

PRAISE FOR  
*Mango Delight*

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“A diverse delight that captures the twists and turns of seventh grade girl drama.”

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# SUMMER IN THE CITY

A Mango  
Delight STORY

BY FRACASWELL HYMAN



STERLING CHILDREN'S BOOKS  
New York



## CHAPTER ONE

# School's Out for the Summer!

**B**ZZZZZZZZ! BZZZZZZZZ! BZZZZZZZZ!

The buzzing in my head woke me with a start. What was going on? Were there bees in my room? On my bed? On my head. I sat up, swatting the air around me, and then I realized it was my phone that was buzzing! I must've fallen asleep with it right on my pillow—again. I grabbed the phone. It was Izzy face2facing me.

“Hey, girl, hey! Good mornting!” she announced.

“Hey. What time is it?”

“Time to wake up!”

“You know, Izzy, one of the best things about summer break is NOT having to get up until you just naturally wake up.”

“So wake up naturally then. It's almost eleven. We got things to do hunty!”

Almost every day since summer break started, Izzy and I would meet up and do something. She got me into paddle

ball, and we were a pretty good team. There was a court in the park closest to her house, so we'd spend the afternoon playing or just hanging by the courts to practice flirting with the cute guys playing basketball across the way.

There was this one guy, Hector Osario, who really got Izzy excited. She thought this brown-eyed, bronze-skinned, shaved-head, six-footer was perfection, but he already had a girlfriend, Marcelle, whose mother owned a beauty parlor and had trained Marcelle to do mani-pedis. Marcelle had fingernails so long they curled at the ends! We couldn't imagine how she managed it, but she was known to be the best teen manicurists in town, and one of the toughest girls in the city. I told Izzy to quit batting her eyes at Hector, since he was taken, but she couldn't help herself. Whenever he was on the basketball court across from where we were playing, her eyes followed Hector instead of the paddle ball, and we'd lose every game.

"Izzy, Mom and I were up really late last night."

"Doing what? Wait, don't tell me, bingeing a TV show. Right?"

"Yeah, *Horror High School*. It was so good. You need to watch it!"

"Girl, you know me, I can't watch anything scary. I'd never get to sleep."

"Well, we watched all nine episodes and then I still wasn't sleepy, so I started reading *Beyonce and Bey-onc*."

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“The new biography? OMGZ! Can I borrow it when you’re done?”

“It’s on my phone. Maybe that’s why my phone was on my pillow . . .”

“Cool. You have an hour, then meet me at my house. And bring my number one fan. I’m making my super special tres leches just for him.”

On the days that Mom and Dada both worked, I was in charge of Jasper. It was not a duty, it was a pleasure for me, because I just loved that little chubby-bubby so much. Yes, sometimes toddlers got cranky and cried and it was impossible to figure out how to calm them down, but I didn’t mind with Jasper because most of the time he was just a happy clown who could always make me laugh.

I wasn’t the only one who admired Jasper. Izzy was in love with him too, mainly because my little teddy bear brother had a huge crush on her! Whenever he saw Izzy, he would toddle up to her, hold his arms high to be picked up, and then plant a kiss on her cheek, wrap his arms around her neck and lay his head on her shoulder. This thrilled Izzy to no end. She declared Jasper her number one fan and favorite boyfriend—at least until Hector Osario saw the light and realized they were destined to be together forever.

Izzy had even autographed one of her 8x10’s, framed it, and given it to Jasper. We thought it was so funny until one night when Mom took it out of his room and he screamed

bloody murder! The photo became a sort of security blanket for Jasper. He'd carry it from room to room, wherever he went in the house. Mom thought he was becoming obsessed with the photo and kept trying to wean him off of it by offering more appropriate treasures like a teddy bear, a blanket, or a framed photo of his mother, but nothing worked. Dada thought it was funny and no big deal. He'd say, "Margie, leave the bwoy be. Just because she's his crush doesn't mean Mommy won't always be number one."

Izzy loved the idea of being idolized, even if it was by a toddler. She started sending me selfies several times a day, urging me to show them to Jasper. I never did. I was afraid he'd become obsessed with one of her selfies and never let me take my phone away from him.

"Okay, Izzy, I'll bring him over, but it's gonna take more than an hour for me to wake up, wash up, eat, and get Jasper ready to go."

