

THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERNOVA YERAKINA AND SNOWCONE

A Note of Explanation

When she was quite small I used to tell my daughter, SuperNova Yerakina Starr (b. 1987), a bedtime story every night. She was especially fond of made-up stories about herself, so I invented a pet dog named Snowcone and often told stories about their adventures, sometimes including people she knew, including her younger brother, Francis Andrew "FweFwe" Starr (b. 1990).

As she started going to school, it occurred to me that she might like to read some stories, herself, so I wrote the series of stories that you see here. They are set in Trinidad, West Indies, and many of them make specific reference to people or places unfamiliar to people elsewhere.

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Chapter 1
MOVING PICTURES

It just so happened one lazy Saturday afternoon that SuperNova Yerakina decided she would really like to go to a movie. She didn't exactly know which movie she wanted to see, so she got out the newspaper and looked at the list. A theatre in Tunapuna had a movie about trains, and SuperNova Yerakina was very fond of trains and railways ever since she had ridden from New Orleans to Boston with Snowcone, her fluffy little white dog with the shiny black eyes and nose, in her lap, looking out the window the whole way at all the amazing scenery passing by. At first she thought she would go to the train movie, but then she saw that a theatre in San Juan had a movie about a great adventure in the desert, with camels and people living in tents and more sand than she had ever seen in her life.

It all sounded very romantic and strange, so SuperNova Yerakina put on some nicer shoes, fetched her purse, and then she called to her dog, "Come along, Snowcone, we're going to see a movie, maybe even two." They walked down to the Eastern Main Road, where they got in a maxi-taxi going west. Snowcone had ridden in a maxi-taxi before, but he was still very excited, as the people got on and off, and the traffic whizzed by, and the cars honked at each other. He sat up straight on SuperNova Yerakina's lap, his ears perked up and nose twitching, so that SuperNova Yerakina had to keep patting him and whispering to him, or he would surely have jumped up and down and barked "Yipyipyip yipyipyip."

When they reached San Juan, SuperNova Yerakina paid the fare and they got down. As they came near the movie theatre it occurred to her for the first time that maybe the people wouldn't let Snowcone come inside with her. In fact, as she thought more and more about it she became quite sure that they would not allow it.

What could she do? Then SuperNova Yerakina had an inspiration. Her purse was not so very large, but Snowcone was even smaller. She would just put Snowcone in her purse and take him into the theatre with her.

At first Snowcone didn't know what she was trying to do, and when

he did figure it out he didn't like it at all. Why in the world did this girl want to stuff him into a purse, along with her pencils, a notebook, a handful of coins, two old cookies that she had forgotten about some days ago, and various other odds-and-ends? He squirmed and barked, so that people passing by on the street thought this was a very strange scene, but when SuperNova Yerakina got very severe and addressed him by his full name, Snowcone Amadeus Fuzzball, the little dog realized that he had better do as she wanted.

Snowcone kept still as SuperNova Yerakina came up to the ticket window, bought her ticket, and then gave it to the usher, who tore it in two and politely guided her up the stairs. She settled down in a seat not too far from the screen and waited for the show to start.

As she sat there, she thought it would be nice to have some popcorn, so she walked back to the stand where they sell drinks and other things and got a nice big bag of popcorn, not too salty. Then she went back to her seat and was just sitting down as the movie began.

The movie was truly wonderful. It opened with a sunrise over the Sahara Desert in Africa, showing nothing but sand as far as the eye could see. And then, over the horizon there appeared a long line of camels, walking in a slow and stately manner, bearing people and their luggage, all going somewhere far away.

SuperNova sat amazed at the fabulous scene, even forgetting for several minutes to eat her popcorn. And for a few more minutes she forgot all about Snowcone in her purse. She did finally think of Snowcone and wondered if she could let him out of the purse without getting into trouble. She looked around and found that no one was very close to her in the dark theatre, and besides, everyone was paying attention to the movie. SuperNova Yerakina slowly opened the top of her purse and let Snowcone poke out his head. She gave him some popcorn, which he seemed to think was very strange indeed, although he ate it anyway. And then she thought that, as long as no one was watching, she could take Snowcone out of her purse and let him sit on the seat beside her. She did this slowly, whispering to Snowcone to keep very quiet.

And there they sat together in the movie theatre, eating popcorn and watching the amazing scenes up on the screen, forgetting for the

time that they were not in the far Sahara but right here at home in Trinidad. The people and camels in the movie went farther and farther across the desert, got lost in a sand storm, found themselves again, met another group going in the opposite direction, camped for the night, and rose again in the morning to see the sun rising over the sand dunes in the east, a magnificent great fireball.

It was all very quiet and lovely, but it didn't stay like that. Just as the people had loaded up their camels and were ready to set out farther into the desert -- and just as SuperNova Yerakina and Snowcone had finished their popcorn and were wondering whether it was time to go for a drink -- a leopard suddenly jumped out of a palm tree, ran under the legs of first one camel and then another, and then proceeded to race about the campsite, scattering baggage, frightening all the camels, and setting the whole place in uproar.

Now, SuperNova Yerakina knew that this was just a movie, and she thought it was great fun. She clapped her hands in delight at all the fun and consternation, as did many of the others in the theatre. Snowcone, however, thought the leopard was real, and he is definitely a dog who gets excited at the sight of a cat. Besides, the people and camels in the movie were all getting excited and running about shouting and grunting.

Snowcone knew that he was supposed to stay quiet, but it was all too much. He jumped up and down on the seat, barking "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip." And then he jumped right over the seat in front (fortunately nobody was sitting in it) and ran about the whole theatre, barking furiously at the leopard and the camels and the people in the theatre, who by that time were all standing up and clapping their hands in delight. "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", barked Snowcone, and the people clapped and whistled, which only made him all the more excited.

And then the manager of the theatre appeared at the back, calling for quiet and wondering what all the noise was about. He saw Snowcone running about barking and immediately set out to try to catch him and put him out of the theatre, but Snowcone was much too fast, and the people only laughed at the manager.

The movie could not go on. It was just too noisy, so that no one

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could hear what was being said on the screen, and besides, everyone was having too much fun watching the antics of Snowcone to care about the movie. When Snowcone finally got tired and allowed SuperNova Yerakina to catch him and take him out of the theatre and back home, the people all thought it was the most fun they had had at the movies in a long time.

And as she later told all her friends the story of the movie and the popcorn and the running leopard and Snowcone's great excitement, SuperNova Yerakina laughed and laughed.

Chapter 2
FERRIS WHEELS, MERRY-GO-ROUNDS, AND A VERY BUMPY RIDE

The amusement park was coming to Tunapuna. It has been there several times before, always in the big empty lot next to the Scarlet Ibis Hotel, and each time SuperNova Yerakina had wanted to go, but once she was away in Tobago, and another time she was home sick with the flu, and yet another time the amusement park had only come for two days and then was gone again before she had even learned of it. SuperNova Yerakina had always wanted to go on a merry-go-round and bumping cars and especially a ferris wheel, but she kept having such bad luck until she feared that she would never get to take those fun rides.

This time, however, she was quite determined not to let anything get in the way. As the day approached when they would set up the rides in the big lot, SuperNova Yerakina thought of everything that might go wrong and prevent her from going, and then she thought of what she could do to prevent any mishap. She worried and worried, and more than once in school Miss Singh had to speak to her sharply to pay attention and not daydream so much. The evening before the big day, her little brother, Boy Fwefwe, suddenly asked if he too could go to the amusement park, and SuperNova Yerakina thought, "Oh no, he is going to get in the way and something will go wrong." But she was a dutiful girl who took her role as a big sister very seriously, so she just smiled and said, "Yes, of course, you can come with me."

Finally the big day arrived. It was a Saturday, so they had no school, and SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe could be there right when the amusement park opened. They got dressed up, made sure they had enough money in their pockets, and then they called for Snowcone. Of course he was coming with them, as it was unthinkable to go some place as much fun as an amusement park and not take the fluffy little white dog with the shiny black eyes and nose.

Normally, dogs are not allowed in such places, but there was such a throng of people waiting for the gates to open that Snowcone passed in unnoticed. SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe looked around and wondered which ride they should try first. Over here was a merry-go-

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round with toy ponies that went up and down, and right beside it was another merry-go-round with lions and giraffes and even a hippopotamus. They saw a tall ferris wheel further away, with a long line of people eager to ride it. And over there was a big wheel where people were strapped in and spun about in a big circle so fast that it made the children dizzy just to watch it.

SuperNova Yerakina wanted to start with the ferris wheel, but Boy Fwefwe was not at all keen on it, so she thought that instead they would take a couple of the easier rides and then maybe her little brother would feel brave enough to try the big wheel. The merry-go-round with ponies was handy, so they got a couple of tickets and then waited in line for their turn.

SuperNova Yerakina held Snowcone, who just this one time was so still that the man taking the tickets never even noticed him. However, once they got on a pony he perked up and started to squirm, not at all sure he wanted to be in such a strange place.

SuperNova Yerakina was having a hard time keeping Snowcone quiet when the ride started. They went slowly around and around and up and down to the sound of circus music, and it was all so very odd to the little dog that he just sat there on the neck of the pony and had no idea what to make of it. By the time the music stopped and it was time to get off the merry-go-round, Snowcone had decided that he actually liked it and was sitting up proud and contented, so that the people waiting in line pointed and laughed at such a funny sight.

They got down and walked about, admiring the lights and looking for another ride that they both liked. Over in one direction they heard a great deal of noise, so SuperNova Yerakina, Boy Fwefwe and Snowcone wandered over to learn the cause of so much commotion. It was there that they found the bumping cars. Every car was in use, the children driving around the arena, crashing into each other's cars and laughing uproariously. "Let's go on that one", said SuperNova Yerakina enthusiastically, to which Boy Fwefwe nodded eager agreement. They bought their tickets, and in a few minutes they found themselves scrambling in the arena along with a mass of other children.

SuperNova Yerakina took a bright yellow car and sat down behind the steering wheel, with Snowcone in the passenger's seat, while Boy

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Fwefwe got his own car, a blue one with a flashing red stripe along each side. The music started, the power was turned on, and the cars lurched into motion. All that each driver could do was to steer the wheel, trying to bump into another car while avoiding getting hit by someone else.

The cars didn't move so very fast and were well padded against the shock of crashes, so that it was all quite safe, but it was also wild fun. Boy Fwefwe aimed his car straight at the side of SuperNova Yerakina's car, but she swerved just in time, and he slid on past and instead crashed into a green car with pink dots that was driven by a laughing little girl with ribbons in her hair. The little girl looked around in surprise and then wheeled her car around fast to try to run into Boy Fwefwe, who hurried off in the opposite direction.

Chased by the little girl in ribbons, Boy Fwefwe drove past SuperNova Yerakina again. By this time, Snowcone had picked up on all the excitement and was sitting up tall in his seat, looking around frantically at all the bright whizzing cars and laughing children, and he simply could not contain himself. "Yipyipyip," he barked, which only made the children and all the people looking on laugh all the harder. "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", he barked even louder, and everyone squealed in delight. Then, as Boy Fwefwe drove past SuperNova Yerakina in his frantic efforts to avoid being bumped by the beribboned little girl, Snowcone jumped over into his blue car and onto the seat beside him. Boy Fwefwe was so surprised that he let go of the steering wheel, and his car went careening every which way.

So it was that Snowcone got to jumping from car to car, startling and delighting their little drivers one by one. Soon everyone in the arena was driving madly about, some of them not even bothering to steer their cars at all, squealing for joy as Snowcone threw back his head and let out a continuous stream of "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", until the music stopped and all the children got out of their cars and went their separate ways.

SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe also got out and went to see what other fun they could find. They were both so excited that SuperNova Yerakina just blurted out, "Let's go and ride the ferris wheel now", and Boy Fwefwe responded "Okay" without a second thought.

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Very quickly they found themselves in the line for the ferris wheel, tickets in hand. It is a mystery to me how Snowcone was ever allowed onto the big wheel, but somehow the ticket taker failed to notice him or thought there was no harm in a fluffy little white dog with black eyes and nose riding a contraption that rose up in a high high arc and then dove back toward the ground so that it seemed as if it would surely crash, only to swerve back up again at the last moment.

The two children got into their compartment, with Snowcone sitting in SuperNova Yerakina's lap, the man closed the bar in front so that they couldn't fall out, and then the wheel started in motion. You might well imagine that at this Snowcone would immediately set up a dreadful ruckus of barks and other doggy noises, but nothing of the sort happened. You see, the excitement of the merry-go-round and bumping cars had tired him out so much that he had fallen asleep right there in SuperNova Yerakina's lap even before the guard-bar was fixed in place. He didn't even feel the wheel begin to move. He stayed that way, sleeping peacefully as the wheel swung up and over and swiftly down and then up and away again, even as the two children squealed right there beside him.

Then, however, after what seemed like a hundred marvellous ups and downs, it was time to bring the ride to an end and let a new set of people on. Now, a ferris wheel is not like these other rides, in which the machine just stops and everyone gets off at once. It can't be done that way, because at any moment most of the people are up in the air, and it would not be practical to run ladders up to each compartment. Instead, the people in the compartment at the bottom are let out, the wheel revolves to bring the next compartment to the bottom and let those people out, then the next compartment, and so on. As it happened, SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe's compartment was at the very top when the wheel first stopped to let the first people out, so that they lurched to a halt sitting right up there above everyone and everything else, with all of Tunapuna in view.

That lurch wakened Snowcone, who sat up to find himself as if on the roof of a very tall building. He looked this way and that over the houses and the many people far below and was just getting used to the scene when the machine started back in motion and the compartment

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fell just a little way to come to a stop again. This was too much for the little dog. He pointed his nose at the first stars that were just starting to show in the early nighttime sky and let forth a long howl, followed by his customary "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", a wonderful high-pitched yelp that could be heard by everyone in the amusement park and all over Tunapuna. Some claim it even startled the doubles vendors over in Curepe Junction.

And as the ferris wheel descended bit by bit in a series of lurches and stops, Snowcone kept up his frantic "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip" the entire way to the ground, so that as far as the eye could see people stopped and looked and pointed their fingers at this funny little dog, while SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe just laughed and laughed.

Chapter 3
PARTY TIME

It was the end of the school year, and SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe had decided to have a little party in their backyard. However, the more they planned and prepared, the less it seemed like a little party than a regular big fête that they were going to have. They had invited many friends and classmates, most of whom were very pleased to attend, so that the Saturday after the last day of school found their yard buzzing with more children than they could count at any one time.

Gerard and McKinley were up in the avocado tree, climbing about and telling Shiva that they would jump down on him at any moment. Claire and André rolled a barrel about the yard and nearly rolled it over Satie and Larry, who were trying to feed peanuts to some ants down a hole in the ground. Starla had threatened to put a hibiscus flower in Alex's ear and was chasing him about, even though having a hibiscus in the ear is not such a bad thing, at that. And Candice and Deana stood there looking up at the tree house in the mango tree and discussing most seriously whether it would be okay to go up the rope ladder and onto the platform in their pretty party dresses. Kaisha was urging them to clamber up the ladder right now, while TinyMite and Mugwump who lived just across the street advised Candice and Deana to be cautious and probably do something else instead, like toss balloons about the yard. When SuperNova Yerakina's teacher, Miss Singh, came over they asked her whether they should go up the ladder, and Miss Singh said she didn't know, perhaps they should ask SuperNova Yerakina if it would be a good idea. But when she went to look for the little hostess, she ran into Boy Fwefwe's teacher, Miss Hosein, just arriving, and the two fell into a conversation about chalk and things like that, so that Miss Singh forgot all about the tree house.

Meanwhile, Boy Fwefwe and Amunu Grace were chasing after a little lizard in a hedge (it wasn't the famous Electric Blue Lizard, of which we will hear later), while Kennedy stood nearby and pointed his finger at the lizard, as well as many other things, and squealed his infant delight. SuperNova Yerakina had just recently learned to cook

on the barbecue and was very earnestly starting to grill some hamburgers for the guests, while Katy and Gissel watched and made numerous suggestions, to which SuperNova Yerakina paid no attention.

And what about Naphtali? Well, she was there too, but in her usual way she was studiously watching all the uproar and trying to figure out what it all meant. Lizards and children were running about, trees were being climbed, ants were being fed, the barbecue was sizzling, and every now and then one of the many balloons would pop with a loud bang for no apparent reason, even if no one was anywhere near to squeeze it or stick a needle in it. Amid all this uproar Naphtali just stood and watched and wondered.

