

## Chapter three

**D**ad? I hadn't been allowed to talk about him, since he'd ... gone away.

A lump in my throat hardened and my finger throbbed. I didn't wait to hear any more. I went to the bedroom I shared with Grampa, lay on my bed and listened to the cars—my usual trick to distract myself. When I was little, I counted how many went past. Then I learnt to tell them apart by their engines. A Focus, a van of some sort, and a Jag. Then a pause: the lights must have changed. A diesel Avensis and a Renault Espace came through. I started to doze off.

It only seemed like minutes later when the light snapped on. I squinted in the brightness. Mum. She didn't even bother to ask about my finger. 'It's after ten. Get up and keep your Grampa company.'

Mum works all the shifts she can to keep us, and I have to look after Grampa when she's not there. That's the deal. Simple. He hasn't slept brilliantly since his fall, and I have to stay up with him until he's ready for bed. And that's rarely before midnight. But I can't tell that to Miss Lancelot, can I?

Grampa looked serious when I went into the living room. 'You've upset your mother.' I sat down on the settee and tapped it with my good hand. Becker jumped up. He

only does that when Mum isn't there. 'I don't like to see my girl angry.'

'Grampa, I didn't lie.'

He stared at me long and hard. Then he shook his head. 'No, I don't think you did.' That made me feel better. 'But your ma does,' he continued, 'and that's the problem.' We sat in silence for a while and Grampa stared at my bandage. 'How's your finger?'

'Sore.'

'I thought so.' He paused for a moment and winked. 'It reminds me of a story from home I could tell you.'

I smiled.

Grampa's nearly eighty—tall and thin and wrinkled like a walnut. One of my earliest memories is tracing the creases in his face. 'Why are you all line-y, Grampa?' I'd asked.

'They're wisdom lines!' Then he put on his West Indian voice: 'Mih's a book full ah wis-dahm!'

Grampa and Grandma came to England in 1955. But home wasn't the shared house where they first lived, or the brand new council house where they'd had my mum. And it definitely wasn't Flat 4c Poplar Square. Home was Trinidad.

He's a great story-teller, my Grampa, and I think I get my imagination from him. When I was little, I'd fall asleep to his gravelly voice, West Indian sunshine on my skin and the noise of the sea in my ears.

Grampa told stories when anyone would listen and this was as good a time as any. He sat forward in his chair and made a cathedral with his hands.

‘There was once a spider called Anancy ...’ Becker twitched in his sleep. Grampa frowned. ‘I can’t remember like I used to.’ He thought for a minute. ‘Ah yes. It was a hot, hot day and Anancy was fed up of the sun. He’d spun webs all morning and it was too hot to carry on, so he settled back to doze in the shade of a banyan tree.’ Grampa’s voice slowed. ‘Anancy’s eyes grew heavy.

‘Suddenly, there was a plop. Anancy opened one eye. He heard another plop, then another, then another. “Is it rain?” he thought. He opened both eyes and looked up. *Plop*—a large stone landed on the soil right beside him. “Hey!” he called, and a screeching laugh in the tree gave Monkey away.

‘Monkey was eating mango and hailing the stones down on Anancy.’ Grampa jiggled his eyebrows. “Hey Monkey,” called Anancy. “What d’you think you’re doing?”

“Mang-o,” shouted Monkey.’

I laughed. Grampa’s voices were magic, and Monkey was definitely the best.

“Ah found mih a mango!” And another stone plopped on the soil.

‘Anancy was furious. And he was thirsty. Nothing would be nicer than a soft, juicy mango. “Remember, Monkey, it’s polite to share.”

‘Now Monkey remembered the last time he’d shared with Anancy. He’d ended up with nothing. “Why is yuh tellin mih, Spider? Ah is no nincompoop. Yuh go fin’ yuh own mango!”

‘Anancy was angry, but he said nothing. He moved to the other side of the tree and he thought. And he thought.

And he thought. And the mango stones kept raining over his head.

‘Suddenly, Monkey let out a screech. “Aye-yah-yie! Aye-yah-yie!” There was a silence, followed by more shouting. “Yuh der, Anancy? Mih need yuh help.”

‘But Anancy held his peace.

‘Monkey shrieked louder, and the hummingbird and the frigatebird and the bananaquit flew past to see what was happening. “Ah cut mihsself. Ah is bleedin to death! Get help, quick!” And the birds flew off. Monkey screeched louder and louder. Anancy yawned and stretched.’

Grampa had that faraway look in his eyes. He wasn’t with me anymore. He was back in Trinidad.

“Do you need some help, Monkey?”

“Anancy. Dat yuh?”

“Yes, Monkey.”

“Up here. Quick, Anancy.”

‘Anancy scrambled up the tree trunk to the fork where Monkey was sitting. He’d cut his paw on a mango stone. Anancy smiled to himself. “My, my. That’s bad, Monkey. That’s a lot of blood, a lot of blood. But I can help, if you’ll let me.”

‘Monkey looked suspicious. But he needed his paw to swing and to eat mango. “Alright Anancy. Wha’ yuh do?”

‘Anancy edged closer. “I’ll show you. But first, will you repay me with one tiny little mango?”

‘Monkey was desperate. “A course Anancy: but only wahn. Now mend mih paw.”

‘Anancy bowed and began to spin his web.

“Give me your paw,” said Anancy after a few minutes. “My web will mend the cut.”

‘Monkey was puzzled, but he held out his paw. Anancy threaded his web round and round, and sure enough, the bleeding slowed. At first Monkey didn’t notice Anancy winding the web further up his arm. When he did, Anancy said, “A precaution, Monkey, just a precaution. Sit very still.”

‘Soon Monkey’s arm and his shoulder and his back were covered in Anancy’s web. “This will make sure you don’t bleed any more,” said Anancy. “Only a few more winds.” Monkey sighed, but he sat as still as he could, and Anancy wound the web around the branch of the tree. “There!” said Anancy, “How does that feel?”

‘Monkey tried to stretch, but he couldn’t. And Monkey tried to stand, but he couldn’t. He was stuck in Anancy’s web! Anancy inched along the branch and rolled a mango from Monkey’s heap to the ground. “One for me!” he said. “And another. And another. All for me!”

‘Monkey was furious. He struggled and struggled, but he couldn’t move. And all his mangoes soon disappeared.

‘The bleeding’s stopped, Monkey,” said Anancy as he skipped past him along the branch. “It’s a good sign!”

‘Monkey screeched as Anancy made his way down the tree and rolled the mangoes to his house. When the frigatebird and the bananaquit and the hummingbird returned, they freed Monkey. But Anancy was nowhere to be found.’

Grampa sat back in his chair and folded his arms.

I tried to clap with my bandaged hand, and Becker jumped. ‘Was that a story from your head, Grampa, or a real one?’

He scratched his chin. ‘Mih stories is jest dat—stories.’ He chuckled. Then he came back to Poplar Square. ‘Traps always belong to the wise ones with sensitive ears. Don’t you forget it, my boy!’

That’s why I loved Grampa’s stories. They were great when he told you them, but they were perfect when you found out what they *really* meant.