"Fine. See you in an hour and fifteen! Bye!" She clicked off, and I dropped back onto my pillow. I wanted to get a little more snoozing in . . . but my bladder was urging me to get up. I stumbled out of bed and headed for the bathroom.

After showering, I pulled on a pair of shorts and a T-shirt and brushed my hair into the usual grapefruit-sized Afro puff on top of my head. In the kitchen, Dada was feeding Jasper his homemade baby food: mashed up yam, cinnamon, and coconut milk. It made the kitchen smell great—and



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it was really yummy. Whenever I was fed Jasper, I'd help myself to some too—a spoon for him and a spoon for me.

Dada smiled and looked at me with pseudo astonishment and said, “Mango gal, since when ya legs get so tall and ya hair reach the sky so?” I stuck out my tongue at him, then laughed and poured a bowl of cereal.

“Any big plans today?”

“I’m taking Jasper over to Izzy’s. She’s making him a special treat. Then we’ll probably go to the park.”

“Sounds like the perfect summer day. I’m gonna change my little homie here and then I have to get downtown and meet a couple about catering their anniversary party.” He lifted Jasper out of the high chair and headed out of the kitchen.

“Good luck with that.”

“Who needs luck when you’ve got mad skills?” I heard him laughing all the way down the hall.



Anywho, the day my perfect summer took a sharp left turn off of Right Street, I was pushing Jasper in his stroller out of our apartment building. Who should be standing out front next to the skinny tree dogs used as a pit stop? Bob! My teacher from Trueheart Middle School. It took me a moment to recognize him, because . . . well, number one, he was not in school where he belonged. Whenever I run into someone

who is not in the place where I usually see them, it takes me a few moments before I remember who they are. I bet I wouldn't even recognize my mother at first if I walked into my classroom and saw her there. The second reason I didn't recognize Bob is because he was wearing shorts and a T-shirt. Now, Bob, who insisted all of his students use his first name, wasn't the type of teacher to wear a shirt and tie, but cut-off jeans and a New York Knicks T-shirt? This was totally out of character, even if he was the most fun teacher I've ever had.

I was pushing Jasper's stroller out of the front door, when I heard . . .

"Mango! Heeeeyyyyyy!"

I turned, and someone started walking toward me. Immediately I took a step back, because like I said, for a few moments there I'd been about to shout out, "STRANGER DANGER!" But then I saw jazz hands and open arms and a shock of red hair that stood up like a cockatoo, and I realized it was just my favorite teacher in the last place I would expect to run into him.

"Bob? What are you doing here? Do you know someone in my building?"

"Yeah. You."

"You came to see me?"

"Right again."

"Well . . . why didn't you ring the bell and come up?"

He wiped the beads of sweat streaming down his forehead

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with the back of his arm. "I had your address on the contact list from the play but not your apartment number. I tried to call, but the phone was disconnected."

"Oh yeah. Since my mom, dad, and I all have cell phones now, we decided to cancel the landline."

"Right. I get it. So, I thought I'd just come stand out here and wait until you came out."

"Suppose I didn't come out?"

"Then I guess I'd get a worse sunburn than the one I'm working on right now."

He did look a little hot pink on the verge of scaly-flakey-itchy red, and I felt sorry for him, so I said, "Wanna come up?"

"Are your parents at home?"

"No, they're both working."

"Well . . . I think it would be more appropriate for us to hang out here. What are you up to today?"

"I'm on my way to Izzy's. She's Jasper's favorite star and she made a special tres leches dessert just for him, so he can fall more madly in love with her."

"Huh? Uh . . . never mind. Can I walk with you? There's something I'd like to talk to you about."

I shrugged. "Okay, but maybe we should find some shade in the park and sit down. You look like a shower head someone forgot to turn off."

He put his hand over his heart pretending to be offended. "Heeeeyyyy, big guys drip in the heat, what can I tell you?"

I laughed and he tickled Jasper under his chin, and then we started walking. When we got to the park, Bob bought three cones of shaved ice from the Icy Man, and we sat on a bench under the shade of a big, leafy tree. The Icy Man had given me extra napkins because Jasper was drooling red juice all down his chin and onto his clothes, but it was so hot out, I didn't care and let him enjoy himself.