Now, as it happened, this was Snowcone's birthday as well, so that the fluffy little white dog with shiny black eyes and nose had a special place in the festivities, even if he himself thought it was nothing more than a great rush of perplexing excitement. SuperNova Yerakina gave him a hamburger all to himself, in fact the very second hamburger to come off the barbecue. She had intended to give him the first burger in honour of his birthday, but at that moment Kaisha came along, tired of trying to persuade Candice and Deana not to be such scaredy-cats and go up that ladder and into the tree house, and told SuperNova Yerakina that she was definitely extremely hungry. She did in fact look quite famished, so that she got the first hamburger. But, as I said, Snowcone got the very next one, and although he was not especially pleased with the mustard and pickle that Katy and Gissel put on it, he still liked the ketchup and thought that the burger itself was positively the most delicious thing he had ever tasted in his whole young doggy life.

And then it came time for the piñata. Now, this is a Mexican tradition, usually reserved for Christmas. However, SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe had wanted to prepare something truly exceptional for a year-end party that was also Snowcone's birthday party, so they had made a piñata all by themselves. It is a container made of ceramic or papier-mâché, with a lot of candies and treats and little toys inside. It is suspended from a rope, and a blind-folded person swings at it with a stick until it breaks open and all the little candies and treats and toys spill out, at which point all the people rush

to get what they can.

To make it more fun, the host or hostess sees to it that the piñata does not get broken too soon, turning the blind-folded guest around and around to make her lose direction and swing wildly in the air, while the other guests keep out of the way of the stick. Sometimes the host or hostess even uses the rope to pull the piñata up out of reach, while the guest swings and wonders why everyone is laughing. After a few such swings, it is someone else's turn to try and probably fail, and then it will be yet another person's turn, until sooner or later the piñata breaks and there is a mad scramble, which is all part of the fun.

As it happened, earlier that month in Miss Singh's class they had been learning about the customs of Mexico, and that was how SuperNova Yerakina had gotten the idea to make a piñata for the party. She and Boy Fwefwe had fashioned it of papier-mâché in the form of big fat pig and then painted it bright pink. It was suspended from a limb of the mango tree, and they had cut a stout bamboo pole with which to whack it. They called for everyone's to assemble under the tree and then pointed up to where their masterpiece hung. "Do you know what this is?", asked SuperNova Yerakina. "A piñata", chorused all of her classmates and then excitedly explained it to the others who were not in Miss Singh's class.

Although Amunu Grace was not in that class, she had watched it being made and so knew all about it. She picked up Snowcone and brought him over to just below the piñata and pointed it out to him as Boy Fwefwe raised and lowered it, trying out the rope. Snowcone could not decide whether this plump pink thing that rose and fell up in the branches of the mango tree was a good thing or not, but he was sure he didn't have any idea what it was or whether he would like to eat it, so he just squirmed and tried to run away while Amunu Grace held onto him.

"Who wants to go first?" asked SuperNova Yerakina, as she held up the bamboo pole. "Me, me", everyone shouted at once and jumped and down to try to get her attention. But SuperNova Yerakina wanted to make sure she didn't start with anyone who could actually break the piñata, so she said "Let's let Kennedy go first", and TinyMite and Mugwump brought Kennedy over and gave him the pole, not bothering

to blindfold him first. Kennedy must have thought it was a stick of sugar cane, because he tried biting it and then grinned and drooled all over it, so that Mugwump had to wipe it off with a towel before it was fit to be handled by anyone else.

Shiva got the next turn. He was properly blind-folded and then turned around and around until he had little idea which direction was which. He first swung in the general direction of the house, and when the others all laughed he decided it must be in the opposite direction, so he turned around and hit a branch of the mango tree, so that several leaves fluttered to the ground. That seemed like a promising direction, so he shifted a little and on his third swing very nearly hit the piñata. He could tell from the gasp of the other guests that he had come close and was just going to take another swing when SuperNova Yerakina sharply told him that everyone got only three tries, that was the rule. It was a reasonable rule, so that even though Shiva was a little disappointed he didn't argue but took off the blindfold and handed the pole over to Starla, whose turn was next.

Starla had three good swings, although with one of them she hit the trunk of the mango tree and put a crack in the pole, and with another she lost her balance and came close to whacking Satie. Still, she showed admirable energy, so that everyone applauded when her turn was up.

And so it went, as one child after another had a go at the piñata. It was great fun to stand there blind-folded and wonder if this next swing would be the one to make everything come tumbling out, but it was also great fun to watch and know at the very start of a swing whether it would hit the piñata or not.

Gerard was the first to actually strike it, but it was too far from the centre, so that all he did was knock the nose off the poor pig. Miss Singh knocked off the tail and made a little tear that let just a couple of candies fall out, but the piñata stayed mainly intact. Larry hit it right in the middle, but only after the pole had been deflected by a branch and landed with too little force to break the wall of the piñata. McKinley's third swing was so wild that he hit the avocado tree some metres away.

Finally, however, it was Mugwump's turn. With the blindfold firmly

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in place, he jumped up and down a couple of times, gave out a very convincing ape call, and then swung the pole around in a wonderful wide arc that cut through the air with a whistling sound to land smack in the middle of the piñata with such force that it seemed to explode apart. The contents scattered far and wide, a few of the smallest hard candies even landing on the roof of the house and some of the toys looping up into the tree house, so that Candice and Deana immediately decided that they were definitely going up that rope ladder as soon as they had grabbed all they could from the goodies on the ground.

Everyone let out a whoop of joy and dove for the candies and treats and little toys all over the yard. Everyone, that is, except Misses Singh and Hosein, who would have liked to get raucous along with all the others but felt that it would not be altogether dignified and so contented themselves with genteelly picking up just a couple of mints that happened to lie right there at their feet.

It was at that moment that Amunu Grace decided -- if she even had to think about it at all -- that it was all very fine to restrain Snowcone and help him to behave like a good, sedate dog, but that she was not about to miss out on her share of the goodies. She released the little dog and joined wholeheartedly in the fray.

So it was that, as everyone scrambled for all that the poor, blasted piñata had contained -- everyone, that is, except Misses Singh and Hosein -- the excitable little dog jumped up on the nearby barrel and barked loud and fiercely over the entire neighbourhood, "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip". And I can tell you that, if their attention had not been turned to other things, SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe and all their assembled party guests would surely have laughed and laughed.

Chapter 4 LOSING MARBLES

It is well known to one and all that Snowcone has a hypertensive reaction to cats, all cats. Well, not quite all. For reasons that no one can explain, Snowcone gets along very well with SuperNova Yerakina's cat Jillie. The fluffy little white dog with the shiny black eyes and nose and the amiable black-and-white cat can often be seen playing together or lying in a heap taking their afternoon nap under a backyard tree. They are the best of pals, even while Snowcone will have nothing to do with any other cat and Jillie avoids every other dog on the face of the Earth.

One day, for no reason that anyone can recall, a friend of the family presented SuperNova Yerakina with a nice big bag of glass marbles. Some of them were the kind known as "crystals", one transparent colour all the way through. Most, however, were "cat's-eyes" with several ribbons of different colours in the middle, so that they did indeed sort of resemble a cat's eye. SuperNova Yerakina thought they were quite lovely, and there were so many of them. She sat down to count them, and then to count them again, but she could never be quite sure whether she had 150 brand new marbles in her possession or only 149. In any event, there were many different kinds, and she spent several happy hours rolling and tossing them in the driveway in front of the house.

After a while she got thirsty, so she gathered up all her marbles in their bag and went into the house to see what there was to drink. Just at that time, both Snowcone and Jillie were asleep on the floor in the living room. All was very quiet, when it came into SuperNova Yerakina's head to disturb this peaceful scene just a little bit.

Taking out her one bright red crystal marble, she rolled it gently across the floor just in front of Jillie's nose. No matter how gently it is rolled, a crystal marble on a hard floor makes a lot of noise, and passing right in front of the little cat's face it caused her to wake up with a start. Imagine her surprise. In one moment she was slumbering peacefully, dreaming perhaps of big bowls of fresh milk or even a luscious canned mackerel. In the next, she was rudely awakened by a

harsh noise to find this strange little round red thing whizzing past the tip of her very own personal nose.

Jillie did what any sensible cat would do. She jumped up in the air with a screech, hair standing on end and claws sticking out from her toes. If she had jumped straight up and come straight back down it would have been uproar enough, but Jillie jumped back and descended from her great leap right on Snowcone's still sleeping head. Snowcone in turn jumped up from a sound sleep, hair standing on end, and howled for all he was worth.

The gently tossed marble, meanwhile, did not just stop rolling once it had passed Jillie's nose. It whizzed right on across the smooth hard floor, bounced off the far wall, then rebounded off another wall and kept right on rolling until it came back to the open doorway. Jillie and Snowcone saw it roll right out the door and go bounce bounce bounce on the hard concrete walkway.

By this time the cat and dog had both recovered from their initial fright. They still didn't know what this peculiar little red thing was, but they knew for sure that it was unfriendly and had disturbed their peaceful afternoon siesta. They were vex, blasted vex, and they meant to punish the interloper. With Snowcone not far behind, Jillie bounded out the door in pursuit of the red marble, while SuperNova Yerakina just looked on, having completely forgotten that she wanted something to drink.

The marble dribbled down the walkway and came to rest on the driveway. SuperNova Yerakina watched from the doorway as Jillie pounced on the motionless marble, certain that she had it in her grasp. The marble, however, squirted out from between her clumsy paws and shot off down the driveway toward the street. This time it was Snowcone who caught up with it, barking "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip" as he ran. He too pounced on the red marble, and actually caught it up in his front teeth, but it slipped out of his grasp and landed on the grass.

In the grass the red marble was easy to see and even easier to catch, and Snowcone quickly picked it up again and stood there, holding it up in his teeth for Jillie to see. For at least a minute they just sat there in the yard, the little white dog with the shiny black eyes

and nose holding the red marble aloft, watched in wonder and puzzlement by the black and white cat.

It was quite a peaceful scene, but SuperNova Yerakina was not content to leave it like that. She is a lively girl, who likes nothing better than to stir up a little excitement, so she quickly picked up her bag of marbles from the table, selected six especially fancy cat's-eyes, and stepped outside. Standing at the edge of the driveway, SuperNova Yerakina rolled all six marbles at once right past the dog and cat, figuring to take them completely by surprise.

And take them by surprise she did. The marbles rolled past, through the front gate and out onto the street, bouncing when they hit a rough spot and generally raising quite a stir. Snowcone and Jillie quickly chased after them, the one barking while the other hissed and spat, determined to teach those marbles a lesson once and for all.

Meanwhile, Snowcone's barking had not gone unheard in the neighbourhood, and several other local dogs came running to investigate the commotion. They reached the yard just as the marbles rolled out onto the street. Thus it happened that, as Snowcone and Jillie rushed into the street and were about to jump onto the rolling-bouncing marbles and show them what was what, they ran smack into the neighbourhood dogs.

It is hard to know who was more surprised, Snowcone and Jillie or the newcomers. While Jillie raced up a tree and out of harm's way, Snowcone and the other dogs set to howling and yipyipyipping madly, charging around in circles of confusion and occasionally striking against one or another of the marbles, which shot through their midst and just added to the general frenzy, while SuperNova Yerakina stood in her yard, laughing and laughing.

Chapter 5
STARTING UP MT ST BENEDICT

One day SuperNova Yerakina decided that she would really like to hike all the way to the top of Mt St Benedict. To her that meant not just the Mount itself with its many big buildings but also the higher hill behind, sometimes known as Mt Tabor. She had heard that there was a fine trail leading up to the highest point that she could see from her house in St Augustine and that at the top were ruins of an old monastery from long long ago. It sounded like a nice little excursion, and there would be plenty of other interesting things to see on the way up to the ruins.

"Come along, Snowcone", she called to her fluffy little white dog with the shiny black eyes and nose, "we're going up Mount Benny." After all, SuperNova Yerakina was not about to go on an excursion without Snowcone, who dearly loves to see new places and things.

They walked over to St John's Road, where they caught the sweeper up the hill. The driver knew SuperNova Yerakina from the several times before that she had ridden with him, but it was Snowcone's first time in the sweeper. He sat up front on SuperNova Yerakina's lap and looked keenly at everything they passed, occasionally letting out a gentle little "Yipyipyip" when something especially novel caught his attention.

The road curved back and forth as they rose higher and higher and could see farther and farther over the flatlands of central Trinidad. Coming around one bend, SuperNova Yerakina saw the hives of honey bees kept by Brother Camillus. She didn't know Brother Camillus and had never visited his beeyard, but she recognized beehives and knew that they were for the production of honey and wax.

They rode to the end of the road and then got out and took the trail in the corner of the parking lot. Walking out of the bright sunlight into the dim forest, they at first had trouble making out the different things along the way, but their eyes soon adjusted and they became quite used to the subdued light.

The trail soon led over a concrete bridge alongside a rock face with a great deal of silk webbing on it. Some of this silk was tunnels built by

great big tarantula spiders. In one of these, SuperNova Yerakina could see the spider itself, large and hairy, but quite pretty, waiting patiently for a bug to wander along within reach, so that it could make a meal of it. She lifted Snowcone up to where he could see into the tunnel and could even look right into the spiders eight little eyes. Snowcone's ears perked up, and he looked quite excited at the strange sight, but before he could make a sound SuperNova Yerakina cautioned him to keep quiet, "Sshhhh."

Also along the rock face were some neat brown nests of little yellow Jack Spaniard wasps. SuperNova Yerakina had never seen that species before, and she was fairly sure that Snowcone hadn't either, so she lifted him up to see them more clearly, although not so close that he would disturb them. Again, Snowcone looked quite alert and excited, although not as much as when he had looked into the tarantula's eyes.

While they were looking at the yellow wasps, a little streak lizard came out of a crack and scuttled along the rock face right in front of them. It had such a white streak along its back and such bright eyes that SuperNova Yerakina thought it was the prettiest little lizard she had seen in a long time. Snowcone again became excited, and this time he let out a sharp "Yipyipip" before she could hush him.

Near the bridge and further along the trail were some chaconia plants with their brilliant red flowers. One of them even had the famous double-chaconia flowers, which were first discovered in Trinidad. SuperNova Yerakina had heard of the double chaconia and pulled out a shiny 25 cent piece to see the picture of the double chaconia on it. It looked just like the real thing, except not as colourful.

Just as she was putting away her coin, Snowcone set to barking away at something on the ground nearby. SuperNova Yerakina went over to look at it and found that he had discovered a column of bachac ants, taking cut leaves back to their big nest in the ground. The reddish ants marched along in a narrow trail that they had made themselves, carrying so many pieces of leaves that SuperNova Yerakina soon gave up trying to count them, although she did collect just a few of them for specimens. Snowcone danced about and barked at the

ants, while taking care not to get so close that they could bite him. He had never seen bachacs before, but on more than one occasion he had been stung or bitten by other ants in the back yard at home and so had learned to be cautious.

And then, just as he got tired of barking at the bachacs, Snowcone looked up and found something else to engage his excitement, a big spider spinning its web below a low tree branch. The lines of silk were so fine that SuperNova Yerakina could only see them where one or another caught the sunlight, and to Snowcone it must surely have seemed that the spider was floating through the air, engaged in a mechanical dance that slowly led it round and round in this one spot below the branch. He yipyipyipped and jumped up and down, trying to get a closer look, but the spider just ignored him and kept on spinning.

The trail went slightly uphill at a point where a curving tree branch extended over it. One time long before, SuperNova Yerakina had seen a little porcupine sitting quietly on that very branch. It had just stayed there, not moving the whole time she stood below and looked at it, and when she came back later it was still there in the very same place. She hoped it would still be there this time, but of course it had long since moved away. Ever afterwards, when she passed that particular spot in the trail, SuperNova Yerakina thought of the porcupine and wondered if she would ever see it again.

Part of the forest was in fact an old cocoa estate. It had been abandoned long ago and allowed to grow back up as forest, but many of the cocoa trees were still there and bearing pods. Coming along the trail was a man with a little brown dog. SuperNova Yerakina was afraid that Snowcone and the brown dog would bark at each other, but instead they were very friendly, touching noses and sniffing each other.

While the dogs were making friends, SuperNova Yerakina noticed that the man had a cutlass and asked if he would please cut down a rip cocoa pod for her. He did and then opened it up, so that she could get the seeds inside. The seeds were surrounded by sweet white pulp, and SuperNova Yerakina and the man sat on a rock and chewed the pulp off the seeds and spat the seeds out on the ground, where they might later grow into little trees. They offered seeds to the dogs, but both the brown dog and Snowcone just licked their seeds and then walked away,

showing no appetite for them.