Bob held the paper cup of shaved ice to his wrist. "This cools your temperature down. Did you know that?"

"No."

"Well, now you do. You learn something new every day, and you'll always be smarter than you were the day before."

Bob wiggled his eyebrows as he laid his line of wisdom on me, and I was reminded of how funny he was in class and how much fun it was being directed by him in the school play. He was the best director ever. I truly believed that, even though he was the only director I'd ever worked with. He had taken a girl, me, who had never done any acting or singing in front of anyone before and made me a star . . . at least in my school. Because of how Bob encouraged me, boosted my ego, and even kicked my butt a little when I needed it, I was actually dreaming of having a career in show business as a singer and actress.

Bob asked me how I was doing and how the summer was treating me and blah, blah, blah, until I raised my hand and said, "Aren't you the one who told us all good writers

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cut through the small talk and get to the meat of a scene as quickly as possible?”

“Why yes, I do believe that sounds like something genius I would say.”

“Well . . . cut to the meat!”

He laughed and slurped a big chunk of his green ice, before starting again. “First of all, I want to let you know that Larry and I—Mr. Ramsey to you—we’re not coming back to teach at Trueheart next year.”

Whoa! Cutting to the meat is one thing, but dropping a bomb like this? This truly did call for a setup, some idle chit-chat, laying some groundwork before dropping the big KA-BOOM! If he and Mr. Ramsey, the music teacher he collaborated with on our school musicals, were not coming back to school, would we even get to do a play at all? I’d been so looking forward to doing another show and getting back together with all my dramanerd friends.

I had to admit it, I was hooked on theater and this was the worst news EVER. Yeah, maybe Principal Lipschultz would hire another teacher who would want to direct the school play, but it wouldn’t be the same. No one was as fun as Bob. What if it was a teacher who insisted we call them by their last name, and it was something like Knucklebacher, or Bumblehurst or some other weird name that would make everything so formal and yuck? Even worse, what if he or she didn’t think I was talented and I didn’t get a part in the show?

“No, Bob, noooo! You can’t leave Trueheart! We love you and Mr. Ramsey. We need you!”

“Heeeyyyy, we love all of you, too, but we have an opportunity that’s impossible to pass up. That’s what I wanted to talk to you about.”

At that moment, Jasper dropped his shaved ice on the ground and began to wail. I gave him mine, and he quieted down the minute he stuck his tongue on it. I couldn’t eat anyway. This news was the most devastating ever.

Bob put a hand on my shoulder. “Listen to me. Larry and I have found a backer who wants to put up the money for us to do a summer showcase of *Yo, Romeo!* in New York. Off-Broadway. Actually, off-off-off-off-wayyyyyyy-off Broadway.”

I gasped. “That’s like, uber-crisp, right?”

“So crisp it’s downright crunchy! We’ll get all kinds of people to come see the show, especially people who invest in theater. If they like the show enough, they could move it to Broadway. I mean, the *real* Broadway. And then Larry and I would be on our way to fulfilling our dream.”

“That’s great. Really great, but are you sure you want to leave Trueheart?”

“We’re sure. We can’t do both. If the show gets picked up, we’d have to be available. Larry and his wife, Stephanie, have already packed up and moved to Harlem. That’s in New York City. His family has a brownstone there, and I’ve been camping out in their basement. Once she gets a leave-of-

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absence from her job, my girlfriend is going to join me and we'll rent our own place."

"You have a girlfriend?" I shouldn't have sounded as surprised as I did, but, well, to be honest, I wasn't sure Bob liked girls . . . you know?

"Yes, I have a girlfriend. Her name is Raven. We have a daughter together, Josslyn. She's four. She'll be coming up to New York, too."

"Wow!" My head was spinning from all this new information. Also because it was amazing that I was having a conversation like this with a teacher! It was like we were just, you know, friends and he was sharing his life with me. Bob had always been the coolest of all my teachers, but we'd never talked like this. It helped me focus less on what I was losing and more on how this would be life-changing for Bob and Mr. Ramsey. I couldn't expect them to put their dreams on hold because me and a bunch of middle school kids would be lost without them. I produced my biggest smile and held my arms open wide for a hug. "Come here you!"