Where the trail crossed the stream to start up the other side toward the heights of Mt Tabor, there is a little stone bridge. As they came to the bridge, SuperNova Yerakina and Snowcone heard a great many frogs croaking and chirping alongside the stream. They could hear but not see the frogs, which were dull brown and black and blended in very well with their background.

SuperNova Yerakina knew that they must be frogs, but Snowcone had no idea what those croaks and chirps could mean. Suspiciously, he approached the source of one such sound and was startled when a little frog jumped suddenly out from under his nose and went plop into the water below. He looked and looked around him, but could see nothing of the mysterious thing that had chirped and then gone plop in the water. As he approached another chirping spot, another frog leaped out so quick that Snowcone couldn't see it and also went plop in the water.

Now Snowcone was really frustrated. He rushed about at first one chirp and then another, sending one frog after another into the water. He dashed here and there after the maddening little chirp-plop things, getting more and more excited the whole time, until the hair stood up all over his back and he was running wildly about in circles, while the whole woods rang with his furious "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip" and SuperNova Yerakina, sitting on a nearby rock and taking in the whole scene, laughed and laughed.

Chapter 6
A LONG VIEW

By and by Snowcone reached the conclusion in his little doggy heart that he was not going to capture whatever made those chirps and plops, and SuperNova Yerakina decided it was time explore further up the hill.

Continuing up the trail from the stone bridge, they passed two bachac colonies even bigger than the one they had seen further down. Then they came upon a column of ants moving along like bachacs but much faster and not carrying pieces of leaves. SuperNova Yerakina had heard about army ants and thought that must surely be what they were. Snowcone had to be very careful with these ants, because they moved so fast that if he had stepped on their column they would have been all over his foot and leg before he could jump away. SuperNova Yerakina took out a vial and her tweezers and collected three ants from the many thousands in the column, a very small one, a medium-size one and a very big one with great long curving mandibles. She wanted to study these later to see how they differed from the bachacs that she had collected earlier.

They continued on further up the trail and eventually came to the ruins of an old monastery from many years before. It was at the very top of the mountain, so that they could look over the valley to one side and see all of Tunapuna and a part of Caura. SuperNova Yerakina took out her lunch, gave half of a tuna sandwich to Snowcone and took the other half herself. Then they sat on a tumble-down stone wall and looked over the valley far below as they ate their lunch. Corbeaux were soaring high over the valley, flapping their wings hardly at all as they wheeled first one way and then another in the wind. It was a warm day, a perfect time to be lazy, so after lunch the girl and her dog stretched out on the grass and had a nap. I have no idea how long they slept, but after a while they stretched and stood up and decided it was time to walk back down.

The trail coming up had been nice, but both SuperNova and Snowcone were ready to try something different. This time they took the other trail, leading down through the pine plantation past the

lookout tower. It was steep, but they were in no hurry, so they just took their time and were careful not to fall.

At the foot of the lookout tower was a sign saying that only authorized persons could go up the steps to the top, but Snowcone couldn't read and SuperNova Yerakina was careful not to look closely at the sign, and up they went. After jumping up a few steps, Snowcone decided he didn't really want to go any higher, but SuperNova Yerakina thought it was silly to come all this way and not see the view from the top, so she picked him up and continued to climb the steps.

It was quite a view from the top of the tower. All of St Augustine was in view, and SuperNova Yerakina took out her binoculars for a better look. There were cars moving in the streets way down there, and she could even see people walking, but they were too small to recognize. She looked for her own house and was disappointed to find that it was hidden by some trees, although she could see where it must be. Next she looked for the Windsor School and was delighted to find it, even recognizing some of the trees and palms in the school yard. The Scarlet Ibis Hotel, beside which she had gone to the amusement park, was easy to find, although the rides were all gone from the lot next door. Some of the University buildings were also easy to recognize, although SuperNova Yerakina was not entirely sure that they were all where she thought they should be.

An airplane flew overhead and then banked left as it came over the fields of Caroni. SuperNova Yerakina turned her binoculars in the direction that she thought the airport should be, trying to find where the airplane would land. After a while her gaze was drawn by something glinting in the sun, which turned out to be three airplanes on the runway. That is how she found the airport and was able to watch the plane come in and land and then taxi to a stop at the terminal building. What would the people arriving on that plane have thought if they had suspected that their movements were being watched by a little girl in a tower far away? Then SuperNova Yerakina decided that maybe Snowcone would like to have a look through the binoculars. She cradled him in her arms and put the binoculars up to his face. At first Snowcone squirmed, but then he caught just a glimpse of something through the tubes, something that seemed to be

right there in front of him and yet was not, and the fluffy little white dog with the black eyes and nose was suddenly fascinated. It was a corbeau sitting on a tree beside the trail far below, talking with another corbeau, so it seemed. SuperNova Yerakina and Snowcone stood there very quietly in the watch tower, watching the two corbeaux and wondering what they could possibly be saying to each other.

As it happened, it was at that particular moment that another corbeau came wafting over a ridge and saw the tower there, a convenient resting place. The girl and her dog were standing so still that the corbeau never noticed them, and they were so rapt in looking the other way that they never saw it approach. With a great rustling of wings, the corbeau landed on the railing of the watch tower, startling Snowcone and SuperNova Yerakina, who reeled around with a shout. The corbeau was so astounded to find himself confronted by these two strange creatures that it very nearly fell off its perch, as it flapped away with a croak and almost collided with a nearby pine tree.

SuperNova Yerakina quickly regained her composure, but the fright of suddenly coming face to face with this great squawking mass of black feathers which then leaped back and away was all too much for Snowcone. "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", he barked as loud as he could. "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", down the trail and across the lowlands, so that some of the people getting off the airplanes seemed to stop and look and wonder, while SuperNova Yerakina just laughed and laughed.

Chapter 7
DOG DAYS

SuperNova Yerakina's classmate Rowena had a sleek little black dog named Windsor. The girls attended the Windsor School on Austin Street, and it was there one morning that they had found this little black puppy just wandering about in the school yard. They looked around for the puppy's people, but they never did find out if he belonged to anyone.

Rowena had seen what fun SuperNova Yerakina had with Snowcone, her fluffy little white dog with the shiny black eyes and nose, and she often wished that she had a dog of her own, so she asked her daddy if she could keep the puppy. Her daddy said he would have to speak with her mummy, but in the meantime they took the puppy home with them, as he had no place else to go.

The next morning, SuperNova Yerakina went to school especially early, as she was eager to see Rowena and find out what had transpired. As it happened, Rowena too arrived early. Her mother had said she could keep the puppy if she promised to take good care of him and feed him regularly and clean up any mess he made in the house. Rowena promised that she would, which meant that she really would, as she was a very serious little girl, even though she liked to laugh and jump and play as much as all the other children.

"Oh goody", said SuperNova Yerakina, "What are you going to call him? Puppies have to have names, you know."

"Well", said Rowena, "I thought I should talk to you about that, because we really found him together, didn't we?" SuperNova Yerakina thought that was very nice of Rowena, and the two of them sat down to consider names.

Blackey? No, that was too corny.

Whitey? That was almost as corny.

Rover? Fido? Both too ordinary.

Spot? That made no sense, as the puppy had no spots at all and was pure black from head to tail.

Rex? Now, there was a nice name, but the girls finally decided it was more suitable for a big dog, and they had no idea how big Rowena's

dog would grow.

Pluto? Maybe.

Dagwood? Maybe not.

Grover? Certainly not.

Neptune? SuperNova Yerakina didn't know where she had heard that one, but it sounded like it might be a dog's name. Still, she wasn't sure, and Rowena thought it sounded more like a name for a goat or perhaps a swift fish.

The girls finally decided that they would name the puppy either Windsor or Austin, and that they would ask their classmates which name they preferred. Both were nice, dignified names that sounded good when called out loud, and neither Rowena nor SuperNova Yerakina could decide which name she liked better.

When school started they asked their teacher if they could address the class and then put the proposition before their classmates. Some of the children liked Austin better, but more preferred Windsor, so that was the puppy's name ever after.

Every day at school SuperNova Yerakina asked Rowena how Windsor was coming along and whether he was growing, and then one weekend she was invited to sleep over at Rowena's house. She was so excited at the thought of seeing Windsor that the night before she was to go to Rowena's house she hardly slept at all. It was a school day, Friday, so the girls were to go to Rowena's house right after school finished in the afternoon. SuperNova Yerakina was excited all day long and almost forgot to eat her cookies at lunch time.

Rowena's daddy came to pick them up at the end of school. When they went around by SuperNova Yerakina's house to get her overnight kit, Snowcone came running out to greet them. Rowena had never being to the house before, so she was a stranger to Snowcone, who often got excited when he met new people "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip" he barked as he jumped up and down.

Rowena thought Snowcone was quite a darling little dog, and she wondered if perhaps they could take him along too to her house. SuperNova Yerakina thought that was a wonderful idea, and Rowena's daddy did too, so they gathered up Snowcone and put him in the car, sitting in the back seat between the two girls.

As always, Snowcone loved to ride the car, and more than once he jumped up and down and barked when he saw something that caught his eye and got him excited. Finally they reached the house, and before any one could stop him Snowcone jumped right out the window and started to run about in the yard.

"Well" said Rowena, "Snowcone certainly seems to like our place. Now let's see if he and Windsor get along." She went in the house and came back just a minute later, carrying Windsor. By this time Snowcone had calm down, so Rowena was able to go up to him and gently put Windsor down on the ground in front of him.

The two dogs -- one fluffy and white, the other sleek black -- looked at each other and then got closer and sniffed each other's noses. When they then started to lick each other's faces, Rowena and SuperNova Yerakina knew that Snowcone and Windsor were going to be great friends.

Rowena's mother was calling them to come in for cookies and juice, so the girls left the two dogs in the yard and went inside. They sat and chatted for the longest time, and each had a second and then a third glass of juice. Just as Rowena and SuperNova Yerakina were wondering what to do next, they heard a great commotion and rushed outside to see what was going on.

The neighbours on both sides were standing out there, staring in amazement at what looked like a little whirlwind tore up and down the street. In fact it was Snowcone and Windsor playing a strange game of tag. A neighbour's dish towel had blown off the line and into Rowena's yard, where Windsor had pounced upon it. The strange sight of skinny little Windsor dashing about, waving a big green flag with red flowers all over it, had excited Snowcone beyond endurance, and he had gone chasing after, the two dogs both barking "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip" at top speed.

Finally Windsor dashed through a bush and lost the towel, which just hung there on the bush, not moving at all. Snowcone, his ears standing up and nose twitching, stopped right in front of that mysterious towel in the bush, suddenly so still, looked it over, and then began to bark at it as he had never barked before. "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", he called out furiously, while all the neighbours and Rowena

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and especially SuperNova Yerakina laughed and laughed.

Chapter 8
DOWN ON THE FARM

"Would you like to go to my uncle's farm on the weekend?" Rowena asked SuperNova Yerakina one day as they had lunch at school. Now that sounded like stupendous fun. The two girls made arrangements that they would ride up to the farm early on Saturday with Rowena's Uncle Robert. Of course, they would take their dogs.

SuperNova Yerakina was so excited that she had a hard time getting to sleep on Friday night, but she was up very early the next morning with her knapsack all packed. Snowcone, her fluffy little white dog with the shiny black eyes and nose, must have known that something was in the works, because he was already up too and even friskier than usual.

SuperNova Yerakina just had time to give Snowcone some food and water and to have a bowl of cereal and a glass of juice, when she heard Uncle Robert's truck pull up outside the yard. Rowena was already in the truck, along with her sleek little black dog, Windsor. The two dogs were just as good friends as were the two girls, so that there was a great deal of touching of noses and wagging of tails as Snowcone got in.

The sun was just coming up as they headed down the highway and then turned onto a side road that went up and up a hidden valley into the Northern Range. Finally they came to a little farmhouse surrounded by chicken coops, rabbit hutches, a small barn, and plenty of cocoa trees. Followed by their excitable little dogs, Rowena and SuperNova Yerakina bounded out of the truck and into the house, where they deposited their knapsacks before running outside to explore the farm.

With their dogs right behind them, the two girls dashed into the barn so fast that they disturbed a big mother pig who was lying there asleep with her little piglets at her side. The pig jumped up with a grunt and a fright and ran straight into Snowcone and Windsor at once, bowling them both over neatly in the dust before charging off into a nearby thicket, closely followed by her squealing piglets. They were gone so quickly that SuperNova Yerakina, who liked to know exactly

how much or how many of anything there was, had no time to count the little ones.

The barn also contained a family of ducks, but these were slower to react, and after the confrontation with the pigs the girls and their dogs were more cautious in their exploration. As the newcomers approached, the mother duck stood up and eyed them with suspicion. She then waddled quacking out of the barn with great dignity, followed by her softly quacking ducklings.

This time there was plenty of opportunity to observe, and SuperNova Yerakina counted exactly 13 ducklings. She was even able to note that they were not all the same colour, some being almost entirely yellowish and others with more or less distinct grey and brown streaks and splotches along the back and sides. This more than made up for missing her count of the piglets.

"Look", said SuperNova Yerakina, pointing toward the ceiling of the barn, "there are wasps up there. What kind do you suppose they are?" Rowena had seen the wasps many times before and could tell her that they were Jack Spaniards. They were darting about on the comb of their nest, flapping their wings and looking most agitated. Both Rowena and SuperNova Yerakina knew that Jack Spaniards could sting, so they were careful not to get any closer, in case the wasps really were as annoyed as they looked.

Over against one wall, they heard a buzzing sound and went to see what it was. There they found a shiny black wasp on her nest of hard brown mud. Rowena had often watched these wasps and had been told by her Uncle Robert that they were called mud-daubers. She had also learned that, unlike Jack Spaniards, they were not at all fierce, so that it was quite safe to get closer for a good look at what this particular wasp was doing. They got so close that they could see her applying fresh mud to the bottom of her nest and buzzing as she did so. "Why is she making that noise?" asked SuperNova Yerakina, to which Rowena had to say that she didn't know.

The two girls were so eager to solve this mystery that they got too close to the wasp and disturbed her from her work. However, this did not mean that she flew off and stung them, just that she flew away in fright. She came back a few minutes later, so that there was no harm

done. When the girls later asked Uncle Robert about the meaning of the buzzing sound, he too didn't know, so that they decided that some day they would have to find out for themselves.

They walked through the barn and out a door on the other side, where they came upon a goat, calmly chewing on some scruffy-looking weeds that grew alongside the building. SuperNova Yerakina had heard that goats were very hardy and could eat almost anything, but she thought those prickly, tough weeds certainly did not look appetizing. Still, she told herself philosophically, I am not a goat, and what tastes perfectly delicious to me -- like custard and macaroni and scrambled eggs on toast -- might be yucky to a goat.

The goat just looked back at them and kept chewing placidly, giving no indication of he really thought about those weeds. But when Snowcone and Windsor went up to examine him at close quarters and sniff at his legs and the hairs on his chin, the goat decided that enough was enough and became a little less placid. He stopped chewing, stamped his front feet once or twice, and lowered his head as if to make a charge and butt the two impertinent little dogs with his long, twisty horns. At this, Snowcone and Windsor decided that it would be wiser to contemplate this strange beast from a distance and scampered out of butting range. SuperNova Yerakina and Rowena knew how excited their dogs could become when faced with something truly novel and saw that Snowcone was about to set up one of his piercing yipyipyips, which would surely have made the poor goat even less placid, so they hastily moved away and called the dogs after them.

Uncle Robert had no cattle, but right near his barn was a neighbour's field with a cow grazing in it. The two little dogs had never seen such a huge animal before and had to investigate. They walked closer and closer to the cow, their ears perked up and sniffing the air, while she paid them no attention but just kept eating the grass in the field. Windsor was somehow a little braver and walked right under her and sniffed each of her legs in turn, but she just kept right on grazing as if he wasn't even there.

This was too much for Windsor, who was used to being noticed by one and all. He took to running frantically around between the cow's legs, while Snowcone jumped up and down on a nearby grass tussock,

letting loose a fireworks of "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip." Perhaps that cow's owner had a yippy little dog of his own. Or maybe the grass was just so very fine and luscious that nothing could disturb her concentration. Or she might just have been the only deaf cow in the valley. In any event, she just kept right on grazing and munching until the dogs got tired of their bacchanal and moved on for new excitement.

This they soon found. Walking along and looking about alertly for whatever they might find, Snowcone and Windsor were startled by a ruddy ground dove that flew up right in front of their faces and swiftly away across the field to alight at the other side. They recovered themselves right away and charged after it in full hunting yipyipyip, feeling as wild as arctic wolves chasing a caribou. Before they even got close to it, however, the dove had flown up again and further away, and again they gave joyful chase. This happened several times, until the dogs disappeared out of sight and around a hill. A sudden silence descended on the farm.

It did not last. As SuperNova Yerakina and Rowena went up to explore the area on the other side of Uncle Robert's house, they were joined by the two panting little dogs, tired but as excitable as ever. The four of them sat down in the shade of a fine big saman tree to look around and decide what to do next. As they sat there quietly, a rustling was heard in the nearby undergrowth. It came nearer and nearer. Snowcone and Windsor perked up their ears and noses and looked keenly about for the source of the rustling. Presently they saw two zandoli lizards dash out into the open and commence to chase each other about the trunk of that great big tree, completely unaware of the presence of the girls and their dogs.

They did not long remain unaware. Snowcone and Windsor dashed to the chase, entirely forgetting their fatigue at running in vain after the ruddy ground dove, intent only on catching a genuine wild lizard. The dogs were quick, but the lizards got up and ran on their hind legs for greater speed, dashing side-by-side in the general direction of the barn, with the savage hounds in hot pursuit. "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", the dogs called in unison as they leaped over a log that stood in their way. "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", they continued as

the lizards skittered into a loose pile of stones and out the other side. "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", they insisted as another zandolie innocently ran across their path and almost distracted them from their pursuit. They were still barking furiously as they dashed into the wide open barn right behind those two lizards.

And that was when they met the mother duck, back from a dip in the pond with her ducklings. When I say that they "met" her, I really mean that they ran right smack into her and ruffled her feathers most unceremoniously. Now, a mother duck can put up with a great deal without losing her composure, but this was too much. This was absolutely too much, to come back from the pond to her very own barn and have too rude little dogs charge straight into her and ruffle her feathers in the presence of her very own ducklings. There are limits to how much a mother duck can tolerate, and these rude dogs had unquestionably passed the limit. "Quackquackquack quackquackquack", she protested sharply as she waddled straight at first Snowcone and then Windsor and gave each of them a sharp peck right on the nose. "Quackquackquack quackquackquack quackquackquack", she repeated and prepared to deal out more pecks all over the poor, amazed little pups' bodies.

Snowcone and Windsor were hurt and surprised and totally bewildered, but that did not stop them from scampered to a safe distance, where they lifted up their head together and sent a furious chorus of "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip" over and over again down the valley and possibly all the way to Mt Tamana, while the ever dignified mother duck put her feathers back in order and SuperNova Yerakina and Rowena laughed and laughed.

Chapter 9
PILLOW TALK

SuperNova Yerakina was terribly excited. She had been terribly excited all week. Today was the day for her first ever slumber party. She had sent out invitations to her friends and was delighted to learn that almost all of them could come to her party. Definitely, it was going to be loads of fun.

Snowcone, her fluffy little white dog with the black black eyes and nose, had picked up on the excitement and was running about the house and yard even more than usual, although he had no idea that SuperNova Yerakina was planning a slumber party or even what a slumber party was. He roamed the savanna in front of the house, chasing butterflies and beetles and little lizards that skittered over the ground and up the tree trunks. Clearly, it was no time to lie still and contemplate calmly.

All that day in school, SuperNova Yerakina found it hard to concentrate on her studies, so that more than once Miss Singh wondered what was wrong with her. Finally, though, it was time for school to let out. She picked up her lunch kit and book bag and nearly ran out the door. First she found her friends Claire and Catherine. The three of them then went to find their other friends, Dara and Gissel and Naphtali and Amunu Grace and Kaisha and Rowena. Naturally, Rowena brought along her sleek little black dog, Windsor, who was a great friend of Snowcone's. To her disappointment, SuperNova Yerakina was unable to find Kaisha, so that they all had to proceed to the house without her.

All the rest of the afternoon, while Snowcone and Windsor romped happily up and down Dash Street, disputing territory with the dogs of the neighbourhood, the girls ran about the yard, picking oranges which they squeezed to make luscious juice, looking at bees and ants leading their busy lives, and playing hide-and-seek and other favourite party games, such as "Mother May I?", "Beauty and the Beast" and "Chuckle-Belly".

After a time, they found that they were hungry, so they all sat down to dothogs and chips with plenty of ginger ale, except for

Catherine, who had observed that fizzy drinks did not agree with her and so had milk instead. Then they had peculiar, two-tone jello with slices of banana embedded in it, brushed their teeth, and lay down in their pyjamas on the big bed that had been put together from three smaller ones in the living room, preparing to stay up all night long telling secrets and stories and teasing each other relentlessly.

They did indeed remain awake far into the night, and some of their hilarity may even have been noticed by neighbours as far away as Cheesman Avenue and Warner Street. However, one by one they gradually fell asleep until only Dara remained up, looking out the window at the moon and wondering about any number of things. So it was that she was the only one awake when there came a gentle but insistent knock at the door.

It was Kaisha. Her mother's car had had difficulties and would not start for the longest time, so that it was already nighttime before it was working properly. Her mother had said that by then it was much too late to take her to the party, but Kaisha insisted and insisted, saying that she really wanted to go, and even if the other girls were already asleep it would be quite all right to wake them up, as it was that sort of party, a slumber party, until finally her weary mother gave in and drove Kaisha around to SuperNova Yerakina's house.

And indeed, the other girls were perfectly delighted to see Kaisha and did not mind in the least waking up. Snowcone and Windsor, too, got into the spirit of the moment and ran about the living room, chasing their own and each other's tails and barking "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", until it seemed as if the entire neighbourhood rang with happy confusion.

Kaisha's arrival infused new life into the party. Far from going right back to sleep, the girls stayed up for almost another hour, retelling to Kaisha and each other the night's earlier jokes and songs and stories, adding new embellishments and laughing uproariously at the end of each telling and often in the middle as well. The amazing story of Amunu Grace and the electric blue lizard, in particular, took on a length and elaboration far beyond what it had had before, with ever more classmates and friends included in the tale that went on and on and on, although in the end the lizard still got away from Amunu Grace

and everyone else.

Gradually, however, they all got sleepy, even Kaisha and Dara, so that they curled up with their pillows and sheets and dogs and dozed deeper than ever.

It was during this new phase of tired-but-happy sleep that Claire started having a dream of some sort. It must have been a rather exciting dream, as she started twisting and turning and pointing her finger in the air, whispering "Catch it, Gissel" and something about a squirrel. Now, you might think that Gissel, on hearing her name called in the middle of the night, even in a whisper, would wake up, but that's not what happened. To the contrary, Gissel was having her own dream, and she must have thought that this was just part of her dream.

She reached her hands into the air and made grabbing motions, while muttering "Oh no", "Oh no" and "I almost got it that time", as if she were trying her best to catch something -- quite possibly a squirrel, or perhaps a butterfly -- that just refused to be captured.

It is really quite remarkable how these things can catch on. Naphtali and Rowena, while still asleep, both started acting as if they were watching Claire encouraging Gissel to catch something, while Gissel kept trying and missing in her attempts. While Rowena gasped every time Gissel made an unsuccessful grab, the slumbering Naphtali just giggled and rolled about on the big bed, which made her bump into Catherine, who also got to giggling uncontrollably.

All of this was just too much for the excitable Snowcone. He opened his bright black eyes, raised his ears, and then stood up to stare at this most amazing scene of sleeping girls mumbling and gesticulating and giggling, carrying on a very strange sort of conversation with each other in midnight moonlight. He yipped low once or twice and then could contain himself no longer. He stood at the big windows, howling at the moon, which immediately woke up Windsor, who stood and howled along with Snowcone, the two dogs letting their mournful notes of "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip" echo over and over again through the living room and out the screen windows, so that lights were soon coming on in confused houses all over the neighbourhood. And while this was going on, the slumber-party girls all awoke with a start, looked about the room at the dogs and the rumped

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sheets and each other. There was only one thing to do. They all stood up on the bed and let loose with their merriment, so that as the howls rose and fell from the amazed dogs, SuperNova Yerakina and Rowena and Dara and Gissel and Naphtali and Amunu Grace and Kaisha and Claire and Catherine laughed and laughed and laughed.

Chapter 10
SPLASH

The next morning the girls took a long time in getting up. After all, they had had more excitement than sleep in the nighttime, and besides, it was a slumber party and they were allowed to get up as late as they pleased. After a while, though, they felt more like getting up and having breakfast than lying down and gossiping.

It was only when they were confronted with a heaping plate of pancakes and a pitcher of orange juice that the girls realized just how hungry they were. They attacked their breakfast with verve and purpose (Kaisha had 5 pancakes, a record for the group, while Rowena and Gissel drank so much juice that SuperNova Yerakina had to refill the pitcher twice), commenting between mouthfuls on all manner of things. The little dogs, Snowcone and Windsor, were still asleep in a corner of the living room, and the girls could even hear Windsor snoring lightly.

After breakfast, Amunu Grace, Dara and Catherine had great fun washing the wares, while the others played in the yard. You might wonder how much fun it can be to wash up after a meal, which most people think is a tiresome chore, and I must admit that I don't understand it, myself. Still, it was plain from their shouts and giggles that they were having a grand time, and everything ended up nice and clean.

When the ware-washers were done and went to join the other girls in the yard, they found Claire and Naphtali up in the tree house, pretending to be defenders of a besieged castle, while Gissel and Rowena, perhaps inspired by the large quantities of orange juice they had drunk, led a band of savage enemies in laying siege. They acted out the firing of huge rocks from catapults, great masses of arrows, and written calls to surrender, while the brave defenders Claire and Naphtali put up imaginary shields and vowed to resist to the very end.

The great hullabaloo of battle right there in the back yard had of course awakened the two little dogs, who were dashing all about the base of the tree, letting forth an excited "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip" that once again was heard all over the neighbourhood. They had no

idea what was going on, just that it must be exciting, so that their barks were directed every which way. Running around the tree, they were both soon going in one direction -- counter-clockwise -- close around the trunk, so that each was chasing the other's tail. The fluffy little white dog with the black black eyes and nose was snapping at the sleek little black dog's tail, and vice versa. This gave them something definite on which to focus in the uproar, and they ran faster and faster after each other and barked ever more frantically, until they were just a greyish blur about the base of the tree and their barking sounded like one continuous "yiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip".

Amunu Grace, Dara and Catherine decided at once to join the struggle. They had a great deal of sympathy for the defenders, but of course they were down below on the outside, with no way to break through the lines of Gissel and Rowena, so they set to work for the besiegers. "What we really need", said Dara knowingly, "is a siege engine." She had read all about it in a book about Alexander the Great and explained how they could make it and how it would work, at least in their imaginations.

However, they had hardly begun on their siege engine when SuperNova Yerakina, who was getting a little tired of this battle with no end in sight, suddenly called out "Who wants to go swimming?"

"I do, I do", the others all chorused in unison. The siege was not exactly forgotten, but both sides found it convenient to enter into a truce, which allowed the defenders to climb down the rope ladder and join the others without admitting defeat.

The sudden halt of hostilities took the excitement right out of the little dogs, who collapsed in a panting heap at the foot of the tree, too tired to pay much attention to the exact nature of this turn in events.

The girls all got their bathing suits and towels and headed over to the University pool, with Snowcone and Windsor trotting along beside. On reaching the pool, the girls signed in and went to change into their bathing suits. When the dogs tried to follow, however, the attendant looked at them sharply and said "No dogs allowed in here" in a way that left them in no doubt as to his meaning. They tried to make a dash through the doorway, but the attendant moved quickly (for the first and last time that week) to stand in their way. There was nothing to

do but sit outside on the lawn and wait for the girls to finish their swim.

SuperNova Yerakina was the first into the pool, jumping in with a shout and great splash that made the other girls right behind her squeal. They ran alongside the pool down to the other end and back and just about to do it again when the attendant came along and gravely warned them against running in the pool area.

For some odd reason, Dara was still wearing a metal-and-plastic headband in her hair. Just for fun, she tossed it into the pool near the shallow end and told the others to try to retrieve it. Three of the girls who were already in the water dove after the headband, and two of them came up with it together in their hands. That set off a flurry of tossing more things into the pool and a general competition among the better swimmers to retrieve them, until the attendant shuffled along and told them that throwing things into the pool was definitely against the rules, or at least that it should be.

So there you had it. The girls were forbidden to run alongside the pool, they were not to throw things into the water, and one wondered if it were even permissible to jump in with a shout and a splash. Did this stop them from having any riotous fun? It most certainly did not.

Standing in the shallow end, they got to splashing water at each other's faces. Kaisha splashed Claire, who in turn splashed Dara. Gissel, Rowena and SuperNova Yerakina stood in a triangle and splashed each other furiously, while Amunu Grace, Catherine and Naphtali, who were all too short to stand even at the shallow end, sat on the edge and kicked up a great spray with their feet, all the while laughing uproariously. Their shouts and squeals reached a new pitch, while the air became a fine mist of water moving in every direction, like a rainstorm that couldn't decide which way was which.

During all this watery fun, Snowcone and Windsor had been sitting patiently out on the lawn, just waiting for the girls to emerge from the pool area. They heard the shouts and other noises and dearly wished they could go in and join the fray, or at least see what was going on, but this had been forbidden, and they were behaving like obedient little dogs. But then that splashing uproar reached such a pitch that it just became too much for them. All at once they bounded to their

feet, raced in through the open gate and down the steps to poolside, where they were immediately drenched by the multitude of splashes sent up by the excited girls.

"Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip". they barked together, standing at the very edge of the pool, while the startled attendant stood and stared. "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", they barked louder still, as they ran to escape the furious approaching attendant. "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", as they ran around and around the pool and between the helpless attendant's, while SuperNova Yerakina and her very wet guests stopped their splashing and just stood or sat there, laughing and laughing.

Chapter 11
PAINTINGS GALORE

It is well known that SuperNova Yerakina likes to look at all sort of pictures. And everyone is certainly aware that she likes to take her fluffy little white dog with the shiny black eyes and nose, Snowcone, wherever she goes. It therefore seemed quite natural, on the day that she decided to visit the National Museum to see the paintings, that he would go with her.

They first walked down to the Eastern Main Road, where they got a maxi-taxi for Independence Square in downtown Pain of Sport. Then they walked up Frederick Street toward Woodford Square, where they were to take another ride in order to get to the museum. However, it was such a nice day, and both SuperNova Yerakina and Snowcone were feeling so fine and energetic, that when they reached Woodford Square they decided to just keep on walking all the way to the museum. Frederick Street was thronged with people, and from time to time the big girl and little dog were greeted by someone they knew.

Dogs are not normally allowed into the National Museum, but SuperNova Yerakina explained to the guard on duty that Snowcone was a very serious and educated dog and that he had been looking forward to seeing the many fine paintings on the top floor of the museum, so the guard made an exception and let him in. The guard could see that Snowcone was by no means just an ordinary pooch.

The first floor held industrial and historical displays, and on the second floor there were still other historical displays, but SuperNova Yerakina and Snowcone walked right past them, intent on going straight to the paintings. They first went into the little room with a series of water colours by the famous painter Michel-Jean Cazabon, a Trinidadian from the last century. SuperNova Yerakina thought these were very fine paintings indeed, but Snowcone was not impressed, so they went out into the larger gallery to see what they could see.

There they found a wonderful array of pictures in various styles and with many different themes. SuperNova Yerakina especially liked some by Peter Minshall, showing people in wonderful costumes, but Snowcone seemed most impressed with some pictures of fine old

buildings, as if he longed to go inside them and explore to his heart's content.

But then they both forgot the costumes and buildings as they walked through a passage and came into a section of the gallery devoted to paintings and sculpture of Trinidad & Tobago's supernatural beings. There was the scary Soucouyant, the deceptive Diabliesse, and the Phantom -- so long and thin that his head seemed lost in the clouds. And over here was everyone's favourite, Papa Bois, protector of forest creatures. Snowcone felt very comfortable with Papa Bois and just stood there looking at his portrait, while SuperNova Yerakina pondered whether he perhaps looked just a little like one of her grandfathers, or maybe more like the other one, or even like Mr Goddard, whose house she passed some days when she went walking with Snowcone.

SuperNova Yerakina read the signs on the wall that described the paintings and statues of these and other supernatural beings, taking care to read them clearly and out loud so that Snowcone could understand, but he just stood there and continued to look at Papa Bois.

After a while they decided they had had enough of that part of the gallery and went wandering about to see what else they could see. There were more pictures of people and things and places, but none of these especially took their interest, until suddenly they rounded a corner and came face to face with a huge picture of a most extravagant cat. It loomed out of the painting, larger than even a tiger, eyes burning as it stared straight ahead, whiskers that seemed to twitch right there on the canvas, giving the impression that it would leap out at them at any moment.

They both stood stockstill, but Snowcone stayed still for only a moment. Then he came alive, jumping up and down, barking "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", and running furiously about the whole gallery. SuperNova Yerakina quickly recovered herself and realized that it was just a painting, but Snowcone continued to act as if it were the biggest, most marvellous cat in the whole world, come alive right there on the top floor of the National Museum. And as he continued to run furiously about, declaiming "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", so that they must have heard his excitement all across the Savanna, SuperNova

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Yerakina laughed and laughed.

Chapter 12
IMAGES IN THE YARD

There are those who are content to just stand aside and observe while other people do all the truly remarkable things, and there are those to live to try things for themselves. SuperNova Yerakina, as you must have noticed by now, is one of the latter kind. It was only natural, then, that the visit to the art gallery should have inspired her with a desire to do some painting of her own. She had recently received some new paints and brushes for her birthday, and one fine day she decided that it was time to try them out. After arranging her three sizes of brushes, six basic colours of tempera paint in little jars, a large tumbler of water to wash her brushes, and several big sheets of newsprint, she was ready to start. SuperNova Yerakina did not have a regular easel on which to set her paper, but by fixing the sheet to a broad board and propping this up against the sloping back of a chair, she found that it all worked out very nicely.

As she arranged her materials in the yard, Snowcone, her fluffy little white dog with the shiny black eyes and nose, awoke from a nap in which he had dreamt of consuming great mounds of spaghetti and meatballs. He was disappointed to find that in reality there was not a single spaghetti or meatball anywhere in sight or smell, but then he noticed that SuperNova Yerakina was doing something new.

Snowcone is a perpetually curious dog, always looking for any source of novelty and excitement, so of course he walked over to investigate. He sat up alertly as SuperNova Yerakina dipped her medium-sized brush in yellow paint. She was just about to put her first dab of paint onto the paper when she noticed him watching with keen interest, so she turned around and deftly put a yellow spot on his black black nose. That was much too strange for Snowcone, who scampered over to the edge of the yard and rubbed his nose on some grass until it felt okay again, while SuperNova Yerakina laughed at her little prank.

She spent the next half hour painting the main features of a fearsome giant Carnival mask and then about an hour more filling in the details in colours that made it appear even more savage. It was mainly yellow, but the bright red eyes and ears and contrasting black

lines here and there made it seem like a very dangerous yellow monster and not at all like a friendly yellow daisy. Meanwhile, Snowcone had recovered from his fright and regained both his composure and his curiosity and was back watching this strange activity, although from a safer distance this time.

SuperNova Yerakina stepped back and for a minute or two looked intently at her first painting, before concluding that it was just fine the way it was, no need to add anything or change it at all. In fact, she was so pleased with her artistry that she decided then and there to make another Carnival mask, a fierce and implacable partner for the yellow monster. She set to work in much the same way, first drawing the outlines and then adding details. This time, however, the main colour was black, with contrasting features in orange and green. Finally, she stepped back to survey the second mask and again had to conclude that it was just right.

Looking around, SuperNova Yerakina noticed Snowcone observing the proceedings. In fact, it seemed as if he had been sitting there for hours, just watching the brush move over the paper and the different colours build up into a fearsome pattern. "Maybe Snowcone would like to do a little painting of his own", SuperNova Yerakina thought. With that, she placed a clean sheet of newsprint on the ground and called the dog over to her.

Now, Snowcone was still cautious from the dab on the nose, but he could not resist finding out what she had in mind. He walked over and sat down right beside the sheet of paper. "Snowcone, I'm going to tickle you on your tummy", said SuperNova Yerakina, and she did. It felt so good to have his tummy tickled and scratched with one hand that he didn't even notice that her other hand held a brush and was at work quickly applying paint to the soles of his paws, a different colour for each.

With his paws nice and gooey wet with bright-coloured paint, Snowcone felt himself picked up, turned over and placed standing right in the middle of the big sheet of paper. "Now, walk around on the paper and let's see what kind of a painting you can make", said that prankster SuperNova Yerakina. Guided and prodded by her, Snowcone did just that, walking all over the paper and nearly slipping once or

twice on the slick paint. He was not at all sure he liked it and very glad when the girl let him off the paper to wipe his long-suffering paws on the grass.

It was at that moment that Amunu Grace came into the yard from next door. "What are you doing?" she asked. "Look what Snowcone just did", replied SuperNova Yerakina. "He made a painting all by himself."

She held up the still wet sheet and turned it this way and that as the two girls tried to decide which way was up and what the painting was all about, anyway. At first they thought it was a cat with a bow tie, but later Amunu Grace was quite positive it was one of her big brothers picking his teeth, while SuperNova Yerakina had decided this must be Snowcone's idea of world peace and a better life for all.

"Did you paint too?" asked Amunu Grace, and her friend was only too glad to show off her two Carnival masks. Amunu Grace had to agree that they were the fiercest masks she had ever seen. "Let's use them to scare somebody", suggested SuperNova Yerakina. She picked up the sheet with the Yellow Monster, while Amunu Grace picked up the Black Monster. Holding the masks in front of their faces, they used a twig to poke little eyeholes to let them see through the paper. Then the two girls looked at each other and had to agree that they each looked very frightening, indeed.

"Who shall we scare?" asked SuperNova Yerakina. "How about Snowcone?" suggested Amunu Grace, as he gaze fell upon the little dog who was sitting watching them with a very puzzled air. With masks held in place, they advanced on Snowcone, chanting "I'm a scary monster, I'm a scary monster" in a most convincing way.

Snowcone retreated from the two strange and truly monstrous masks. He backed away, but they kept coming toward him, still intoning "I'm a scary monster" over and over. With his tail between his legs, he ran to the far end of the yard, but they continued to advance, relentlessly repeating "I'm a scary monster, I'm a scary monster."

It was all too much for poor Snowcone. He had tried his best to be brave and hold fast to his dignity, but this was just too much. He raced around to the other side of the house, protesting loudly "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip." The great huge faces kept after him, so he ran around the house again, barking even louder "Yipyipyip yipyipyip

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yipyipyip." And finally, as the Yellow Monster and the Black Monster advanced on him from both sides, poor little Snowcone leaped up onto a low branch of the avocado tree and let the entire neighbourhood know that he as positively the most oppressed creature in the entire doggy universe, "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip", while SuperNova Yerakina and Amunu Grace threw down their masks and rolled about on the lawn, laughing and laughing.

Chapter 13
FISH TALES

SuperNova Yerakina and her little brother, Boy Fwefwe, are rather fond of the Tunapuna market, mostly because it is a good place to get their beloved doubles. On market days they had often looked at the fishes lying there on the various stall tables and wondered about them.

They knew that fish lived in the ocean, but they little idea how they came to be lying there on wooden tables in the market.

It was thus that, when one of boy Fwefwe's classmates asked one day if they would like to go fishing during the Eid ul Fitr holiday, they responded with instant enthusiasm. It was of course understood that Snowcone, SuperNova Yerakina's fluffy little white dog with the shiny black eyes and nose, would come along with them. He went almost everywhere with them.

The arrangements were made, and they looked forward to the fishing expedition with great anticipation. Finally the day came, and Nathan, the classmate, knocked on the door with his parents, whom SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe were meeting for the first time. Their later memories of Nathan's parents were so closely associated with that day ever after they referred to them simply as Uncle Boat and Aunt Bait, and it due time it was even forgotten that they had any other names.

The two adults, three children and one dog drove around to Chaguaramas, where the boat was moored. One of the first things the children noticed were the words "Sea Spray" painted along the bow of the boat on each side. "What does that mean?" asked SuperNova Yerakina, pointing to the words. Uncle Boat explained that it was traditional to give names to boats, just like to people, and that he and Aunt Bait had named theirs after one they had seen in a movie long ago. "If I ever have a boat, I think I'll name it Francis Andrew Starr", announced Boy Fwefwe.

They all got on board and put on their life jackets. Then Uncle Boat started the engine. He steered the Sea Spray out of the harbour toward open water, while Aunt Bait prepared the fishing lines and the raw shrimps that they would use to catch fish. They passed one or two

other boats that were also putting out to sea to go fishing, but mostly it looked like people were just going for a sail or even sitting out on the deck taking it easy.

At first, SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe watched the receding shore. They found that things looked quite different now from how they had looked from on land. After about 20 minutes, the shore was far behind them, and the children turned their attention to the sea and the little, rocky islands that they were passing on their way out into the Gulf of Paria. "Those are the Five Islands over there", said Uncle Boat, "and on a clear day you can make out the coast of Venezuela from here. Today it's a little too misty, though."

They continued out a little way into the gulf, and then Uncle Boat turned off the engine and said that they would see if they could get any fish where they were. Aunt Bait handed each of the children a line with a shrimp on the hook and explained how they could tell when there was a fish on the line. Then she gave one to Uncle Boat and another for herself, and all five of them threw their lines into the water.

Snowcone stood at the edge of the deck and looked at the fishing lines in the water. It seemed like he wished he had one too, just so he could join in the fun, whatever that might be, but Aunt Bait knew perfectly well that he would just get confused and probably lose the whole line and hook.

Nathan had been fishing before and could usually tell when a pull on the line meant that something was at his bait and when it just meant that a sea current had shifted the line. It took SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe a while to learn the difference, but in time they too were pulling up their lines only when felt the right kind of tug.

For a long while no one caught anything, and Uncle Boat was on the point of starting up the engine to look for another spot, when Nathan pulled up a little fish that flipped and flopped about on the deck. Snowcone, who had never before in all his doggy life seen a real life fish, let alone a lively one, was taken quite by surprise. He barked and yelped and jumped about the deck, so that SuperNova Yerakina had to grab his collar and hold him still for fear that he might go overboard in his excitement.

Aunt Bait told Nathan the fish was too small to keep, so he extracted the hook and dropped the fish overboard into the water. They watched it swim away, unhurt and wiser in the ways of lines and hooks and tasty morsels that are best left alone.

They caught several more little fish, all too small to keep, before Aunt Bait looked at the watch and said, "Oh my, look at the time. It's almost noon. Is anyone hungry?" It was only then that they all realized that were quite hungry indeed, so that everyone pulled up their lines and stopped a while to eat.

It was very pleasant to sit there amid a sunlit sea and eat their lunch while they watched the pelicans fly by. One pelican suddenly folded its wings and dove straight down into the water, emerging with a fish in its beak. And at one point they got a glimpse of a far-off school of flying fishes gliding very low over the water and diving back in, only to break through the surface again and glide some more. It was so very peaceful that Snowcone forgot all about the flopping fish on the deck and went to sleep on top of a coil of rope in the bow.

After lunch, Uncle Boat said they would try another fishing spot that he knew just a little further out to sea. He started the engine, and they chugged along for about 10 minutes before he again stopped the boat and they put their lines back in the water.

This time the results were rather more dramatic. Boy Fwefwe had hardly let down his line when he felt a distinct tug on it, much stronger than any he had had before. The tug continued, and Aunt Bait had to help him pull up the line. It felt like he must have hooked a whale. When they finally got the line all in and saw what was on the end of it, it wasn't a whale, not even a really big fish, but it was the biggest that anyone had caught that day and the first that they did not have to throw back in the water. Uncle Boat praised Boy Fwefwe for his effort, which made him very proud. Snowcone must have been very sleepy, for he remained oblivious to this great event and just lay there on the coil of rope with his front paws over his face. He did not even wake up when Nathan caught a slightly bigger fish just a few minutes later.

However, it is well known that Snowcone is a supremely excitable little dog, and it was only a matter of time before he would find something to agitate him. After Aunt Bait and Uncle Boat had each

caught two little fishes (of a size to throw back) and they had all sat there for a while without a nibble on anyone's line, that time had come.

SuperNova Yerakina was just at the point of wondering if she would ever catch anything at all memorable when she suddenly felt a massive pull on her line that very nearly hauled her right over the side of the boat. Uncle Boat and Aunt Bait quickly reacted to grab her line and help her to hold it steady, and then all three of them slowly worked to pull it in, while Nathan and Boy Fwefwe watched in rapt attention. Perhaps it was the jolt of the line that suddenly shook the boat, or perhaps someone had let out a little shout of surprise, or it could just be that his sleepy time was over, but in any event Snowcone was instantly standing up alert on his coil of rope, ears and nose twitching ever so slightly as he leaned forward to see what was what.

With Uncle Boat and Aunt Bait's help, SuperNova Yerakina pulled in her line and netted the fish onto the deck. It was a shark. Just a small one, but a real live shark, nonetheless, perhaps twice as long as Snowcone. With the hook still in its mouth, it lashed about on the deck, knocking the lunch baskets with its long tail and slapping the floor boards with its fins. "Wow, look at that", yelled Nathan and Boy Fwefwe together, while SuperNova Yerakina just stared and jumped out of the way of the writhing tail.

IT was just about the strangest sight Snowcone had ever seen, and he could contain himself no longer. He danced about the twisting, turning, board-slapping shark, the hair along the top of his neck bristling, barking made defiance at this grey demon from the depths, "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip. And again, "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip."

And for once, SuperNova Yerakina was too astounded to laugh.

Chapter 14 SPELUNKING

Looking through the dictionary one day, SuperNova Yerakina came upon the strange word *speleology*, defined as "the scientific study of caves". A little way below it on the same page, she then found *spelunking* defined as "the activity of exploring caves for sport". This last word had such a nice sound to it, like two rocks knocking together, that she just had to say it to herself several times, "Spelunking. Spelunking. Spelunking. Spelunking. I wonder if I could be a spelunker and go spelunking."

With that, SuperNova Yerakina entered into a phase of reading everything she could about caves and speleology and the wonderful sport of spelunking. She found a couple of books on the subject at the Tunapuna Public Library, and at a friend's house there were back issues of *National Geographic* magazine with some articles about various amazing caves. And the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* was some help.

As luck would have it, a class from the University was planning to visit the big cave on Mt Tamana, and SuperNova Yerakina knew the class lecturer, Dr Rockne, the mother of her classmate Cecilia. She asked if she might be allowed to go along, and to her surprise Dr Rockne agreed. Of course, she wanted to take along Snowcone, her fluffy little white dog with the shiny black eyes and nose, but she was afraid that this would not be allowed, so she decided to just take him along and hope that it went unnoticed. This was quite naughty on her part, but we have to admit that SuperNova Yerakina is really extremely fond of her dog and would like him to share all of her adventures and interesting experiences, so that we can understand why she did what she did.

SuperNova Yerakina would have liked to put Snowcone in her purse, as she had done when they went to the movie, but he had grown since then, while her purse had remained the same size, and he simply wouldn't fit. Besides, it would have looked rather odd to take a purse along on a spelunking expedition, don't you think? So she just bundled him up in a jacket that she carried under her arm and hoped that he would be quiet.

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When the time came, Dr Rockne and the students and SuperNova Yerakina all got into a big maxi-taxi to take them to Mt Tamana. Snowcone got in too, but he was covered by the jacket and kept very quiet, so that none of the University people was aware of it. And once the maxi-taxi started down the road, Snowcone fell asleep, so that he remained unnoticed all the way to their destination.

Approaching Mt Tamana, they turned onto a dirt road that went up a hill and finally came to an end at an old, abandoned farmhouse. The maxi-taxi stopped, the door opened, and everyone got out, including Snowcone, still bundled up asleep in the jacket under SuperNova Yerakina's arm. They turned onto a path through forest and an old cocoa estate, and after a 10-minute walk they reached the cave. Walking to the cave, they had passed a tree with cicadas calling shrilly, which had caused Snowcone to wake up. SuperNova Yerakina heard him stir and held him still closer, whispering to him to keep quiet.

There are three entrances into the main Tamana cave. Two of these are just holes into the ceiling of the cave, so that someone with a rope ladder could simply climb straight down into it. The other way is more complicated, requiring the spelunker to descend into a broad, sloping cavern and then squirm through a muddy gap just wide enough to let one person pass. This last way is very messy, but it is also the safest, so that Dr Rockne insisted that everyone enter the cave by that route.

First, however, she stopped at the opening to the broad cavern and announced that it was time to check their equipment. Although they did not expect to need them, two students had each been detailed to carry a long coil of stout rope, in case it became necessary to lift someone out in an emergency. And everyone was expected to bring along at least two flashlights and preferably three, each with fresh batteries. The students all knew that this was standard practice. Sometimes even a good flashlight fails or gets dropped and broken, so that every spelunker makes sure to have at least one extra for backup. From her reading, SuperNova Yerakina knew this too, so that she carried her regular flashlight plus two small extra ones.

Dr Rockne went first. She had been in the cave so many times that she twisted and rolled through the narrow gap in a jiffy, but the

students coming after her had more difficulty. One of them, who was rather fat, got stuck when he was halfway through, and for a moment the entire class feared that he would remain wedged in that position, so that some of them would be trapped inside the cave while the others had to stay outside. The gap was quite slippery, though, and after a few pushes and pulls from his classmates and a twist or two of his own the student managed to wiggle through to the other side. Although he kept the thought to himself, the whole time he was in the cave that student worried about whether he would be able to get back out.

SuperNova Yerakina had a much easier time getting in, as she was so skinny that the narrow gap was like a big wide doorway to her. Once inside, she decided that it was dark enough that she could uncover Snowcone's face and let him see around, although she still hugged him under her arm and cautioned him to stay quiet.

Shining the flashlight around on the walls, she saw some pale crickets with amazingly long, thin antennae that stretched out like little whips several times as long as their bodies. She brought Snowcone closer to have a look at one of them, but when it sensed their presence and started waving those threadlike antennae about Snowcone got just a little excited and prepared to bark in alarm, so that SuperNova Yerakina had to shush him and carry him back further away from the cricket. She even called him severely by his bull name, Snowcone Amadeus Fuzzball, in order to make it clear that she was not joking.

It was at about this point that she shone her flashlight on the ceiling and discovered a great many bats hanging there. In places they seemed so densely packed together that there was not space enough for even one more bat to squeeze into place. Someone must have disturbed one of the little furry fliers, because it dropped down from the ceiling and flew along the cave, one wingtip almost brushing SuperNova Yerakina's head. She felt Snowcone give a start and just had time to cover his mouth to stop him from raising up a "Yipyipyip" that would surely have been heard by everyone.

Walking further along, the girl and her dog came to a spot where there seemed to be hundreds and hundreds of cockroaches milling

about on the cave floor. They came in many different sizes, and now that she really looked at them it seemed to SuperNova Yerakina that they were everywhere, walking over the surface, burrowing in the loose soil and skittering up the hard-rock walls of the cave. Again she had to caution Snowcone Amadeus Fuzzball, who was wriggling with frantic curiosity, to keep still. By this time the group had stretched out a great deal, so that the nearest students to SuperNova Yerakina and Snowcone were a few metres in front and a few metres behind them.

Just a little way along they came to a metal ladder that had been placed there some years before to aid people in descending to the next level. This was a great help to everyone, as the cave fell off steeply at that point, with no very good stepping places for inexperienced spelunkers. Still holding the jacket under one arm, SuperNova Yerakina very carefully climbed down, holding onto the ladder with her other hand.

On the next level she found no more cave crickets, but there was a still denser blanket of bats on the ceiling, and it seemed like the cockroaches on the floor and walls were present in the millions. She did not go very far before she came to another sudden drop-off and another metal ladder to help her down. SuperNova Yerakina prepared to climb down this ladder in the same way as she had the other. First, however, she needed to tie one of her shoelaces, which had come undone. Putting down the jacket on a dry rock, she knelt to attend to her shoe.

Feeling himself on solid ground, Snowcone at last wiggled out of the restraining jacket. Celebrating his freedom, he bounded forward a few steps, only to find himself in the midst of a great horde of scurrying cockroaches. There were little tiny ones burrowing into the soil right at his feet, medium-sized ones that ran about madly and even ran up his legs and onto his back, and adults that flew up and around his face.

With a zillion all-sized cockroaches whizzing under and over and upon him, it is out of the question that excitable little Snowcone should contain himself any longer, and he didn't even try. "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", he barked, standing there in a universe of cockroaches. "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", he barked some more, running about the cave floor, trying to run after those hordes of

cockroaches or away from them or possibly away from himself.

And as his yipyipyips echoed off the walls and ceiling and came rebounding back with the voice of many wild little dogs at once, startling the hundreds and thousands of bats out of their daytime slumber, so that they all took wing at once and poured along the airways toward any exit they could find, uttering extremely high-pitched little chirps, Dr Rockne and her class of students all along the length of the cave stopped and wondered what could possibly be raising such a ruckshun, while SuperNova Yerakina laughed and laughed.

Chapter 15
ON CAMERA

It turned out that Dr Rockne and her students and SuperNova Yerakina were not the only ones interested in caves. Far from it. The caves of Trinidad had been in the news lately, and there was considerable public interest in bats and the mysterious oilbirds and various other creatures that spend the greater part of their lives in subterranean darkness.

So it was that one day in school SuperNova Yerakina's classmate, Cecilia, mentioned that her mother would be interviewed on television that afternoon and that she was going to the studio with her mother to watch the interview. Furthermore, she had asked if SuperNova Yerakina and Snowcone could come along. Now, Dr Rockne had a great sense of humour and, although she thought it very naughty of the girl to bring along her fluffy little white dog with the shiny black eyes and nose on a serious speleological expedition without permission, she had to agree that the uproar caused by Snowcone's little rampage in the cave had amused one and all, except perhaps the cockroaches and bats. She therefore saw no harm in SuperNova Yerakina bringing her little dog to the large studio, as long as they sat near the rear and kept quiet. Little did she know that even in such an apparently safe setting Snowcone was capable of a great deal of confusion and hullabaloo.

Dr Rockne picked up the two girls as school let out, and they went around to her house to fetch Snowcone. SuperNova Yerakina would have liked to bring her fat Jillie along too, but she knew that would be asking too much.

They drove to the television studio and checked in at the front desk. The desk clerk was used to having all kinds of strange people and their even stranger pets come into the studio, so that she paid absolutely no attention to Snowcone. An assistant led them all into the studio, which was empty at the time, and showed Cecilia and SuperNova Yerakina to their seats. Then he escorted Dr Rockne to her seat in front of the cameras and took some light readings while she adjusted her makeup. Dr Rockne was not usually very fussy about makeup and such things, but she knew that television lighting can do

funny things to a person's complexion, so she took a little more care with her appearance than usual.

She had just finished putting a dab of powder on her cheek when the interviewer came in, took his seat beside her and began to discuss the questions he would ask during the programme, while the assistant made his final adjustments in the lighting and the two cameramen took their places. Cecilia and SuperNova Yerakina watched all these preparations with great interest, while Snowcone perked up his ears, tilted his head quizzically to one side and made it clear that he found it all very odd, indeed. For some programmes, the seats at the back of the studio are filled to capacity, but on this day there were no onlookers besides the two girls and one dog.

The assistant gave a signal, and the interview began. "Good evening, friends and neighbours", the interviewer said, looking directly into one camera, "and welcome to *Pulsebeat*. My guest this evening is Maria Rockne of the University of the West Indies. She is a specialist on the peculiar plants and animals that are adapted to live in caves. Dr Rockne, can you tell us a bit about the kinds of caves we have in Trinidad & Tobago and how they differ from those found elsewhere?"

And with that the interview was underway. Dr Rockne detailed some of her findings and those of other speleologists -- introducing the word "speleology" to the television audience as she did so -- and even brought out some examples of strange cave-dwelling animals. One of the cameras was especially equipped for closeup shots, so that the people at home all over the country could see these animals far better than could Cecilia and SuperNova Yerakina and Snowcone right there in the studio.

When Dr Rockne produced a cave cockroach, which got loose and almost skittered across the floor before she recaptured it, Snowcone became excited and gave a little yip before SuperNova Yerakina would whisper to him severely to be quiet. He sat back down on his chair and behaved himself, but just a few minutes later a bat got loose. It flew about the studio, uttering those extremely high-pitched little chirps, which positively was more than Snowcone or even the best-behaved little dog in the world could or would or should have to bear in silence. With every hair on the back of his neck standing on end and uttering a

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long yelp of purest consternation, he leapt out of his seat with such force that it carried him clear over the intervening five rows of seats to land on the floor of the studio.

And he did not stop there. As the bat flapped and wheeled overhead, Snowcone dashed frantically about among the lights and cameras and the interviewer's and Dr Rockne's chairs, barking out a shrill and continuous "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", as he chased in vain after the offending, cave-evoking bat, very nearly upsetting one of the cameramen who was trying to catch it all on tape and causing three more assistants to come rushing in from other rooms. "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", he continued from one side and then the other of the studio, while Cecilia and SuperNova Yerakina and Dr Rockne and in fact everyone except the poor interviewer laughed and laughed.

Chapter 16
A REAL ZOO

The whole class was going to the Emperor Valley Zoo as part of a special school outing. When they heard about this, SuperNova Yerakina and Rowena immediately thought that the zoo would be great fun for their little dogs, Snowcone and Windsor. They asked Miss Singh if it would be okay to take the dogs on the outing, and Miss Singh didn't think so, but after she phoned the zoo and spoke with the Curator, she told them that they could bring Snowcone and Windsor only if they kept them on leashes and saw to it that the dogs did not get into any mischief.

When they reached the zoo the Curator, Mr Boos, met them at the gate and offered to show them around. He looked at Snowcone and Windsor and remarked that they were even smaller than his little terriers at home.

The tour began with the turtles, which lived in an enclosed pond right near the entrance. Many turtles were sitting out on the rocks, sunning themselves, while others swam about in the pond. "Look", said Deana, "when they're on land they use their legs to walk, and when they get in the water they can use their legs just as well for swimming." Two turtles were floating in the pond with just their noses out of the water, not moving, but Deana got so excited at seeing how they could walk and swim just as well with the same legs that she waved her arms about, and the floating turtles were startled and dove down to sit at the bottom of the pond. The other children thought that was funny, and Mr Boos said "Let's see how they can stay down without coming up for air." Everyone stood there quietly, waiting while Miss Singh looked at her watch to see how long it would be, but after they had waited three minutes and the turtles were still under water the whole class became impatient and decided to move along.

The next stop was the ducks, which were paddling about in a much bigger pond, looking for snails and other goodies on plants and in the mud. André, who was standing at the back of the group, made a noise like a duck, which made Snowcone and Windsor look around curiously to see where this other duck was.

Next they went to look at the macaws. Claire asked why they were called macaws, when they just looked like very big, colourful parrots. Mr Boos told her that they are indeed parrots, but that ... well, he gave an explanation of the name "macaw" that just confused everyone and made Claire wonder if Mr Boos really knew why they had that name, after all. The macaws made loud squawking sounds, which André imitated, so that the dogs once again looked around in wild curiosity.

Everybody thought the monkeys were the most amazing animals they had seen. In some ways they were like little people, but in other ways they were so different. The spider monkeys swung deftly about their cage, using all four feet and their long tail. Mr Boos told the children that when a tail can be used for holding onto things it is called a prehensile tail, and Miss Singh told them to say the word "prehensile" out loud three times, so that they would remember it. Nearby was a big reddish monkey that started to make loud sounds like a lion. Starla read out loud the sign in front of the cage, "Howler Monkey", and said it was a good name for a monkey that howled so loud. André tried to imitate the sound, but it came out more like a grunting peep than a real howl.

Walking further up, they came upon what looked like two big chickens with extremely long tails. They were not in a cage but just wandered freely in the open spaces within the zoo, sometimes even walking along the sidewalks. Mr Boos told them that these were peafowl, and when Shieva asked why one of them was so much more colourful than the other he explained that the colourful one was the peacock and that he used his great big colourful tail to attract the peahen to be his mate. The children were so intent on watching the peacock strutting about in front of the peahen, spreading his tail like a rainbow, that no one noticed André trying to imitate the peacock's display with an imaginary tail.

Not far away was a cage with some other birds that looked sort of like chickens, but much smaller than the peafowl, and all white and very fluffy. In fact, they looked a little bit like Snowcone, except that their eyes and nose were not especially black and they had just one pair of legs. "Oh my," exclaimed Preya, "are those some kind of funny

peacock and peahen too?" Mr Boos laughed and said that they were in fact chickens, although of a special breed. "But those don't look like real chickens. Why are they so funny-looking?" Preya wanted to know. Mr Boos explained that some people take a special fancy to chickens, just other people do to dogs or cats or pigeons, and like to try to breed new kinds with special characteristics, and that this fluffy white chicken came about because of such special breeding. André imitated the stiff little strut of the birds quite well and was having such fun that he nearly got left behind when the class moved on.

Further along they came to a herd of peccaries inside a big enclosure with trees. The peccaries were going about, grunting and rooting in the ground, and Rowena remarked that they were behaving just like some pigs that she had once seen on her uncle's farm and that they even looked sort of like pigs, only smaller and with more hair. Mr Boos said that she was quite right, as peccaries are a kind of wild pig that is native to this part of the world. André's imitation of the peccaries' grunts was so convincing that Snowcone and Windsor looked around to see where the pigs could be.

Nearby they saw an ostrich, which came over to look at them as they approached its enclosure. It lifted its head up at the end of its long long neck and looked down with its big curious eyes. "Look, it has wings", exclaimed Gissel, "why doesn't it fly over the fence and out of here?" Mr Boos explained that ostriches, like some other very large birds, are too heavy to fly and use their wings for other things instead. As he said this, the ostrich began to prance about, waving its wings as it did so. This was a signal to André to start doing the same thing, using his bent arms in imitation of the ostrich's wings. However, it was not nearly as impressive as the real thing, so that he went back to grunting like a peccary.

They then went up a walkway to see a herd of red deer from Europe. Two of the largest deer had big antlers on their heads, and this time it was Miss Singh's turn to ask a question. "I have always wondered why some deer have antlers, while others do not", she said. Before Mr Boos could answer, McKinly spoke up, saying that it is only the grownup males -- known as stags -- that have antlers and that they use them in struggling with each other for mates. Mr Boos confirmed

that this was correct, which impressed Miss Singh immensely. André was so amazed at McKinly's knowledge that he didn't think to try to imitate the stag shaking his head and rattling his antlers against the fence.

In a different enclosure nearby was a herd of brocket deer, native to Trinidad & Tobago. A new baby deer -- known as a fawn -- had recently been born, and they hoped they could see it. Sure enough, there it was, lying on a bed of leaves under a tree. "Look", said Alex, "the adult deer are all brown, but the baby is speckled with white spots all over. Why is that, Mr Boos?" It was explained that the spotting made it harder to see the fawn as it lay on the eaves, so that it was safer from other animals that might try to eat it. André wondered if there was any possible way that he could imitate the fawn's spots. Snowcone and Windsor didn't even see the fawn, although SuperNova Yerakina and Rowena tried their best to point it out.

Back down the walkway they came to some very strange animals, a herd of capybara, shaggy beasts about the size of a large dog. "Those look like giant guinea pigs, sort of", said Satie. "I suppose they are a bit like guinea pigs", said Mr Boos. "Both guinea pigs and capybaras come from South America, and they belong to the same group of animals, the rodents, which also includes mice and rats." The capybaras were walking about in their enclosure, and then some of them went and waded in their pond until the water was up to their necks. They made no sound and looked very grave, so that the best André could do to imitate them was to be silent, keep a straight face, and try to walk as stately as possible. Snowcone and Windsor didn't know what to make of them.

The lions were not far away. They were exciting animals to see up close, and Snowcone got excited and strained at the leash, barking "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip" and alternately trying to run toward the lions and away from them. Windsor, on the other hand, had had no experience with cats and couldn't see what all the fuss was about. "Why do you suppose one of the lions has a big mane of hair around its head and neck and the others don't? Does any of you know?" asked Miss Singh. Katy knew the answer: Only males have a mane, while females - - known as lionesses -- do not. The lions were much less active than

the capybaras, and in fact they all just lay there in the big cage, so that it looked like they were all asleep. Instead of trying to imitate the lions sleeping, André imitated Snowcone going "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", which startled Snowcone so much that he just looked in silent amazement, while SuperNova Yerakina and Rowena laughed.

The jaguars in a nearby enclosure were much livelier than the lions. They walked about, wrestled with each other, twitched their tails and even roared once or twice. Mr Boos explained that in Spanish and even sometimes in English jaguars are known as "tigers", because when Europeans first came to the New World and encountered them they thought the jaguars resembled the tigers that were already known from Asia. André wasn't really listening to this. He was too busy roaring and swatting at an imaginary jaguar with his paw. Snowcone and Windsor jumped out of the way of his paw and looked resentful at his attempt to scare them out of the way with his paw. Even Windsor seemed to feel that having big cats both in front and behind was really too much.

Going into the fish house, they couldn't see very well until their eyes adjusted to the dim light. Most of the tanks held fish, but the whole class was especially drawn to the matamata turtle in a tank all by itself. It had a broad head with a snout at the end and strange growths protruding in various places. "That is positively the weirdest turtle I ever saw", exclaimed Gerard. "Yes, isn't it?" chuckled Mr Boos. "It was brought to us by a fisherman from Nariva. He went looking for cascadu and found this instead. It is a rare turtle in Trinidad, so we were lucky to get this one. Its scientific name is *Chelus fimbriatus*." That set André to imitating a turtle swimming about, all the time intoning "*Chelus fimbriatus. Chelus fimbriatus. Chelus fimbriatus.*" And this time the other children took to imitating André, all dancing about in the fish house, making swimming motions with their arms and saying "*Chelus fimbriatus*" over and over again, while Snowcone and Windsor jumped up and down and barked "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip". They made no attempt to bark "*Chelus fimbriatus.*" Mr Boos laughed and laughed, while Miss Singh looked just a little askance at such public commotion.

It was just a short distance to the reptile house. First they stopped to look at the tortoises wandering about in an enclosure all their own.

Larry thought they looked like turtles. "Mr Boos, are tortoises a kind of turtle?" he asked. "Yes, that's right. Tortoises are turtles that live on land all the time" was the reply. "Some tortoises live for a very long time, even over 100 years", he added. André tried to imitate the walk of the tortoises, but he found that he couldn't move that slowly.

Then came the high point of the visit. Mr Boos excuses himself to go into a room of the reptile house, and when he came back out he carried a large snake. "This is a boa constrictor", he told the class. "In Trinidad we call it a macajuel. Would you like to touch it?" There was a great inrush of breath, as the children backed away from the macajuel. The fluffy white hair on Snowcone's back and the sleek black hair on Windsor's back stood up, and they both growled low at the sight of the great big snake. Only SuperNova Yerakina and Candice stepped forward to touch the macajuel. Both had been to the zoo before with their parents and had made the acquaintance of the very same macajuel, so that they were proud to show that they were not afraid of it.

Snowcone protested as SuperNova Yerakina carried him forward, so that it was left to Candice to show the others that the macajuel is a gentle snake, besides being so pretty and not at all slimy. She stroked it on top of its head, under its chin, and then ran her hand along its long body, which the snake seemed to like. Gradually the other children gathered their courage and came to stroke the snake, having such fun with it that, when it came time for Mr Boos to put it back in its cage, they all begged to be allowed to touch it just one last time. André tried his best to wiggle and squirm like a real macajuel.

It was time to go. Mr Boos escorted them back to the front gate, thanked them for coming, and congratulated SuperNova Yerakina and Rowena on their dogs' good behaviour. "Next time you come back, maybe they can come and play with my terriers", he said.

Although the visit to the zoo was over, it wasn't yet time to get back on the bus and return to school. It was now noon, and they had brought their lunches with them. The Botanic Gardens just next door were an idea place to sit and eat, so they all walked over there in double file and sat in a shady place with a nice view, where they had a good view of three kinds of palms.

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Miss Singh asked what their favourite animal in the zoo had been, and everyone had a different answer. They all clamoured to explain why their personal choice was the best in the whole zoo, raising up such a joyful noise that Snowcone and Windsor could no longer restrain themselves. "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", they barked in concert, jumping up and down in uncontained excitement at what they had seen and heard, while the entire class -- even Miss Singh -- laughed and laughed.

Chapter 17
IN THE RAIN

Some people get frightened in a rainstorm. There is no doubt that the roar of buckets of rain falling and the crash of occasional thunder can be loud and very impressive at times, especially when accompanied by high winds. Like most people when there is a really heavy rainstorm, especially at night, SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe like to stay indoors and just watch the commotion from a safe, dry distance. However, the light, warm rain of a true sun shower is quite a different matter. At a time like that, the two adventurous children would rather put on their bathing suits and prance about in the yard, getting thoroughly soaked, and then maybe run up and down the street in an attempt to get even wetter than they already are. There is something truly wonderful and exhilarating about being out in the rain when you want to be.

So it was that one day they got home from school just as storm clouds were gathering over a warm, breezy afternoon, and SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe got to thinking the very same thought about getting truly sopping wet. "It does look like a good day for a run in the rain", said SuperNova Yerakina as she looked out the front door. "It's nice and warm", Boy Fwefwe agreed. "And on a day such as this it will surely not be a hard and gusty rain", SuperNova Yerakina added with some finality.

So it was decided. They rushed to the closet to find their bathing suits, got changed in a jiffy, placed their towels conveniently by the door, and were outside in the yard just as they first gentle drops came pattering down. It was just little drops at first, but then the rain picked up, and soon it seemed to be coming down in great bucket-sized sloshes, although still so warm that it was a joy to be wet.

They ran around in the yard, trying to find the soggiest patch of grass, the drippiest tree limb, the pouringest patch of sky, laughing and shouting words with no particular meaning. And then they were out the gate and dashing up the street, squealing merrily and wondering how in the world they might get just a little bit wetter still. They came back down the street and into the yard again, where their eyes

alight on a pair of empty buckets that just happened to be sitting there. "Oh goody", they yelled in unison and proceeded to the faucet beside the house, where over and over again they filled their buckets and dumped water on each other, on themselves, and just for good measure on the trunk of the coconut palm that stood inoffensively by the fence where it had always stood.

SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe were just looking around for a new target for their happy drenchings when Snowcone, SuperNova Yerakina's fluffy little white dog with the shiny black eyes and nose, made the mistake of awaking from a sound nap and wandering out to see what all the fuss was about. Snowcone, you understand, cannot bear to stay away from the scene of any kind of excitement whatsoever, but this was one time when he really should have gone back to sleep and let the excitement alone.

He never knew what hit him. He came around the corner as SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe stood there looking around, each with a full bucket at the ready, and they didn't even have to think about it. Boy Fwefwe was closer. He let it all fall over the unsuspecting pup in one great gush. Snowcone stopped stockstill in amazement, and that is when SuperNova Yerakina drenched him with the second bucketful.

It was all too much for the no-longer-fluffy little dog. Right there where he stood, he pointed his nose at the heavens and poured forth a cascade of doggy surprise and shock, "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", while SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe laughed and laughed.

Chapter 18
CUTTING IT CLOSE

It is often said that "A job well done need never be done again." About many sorts of jobs this is quite true, but no matter how perfectly the barber cuts your hair, it is quite certain that in time you will need a new haircut, and that after that you will still need many more haircuts.

So it was that one day SuperNova Yerakina's little brother, Boy Fwefwe, had to have his hair cut. He is quite a sociable boy and doesn't really like to do things all by himself if he can do them together with others, so that on that day he asked SuperNova Yerakina if she would like to come along while he went to the barber. Being a dutiful big sister, SuperNova Yerakina said that of course she would be quite glad to go along, although in truth she had planned to sit up in the tree house and read a new book. She asked Snowcone, her fluffy little white dog with the shiny black eyes and nose if he would like to go with them, and when he just cocked his head to one side and looked quizzical she took that to mean yes and went to get his leash.

So it was that on an especially fine morning the three of them were walking along the road to Indar's Barber Saloon in Tunapuna. It was a fairly busy time of the week, so that there was already one person in the chair and two others waiting their turn. SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe each got to looking through a magazine, while Snowcone sat there and wondered at the strange clicking of the scissors and the rain of hair that just kept falling to the floor, as well as the unusual quietness of the two children.

By and by, it was Boy Fwefwe's turn, so he climbed into the chair. Snowcone thought this was a bit odd, but not nearly as odd as when Indar wrapped a big white cloth around Boy Fwefwe and started clicking that funny device around his head. And the rain of hair just kept falling onto the floor. Snowcone looked over toward SuperNova Yerakina for some kind of explanation, but she just kept on looking at her magazine, occasionally turning the pages, as if nothing in particular was going on.

The more he watched, the more perplexed Snowcone became. Boy

Fwefwe still looked like himself, but he kept changing just a little at a time, and of course Snowcone could not recall that a few weeks earlier Boy Fwefwe had looked just as he was coming to look now.

Finally the barber was finished. He whipped off the white cloth with such a flourish that Snowcone stepped back in some surprise. And then the barber proceeded to brush Boy Fwefwe's neck and the back of his head. It was then, just as he was stepping down, that Boy Fwefwe felt a tiny piece of stray hair go up his nose. He sneezed. And what a sneeze it was, one of those sneezes that hand back there at the back of the nose for the longest time and then come rushing out like the end of the world. "AaaaaaaaaaaaaahCHOO", resounded his record-breaking sneeze that stirred up the scattered hair halfway across the floor and set SuperNova Yerakina and Indar's newly arrived customers and even Indar himself to sneezing contagiously, so that they all then went into a new round of sneezing in new and unexpected tones.

It was all too much for Snowcone. He has sat there calmly while the scissors clicked and the hair rained down and Boy Fwefwe took to looking somehow more and more different, but when the whole room went into this convulsion of crying out in tones that he had never before heard in all his young doggy life, well, Snowcone could not stay quiet. He lifted up his head and barked away his consternation, "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", while SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe and Indar and the unshorn customers alternately sneezed and laughed.

Chapter 19
UP, UP AND AWAY

Never in her wildest dreams had SuperNova Yerakina imagined that she might fly in a hot-air balloon before she was even 10 years old. However, sometimes these things have a way of happening, so that she should not really have been altogether amazed one day to find herself climbing into the basket of a balloon along with Snowcone, her fluffy little white dog with the shiny black eyes and nose, and the pilot who was to take them up and over the houses and trees in one direction or another, according to the wind's whim.

It all began with a contest. Supernova Yerakina could never remember exactly what the contest was about, just that one day in the supermarket she had been asked to fill out an entry form and drop it into a box. Then, some weeks later, she got a phone call to say that she had won and should show up at the municipal park in Arima on such-and-such a day. She had so completely forgotten the contest by that time that she had to ask the person on the phone what it was all about. She still did not entirely understand, but one thing was evident: The prize was a ride in a hot-air balloon.

A crowd had gathered in the park to watch the event. Some were SuperNova Yerakina's friends and classmates, who had come to wish her a pleasant journey, but most were just curious people who had heard about hot-air balloons but had never before seen one.

With the three of them safely in the basket of the balloon, the pilot gave a signal to his assistant on the ground. The ropes that held the balloon in place were loosened, and they suddenly floated free up into the sky. It happened so quickly that before she knew it SuperNova Yerakina found herself far above the trees and houses and people down there in Arima, all of whom looked like tiny dolls.

As luck would have it, they caught a nice gentle breeze blowing west, sending them above the route of the Eastern Main Road. It amused SuperNova Yerakina to look down at the cars that appeared to be toys and occasionally to see someone look up at the silent balloon and shout and wave. She made sure to wave back at everyone who waved to her.

As they proceeded further west, the balloon slowly started to lose altitude, and SuperNova Yerakina was afraid it would come down too soon, before she had had a chance to really see much of Trinidad from the air. When she mentioned this to the pilot, however, he told her not to worry. He knew that she lived in St Augustine and just wanted the balloon to descend a little, so that she could get a better look at familiar sights. He could put more gas into the balloon at any time to take it higher, he assured her. SuperNova Yerakina found that very comforting.

Meanwhile, Snowcone was just getting over the incredible strangeness of watching everything down below them shrink, while he and SuperNova Yerakina and the pilot remained the same size, and had started to adjust to the way they kept somehow swinging about in a breeze. They had descended far enough that he could make out dogs and cats here and there, and he found it very strange indeed to suddenly be the biggest dog in the world. Some dogs barked at the balloon as it floated over, and Snowcone couldn't help noticing that their barking sounded very far away, even though he could see that they were in fact just very tiny dogs right at the foot of the basket. He wanted to jump down and chase them unmercifully, but SuperNova Yerakina restrained him.

They floated by not too far from the Windsor School, the first really familiar sight to SuperNova Yerakina. And then, by the greatest of luck, they went right directly over her own house. Her little brother, Boy Fwefwe, was standing out in the street as they came overhead and called out to her, jumping up and down in excitement and calling to all the neighbours to come and see his sister up there in the sky. This was almost too much for Snowcone, who recognized Boy Fwefwe and one or two of the amazed neighbours and was most disturbed that they were now so unaccountably tiny. "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", he barked in alarm, but then they had bloated further along with the wind.

A flock of orange-winged parrots flew by below the balloon, setting up their usual raucous chorus. Snowcone had often watched and listened to them at home as they fluttered by high in the sky, their stubby little wings beating furiously, and he recognized the sound, but how could they possibly now be down there and so much bigger than

usual? It seemed that everything had been turned topsy-turvy in his doggy world.

They floated past Curepe Junction, where the taxi drivers caught the sight of this exotic airborne machine and stopped calling out "Yeah, Chaguanas, Chaguanas", although not for long, and one doubles vendor became so careless as to plot a dollop of channa with extra pepper right into his own long-suffering left hand. Was it just his imagination, or did Snowcone actually catch a whiff of doubles with extra pepper, way up there in the balloon?

IT was almost time to bring the journey to a close. After all, the coast was just a few kilometres away, and they had to land before the balloon got over water. The pilot's assistant had driven ahead with the truck to select a suitable landing field. He set up a smoke flare and waited for the approach.

The pilot started to release gas from the balloon, which began to fall slowly through the air. Down and down it came, and Snowcone watched in amazement as the cars along the road gradually got bigger and bigger still, until they were almost as big as he was. And then he saw that even some people out in a field seemed almost as big as he was, and then there was a dog that by now seemed positively enormous, compared with the miniature dogs of St Augustine.

Everything then got bigger and bigger in a rush as the balloon came down just a little too fast and landed in a field of cut-over sugar cane with a bump that almost made it topple over, while a gigantic dog the same size as Snowcone came bounding up to see what he could make of it.

It was all too much for the fluffy little white dog, who leaped out of the basket and raced all over the field, chasing the other dog and then his own tail and then a great tall cattle egret that happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, all the time announcing to the world his astonishment, "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", over and over again, "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip", while SuperNova Yerakina and her pilot laughed and laughed.

Chapter 20
A HONEY OF A TIME

Many times in the Tunapuna market, SuperNova Yerakina and her little brother, Boy Fwefwe, had seen Marc Clifton selling honey. Marc was a beekeeper with long dreadlocks and a beard, and he always wore white clothes, so that people who didn't know his name just called him the Rasta in White. They had never spoken with him, until one day they wandered down on market day to get some of their beloved doubles and found him just unpacking his honey to sell.

"Good morning" he greeted them. "Good morning" they said and stopped to see what he had. Noting their curiosity, he asked if they knew where honey came from. As it happened, they were not entirely sure, beyond knowing that it had something to do with bees, so Marc showed them the comb in which the bees store honey and told how it is made and why bees go to so much trouble just to produce a sweet liquid.

This was all so intriguing that the two children looked forward to going to market at times when they could count on finding Marc, even if they didn't especially want any doubles. They just liked to look at his bottles of honey and hear him explain things about his bees and what they did and how he extracted honey, wax and pollen from the hives.

Marc told them that the site of his beekeeping operation -- known as a bee yard -- was far up the Caura Valley, and SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe silently wished they could go and see it some day. It all seemed so marvellous and other-worldly, though, that it didn't occur to them simply to ask if they could visit some time. It was thus a very pleasant surprise one day when he suggested that the following week, if they cared to come to the market at the end of the business day, they could come along when he returned to his bee yard. They immediately said that that was exactly what they wanted to do and set an appointment for the next week.

It was a week of anticipation. They told their friends and classmates, who all thought it sounded most wonderfully adventurous. And they told Snowcone, SuperNova Yerakina's fluffy little white dog with the shiny black eyes and nose. Snowcone of course had no idea

what it was all about, but he was infected by their excitement, and with good reason, for they fully intended to take him along on their first ever visit to a genuine bee yard.

Although Marc has said that they could come at the end of market time, they were too excited to wait and so showed up at his stall almost two hours ahead of time. However, that was not a problem. On the contrary, he was glad to have them help out with his business, which they thought was great fun. It was a busy day, with plenty of people wishing to buy honey and pollen, so that business was brisk. SuperNova Yerakina took the customers' money and made change, while Boy Fwefwe helped to give them what they requested. Snowcone just sat under the table and watched the people coming and going and wondered how there ever got to be so many people in the world.

Business was so good, in fact, that just a little more than an hour after their arrival, SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe were told that everything had already been sold, and they might as well pack up and head for the bee yard.

Marc drove a beat-up old truck named Waddell. He had had Waddell for so many years that he could no longer recall why he called his truck so, but one thing was certain. Waddell had served him well, and he had no thought of replacing him with a new truck until he absolutely would not run any more. Waddell had some difficulty with the steeper hills as they headed up the Caura Valley and then up and up a long, winding sideroad, but Marc just kept humming a little tune of encouragement, and somehow the ancient truck managed to make it over each new rise and around each bend.

After what seemed like an eternity of new scenery, they turned into a driveway and stopped before a house as white as its owner's shirt and pants. SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe helped Marc to carry his empty boxes and other gear into the shed, while Snowcone looked around the place. Then it was time to go and see the bees.

Honey bees are not really dangerous for people who know what they are doing. However, it is still a good idea to wear protective clothing when first inspecting hives, just in case some of the bees are in a stinging mood on that particular day. Then, if all seems calm and

orderly, one can take off some of the protection for easier movement.

So it was that Marc put on a complete suit of white overalls, a hat with a veil that completely covered his head and face, and a pair of leather gloves. Then he helped SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe into protective suits that he kept on hand for visitors. They were the smallest visitors he had ever had in his bee yard, so that even the smallest suits were somewhat too big for them, but he rolled up the sleeves and pant legs and they fit well enough. "Okay, we're all set" he announced. "Let's go and have a look."

They approached the first hive, and he showed them how to open it with his hive tool. The two children were amazed to peer inside and see the great mass of bees all walking about. SuperNova Yerakina lifted Snowcone up to have a look, but he squirmed and whined to be let down, even though he appreciated the delicious smell that rose up from the thousands of bees, their wax combs and the pollen and honey stored in the cells.

Marc gently lifted on the wooden hive frames by its two ends and brushed aside the mass of bees on one side, in order to give SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe a better view of the comb. "Look," he said, "the cells at the top mostly have honey in them, while those a little lower and toward the sides contain pollen. And if you look in some of the cells down below you will see larvae curled up in them, one to each cell." They did as he suggested and saw each of those things, just as he said. Even Snowcone looked up at the comb with interest, even though he was content to do so at a distance.

"What are those funny little things at the bottom of the comb?" asked SuperNova Yerakina. "They look sort of like peanuts."

"Ah" said Marc, "those are special cells in which the bees are rearing new queens."

"Isn't there any queen in the hive right now?" she asked. "Yes, there should be" he replied. "Let's see if we can find her."

With that, he turned the frame around, examined both sides of the comb, then put it back in the hive and lifted out another frame, which he likewise examined on both sides. He put this one back too and lifted out two more in turn before finding what he was looking for. Holding the frame carefully with one hand, Marc pointed with his finger

to a bee that was a little longer than the others and just slightly stouter. She was surrounded by a mass of other bees with their heads pressed against her. They appeared to be kissing her. "In ants and termites" Marc explained, "the queen is much bigger than the workers and looks very different from them, but in honey bees she is only a little bigger. It can actually be quite hard to find the queen in a hive with several thousand bees in it."

The bees had been very patient with all of this manipulation, but now they were starting to get a bit irked. A few of them flew around SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe, making angry buzzing sounds, and one whirred all about Snowcone's head, which confused and agitated him so much that he barked and snapped at her and then went dashing away into the nearby woods. It was time to close up that first hive and move on to the next one.

They continued their inspection until Marc was satisfied that all of his hives were healthy and in good order. Then he selected two with plenty of honey in their combs, so that he could give the children a demonstration of how honey is extracted. For a full honey crop he would have used a motorized extractor inside the immaculately clean honey room at the side of the house, but nothing so elaborate was needed for just a simple demonstration. He brought out a portable, hand-operated device that treated just two frames at a time. It was turned by a crank, sort of like a mechanical ice cream maker.

Snowcone returned from the woods just in time to see Marc take the first two frames, slice the wax lids off their honey cells with a knife, and put them in place in the extractor. Then he invited Boy Fwefwe to set it in motion. Boy Fwefwe was very proud of his strength, but he had trouble with the hand crank and could only get the wheel of the extractor moving slowly, not fast enough to drive the honey out of the cells. "Here, let me try" said SuperNova Yerakina, and she put her will and muscle into making it rotate. It went somewhat faster, but still not fast enough.

With a laugh, Marc took the crank and got the wheel spinning so fast that it became just a grey blur and the honey flowed out of the cells and down into the collecting pan in a liquid golden stream. The clatter of the extractor startled Snowcone, who had been made quite

nervous by the bee buzzing about his head and by the sound of others that even now were buzzing not far away, and he bounded back into the woods with a nervous "Yipyipyip."

It took only a minute to get the honey from the first two frames, and before very long they had extracted all they could from the two hives. Marc took the extractor back into the honey room, where SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe watched in rapt fascination as he poured the new honey from the collecting pan into two fresh, clean jars. They were only too glad to help when he asked them to hold the jars steady while he poured. "Now" he said, we have all done a good job, and I think we deserve a treat. Could I interest you in a taste of this honey that we have just extracted with our own hands?"

In truth, the taste of the lovely new honey was exactly what SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe had been longing for ever since they had seen and smelled it in the first comb. Marc picked up one of the jars and led the way into the house, where they all sat down at the table and each had toast with a liberal spread of honey on it, along with a glass of milk. It was absolutely lovely fare, and if the children had not been so busy eating and drinking they might well have commented that it was the most delicious food they had ever tasted.

Snowcone, meanwhile, had at last ventured back out of the woods, only to find the bee yard apparently deserted. He looked here and there, around the other side of the house, under Waddell and all around the edge of the rows of hives, but SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe were nowhere to be seen. This was dreadfully upsetting, especially to an excitable little dog like Snowcone, who presently gave voice to his considerable frustration. Throwing back his head, he let forth a mournful howwwwwlll that startled the three people in the house from their blissful eating and drinking.

Rushing to the door, SuperNova Yerakina called him inside, much to his relief. And, once inside, it seemed only natural that Snowcone too should sample the product of the hive, even though he had done very little to help in the extraction. "Here, Snowcone" she said, as she put a piece of toast and honey on a little plate beside him, "try some of this."

The day's events had made Snowcone wary of all novelty. He sniffed the food, found that it smelled very nice indeed, then put out

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the tip of his pink tongue and delicately tasted just a drop of the honey. It was so delicious that he positively launched himself onto that piece of toast and almost swallowed it in one gulp.

That set off the most wonderful sensation imaginable inside his doggy little mouth, so that Snowcone could contain himself no longer. The emotional ups and downs of the day in this very strange place, topped off by the sudden experience of this fabulous new food, gave rise to such a surging turmoil that he expressed himself in the only way he could under the circumstances. Dashing all about the kitchen, he barked "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip" with such vehemence that it must have been heard and possibly even felt clear across the Caura Valley, while SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe and the delighted Marc Clifton and -- who knows? -- perhaps even Waddell laughed and laughed.

Chapter 21
A DAY AT THE RACES

"I think I would like to go to the horse races", thought SuperNova Yerakina one day for no particular reason. "I'm six years old, and I have never been to the races. I really think it is time I went."

And with that her mind was made up. She dressed herself in what she imagined was appropriate garb for watching a horse race, picked up her purse and called to her fluffy little white dog with the shiny black eyes and nose, "Come, Snowcone, we're going to the track."

At that time the races were still held at the Queen's Park Savanna, and it was quite a simple matter to get there. They rode into Pain of Sport all the way to Independence Square and then just walked the few blocks to Woodford Square, where they caught another ride as far as the Savanna. "Well, Snowcone" said SuperNova Yerakina in what she thought must surely be just the right tone for someone going to the races, "here we are." Knowing how excited he could get whenever he found himself in a new situation, she decided to pick up Snowcone and carry him until they were safely in the stands.

SuperNova Yerakina approached the ticket window with such complete six-year-old assurance that it did not occur to the ticket clerk to tell her that dogs were not allowed inside. Besides, he was amused to see how much she reminded him of his own little girl. She continued to carry Snowcone as she entered the stands and looked around for a good place to sit -- not too crowded, and with a good view of the race track -- but once they were in place she set him down on a seat beside her with the admonition to sit still and not make any noise.

The horse races are an afternoon-long alternation between intense activity and monotonous calm. Each race lasts a very few minutes, during which the horses bound around the track at top speed and the people in the stands jump and shout for all they are worth. Then everyone just waits around for many more minutes for the next race to begin and the horses to run while the people jump and shout, after which nothing is heard but a sleepy murmur for another long period until the next race.

So it was that SuperNova Yerakina and Snowcone came into the

stands right after one race had ended. All was quiet. They sat there, and then they sat there some more, while absolutely nothing seemed to be happening. SuperNova Yerakina began to wonder about the purpose of all this, while Snowcone took a little nap on his seat.

Things got a little more interesting as several horses came walking onto the racecourse, each led by a very colourfully dressed jockey. A wonderfully powerful-looking grey horse was led by a jockey in gleaming silver and purple. They were followed by a jockey in green and black with yellow trim leading a dark brown horse that stepped high and seemed to be in the best of spirits. But SuperNova Yerakina was most taken with a pure black horse that fairly pranced its way along the track, restrained by the sure hadn and soothing words of a jockey dressed all in flaming red except for a white stripe along each leg and arm. She felt sure that the show was about to begin, but the horse and jockey disappeared again without anything seeming to get underway, and SuperNova Yerakina went back to wondering what it was all about.

Then, just as the afternoon warmth was making her feel a little drowsy and she was thinking seriously about following Snowcone's example and taking a nap, the girl and her little dog were jolted into alertness. The gates at the nearby starting post all clanged open at once, the horses and their riders bounded out onto the track, and the spectators in the stands rose up together, shouting encouragement to their favourites.

SuperNova Yerakina was stunned in amazement for a moment, and then, before she could think to restrain him, Snowcone acted as though driven wild with the sheer excitement of it all. Primitive hunting instincts surged up inside him. He completely forgot that he was a civilized little dog who lived in house and ate manufactured food and had never killed anything in all his doggy life. He raced out of his seat and down the aisle, and then he leaped over the railing and right down onto the track, where Snowcone the savage carnivore charged after the mass of fleeing horseflesh in a mad celebration of purest blood lust. "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip" he barked after the horses, as they and their jockeys seemed to race ever faster from his fangs.

Of course, he didn't catch and kill even a single one of those horses.

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He didn't even get close, as they easily outpaced this short-legged little civilized dog. The fact of the matter is that neither the horses nor their jockeys were even aware that he was on their trail. Still, for that brief moment, as he ran after them barking out his challenge of "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip" and SuperNova Yerakina and the people in the stands laughed and laughed, Snowcone tras transformed into a wild and primitive beast of prey with the unshakable conviction that he drove a herd of terrified mustangs before him.

Chapter 22
BACCHANAL TIME

SuperNova Yerakina and her little brother, Boy Fwefwe, are not great Carnival-goers. They play their parts in the kiddie mas at school and sometimes, passing by the Exodus panyard of an evening, they stop to hear the panmen practise, but that is usually enough to satisfy their appetites.

There came a year, however, when SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe were feeling rather restless of a Carnival Tuesday. It was a nice day out, but they didn't especially want to play in the tree house or fly their kites. None of their toys interested them, and they didn't care to read or draw pictures, so they just sat in the living room and watched the Carnival celebrations on television.

Just sitting there on a lazy afternoon, SuperNova Yerakina remarked that they weren't really having very much fun, and it looked as if the people playing mass in downtown Pain of Sport were having much more of that precious commodity. She just made that remark with nothing in particular in mind, but then her brother asked "Well then, should we go into town?"

"What a good idea. Why didn't I think of that, myself?" exclaimed SuperNova Yerakina as she sat up in her chair. "Do you really think we could do that?" Boy Fwefwe saw no reason why they couldn't, so it was decided then and there that it was exactly what they would do. "Come along, Snowcone" they called to SuperNova Yerakina's fluffy little white dog with the shiny black eyes and nose, "We're going to Carnival."

And with that they were out the door and walking down the street. Riding the maxi-taxi into Pain of Sport, they noticed that there were more and more people and more and more noise as they got closer to the city centre. The crowd got so dense that the maxi-taxi had to stop by the old train station and let the people out. Walking the long block up toward Independence Square, SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe could hear the boom of the loud speakers and the shouting throngs of people, and then as they entered the square the noise suddenly seemed to be all around and inside them, while the swirl of extravagant costumes made them feel as if they had stepped into the

midst of a swarm of giant butterflies. "Quiet, Snowcone" whispered SuperNova Yerakina, as he twisted and squirmed in confused excitement.

They paused to consider what to do next. "Let's go toward Woodford Square" suggested Boy Fwefwe, "There's always something going on there." SuperNova thought that was as good an idea as any. As they made their way down to Frederick Street and then across Independence Square, the two children got somewhat used to the uproar of sight and sound, but SuperNova Yerakina was careful to hold onto Snowcone, who always had a hard time getting used to anything new.

Walking up Frederick Street, they met many more masqueraders, and three times they were greeted by people they knew. At least, the people clearly knew them and called them by name, although it was hard for SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe to recognize them in their costumed state.

To their surprise, nothing in particular was happening in Woodford Square, and in fact the children could not recall it ever having looked as lifeless and forgotten as it did at that moment. No matter, they were having fun just walking around, so they continued up Frederick Street. Members of various bands were streaming down the street toward Independence Square, and SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe were delighted to see a group of black-robed masqueraders striding along toward them on high stilts. SuperNova Yerakina held Snowcone up high to let him see them, all the while holding him tight, as he squirmed and yelped in unrepressed agitation. "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip" he barked at the mysterious black figures with the extremely long legs, the leader of whom saluted him smartly.

In due time they found that they had come all the way up to the top of Frederick Street and reached the Queen's Park Savanna. They had also come into a different flow of people. Instead of heading down toward Independence Square, these people were dancing and shuffling toward the grandstand. After a moment's hesitation, SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe decided to just keep going, as they figured there must be things happening where all these people were streaming.

This time they were not mistaken. Drifting out of the flow of humanity, they found themselves at one end of the grandstand. Down the middle ran a ramped roadway, along which a Carnival band moved in ardent performance, accompanied by a steel band on a flatbed truck. The two children quickly moved off to one side, as the band danced past, much too intent on their performance to take any notice of a little girl and her even littler brother and dog among the great mass of revellers. "Quiet, Snowcone" whispered SuperNova Yerakina automatically, hardly even noticing whether he was in any danger of running wild.

It must be admitted that, despite his understandable excitement, Snowcone had been very restrained the entire time. He had been exposed to loud, booming rhythmic noise, had walked among a riot of colours that danced and sang, and surrounded by an unimaginable throng of strange people, many of them hardly even recognizable as people, yet not once had he really lost his composure. It appeared that he had truly come into a new maturity and would get through a Trinidad Carnival without once causing a ruckshun.

At least, one could reasonably hope as much until the Cat appeared. The Cat was in fact a human being in an enormous, extravagant costume which dwarfed the person inside it. It might better be said that the Cat was a great and elaborate decoration with a human being attached to it to make it work. It was formally called something like "The Suppleness of Being, Personified", and it is not even certain that it was supposed to be a cat, although it did have luminous staring eyes and long, springy, bristling things on its face.

In any event, these subtleties of is-a-cat versus isn't-a-cat were altogether lost on Snowcone. His loathing of cats -- except for SuperNova Yerakina's cat Jillie, of whom he is inexplicably fond -- is uncomplicated. He will not suffer any cat -- except Jillie, as we have just noted -- to pass through his presence unchased. So it was, when that supple being personified hove into sight, that one thing was perfectly certain in Snowcone's doggy mind. Advancing upon him in the here and now was the greatest, most monstrous, positively cattiest of all cats in the entire known universe, and it could not possibly be tolerated.

With a shake and a snarl, he leaped free of SuperNova Yerakina's embrace and bounded up the ramp, bellowing his "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip" of a challenge to the Monster Cat. Rushing between the legs of startled masqueraders, Snowcone nearly upset an entire section of the band representing "For Whom the Bell Tolls" or some such turn of phrase and aimed himself straight for the Cat, as the steel band lost its concentration and stopped playing.

The difficulty in attacking such an enormous costume is in knowing which is the business end of it, especially if you are a little dog with no experience with Carnival costumes and nothing to guide you but a single-minded loathing of cats. The closer Snowcone got to the Cat, the less sure he was of just what to do with it, so that he ran around and around and through it, still barking "Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip" in full savage enthusiasm. The poor human being motivating the Cat -- or whatever it was supposed to be -- wanted desperately to escape from this sudden ball of fury, but a great big Carnival costume is not a t-shirt that you can peel off and cast aside just like that. The human being was trapped inside the Cat.

"Yipyipyip yipyipyip yipyipyip" Snowcone continued to bark, rushing around and through that frightened costume, until the Carnival attendants recovered from their astonishment enough to drive him defiant from the ramp, while SuperNova Yerakina and Boy Fwefwe and the grandstand spectators and even the masqueraders -- in fact, everyone except that poor person trapped in the Cat -- laughed and laughed.