He held his hands out in front of him. "Sweaty! Excessively sweaty!"

Ew. So I just took his hands and squeezed them as tight as I could. "I really am happy for you. And it was so cool of you to come and tell me. Who else knows?"

"No one."

"Oh." That was a surprise. "Why tell me before anyone else?"

“Mango, you don’t get it, do you?”

“Get what?”

“The reason I was standing in front of your apartment building like Frosty the Snowman in July?”

I screwed up my face and shrugged. Whatever he was pitching, I wasn’t catching.

“We want you.”

“Me? For what?”

“To come to New York and star in the show, of course! Who could possibly be a better Juliet than you? You’re perfect!”

And that’s when Jasper decided to throw his arm up, launching what was left of his shaved ice and red syrup into the air. It all came down on my head like a cherry ice shower, but I didn’t care, I was too busy imagining myself going to New York to star in a show!



## CHAPTER TWO

# Stars in My Eyes

A couple of hours later, Bob, Mom, Dada, and I were seated around our kitchen table. The adults were having a serious conversation, and I was just sitting there like a kid, arms folded across my stomach, which was aching in anticipation of a decision.

The hands of the kitchen clock were creeping past 7pm. Mom was still wearing her red Target manager shirt, which she usually changed out of the minute she got home. Dada got up from the table to check on the oxtail stew that was simmering in the dutchie on the stove. Jasper was seated on the floor by the fridge stacking and knocking down blocks again and again. Oh, for the carefree life of a toddler, instead of being on pins and needles while grown-ups discuss your fate, your future and what's best for you without turning to ask you what you want once.

"You mean to tell me, Mr. Bob"—even though Bob had asked, Mom refused to be casual with a teacher and call him

by his first name—"that you couldn't find any other actress in all of New York City to play this part?"

"Exactly. After a week of auditions, we did see some who looked perfect for the role, but they couldn't sing as well as Mango. And the few who had really good singing voices were either too old or just not right for Juliet. We even tried to work out a deal with Destiny Manaconda."

Suddenly, the ache in my stomach was completely forgotten. Destiny Manaconda was the star of *Cupcakkers* my favorite television show. Actually, it was mine and Brooklyn's favorite show back when we were besties. Before she accused me of drowning her new cell phone on purpose, we'd call each other and watch it together every week. Since the show ended, Destiny Manaconda became a huge pop star *and* the girlfriend of my BCF (Boy Crush Forever), Gabriel Faust. He's so cute, so uber-crisp, that I have a life-size poster of him hanging on the inside of my closet door. I leapt up from my seat. "Destiny Manaconda! She's going to be in *Yo, Romeo!*?"

Bob shook his head, "Well, no. She wanted to get paid . . . a great deal of money, and since she has a hit song on the hot one hundred, her people are sending her out on a radio festival tour."

"That's right, she's going to be in the WXXR Summer Jam with—"

Mom's hand jutted out like a traffic cop. "Hello! Can we get back to the topic at hand here?"

I sank back down, and Bob cleared his throat and

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continued, “Sorry, uh, Destiny didn’t work out and I feel it’s for the best. She a great singer and all, but she lacks a certain quality that Mango brings to Juliet. Seriously.”

*A certain quality?* I wondered what he meant. I mean, I was just plain old me.

Bob was doing his best to sell Mom on the idea. “Believe me, Mrs. Fuller, Larry and I tried our best, but we couldn’t find anyone more perfect than your daughter.”

Mom shook her head no and she pulled off the band that held her locs back in a ponytail, “I’m really sorry, Mr. Bob. I mean, I loved your show and you’re right, Mango was terrific in it, but . . .” She ran her hand through her hair. “She’s only twelve—”

“—Which is why she is perfect for Juliet!”

Uh-oh. Bob had just interrupted Mom. No one EVER interrupted Marjorie Nadine Fuller and lived to tell.

Mom held up her traffic cop hand to quiet him. “She may be perfect for whatever, but she’s too young to be traipsing off to New York City all by herself. Her father and I are working people. We can’t just take the summer off. It’s just impossible. Who would take care of her? See to it that she’s safe and fed and following the rules?”

“I’ve already thought of that!”

Mom twisted her lips and dropped her chin to her chest. “Oh, you have, have you?”

“Yes. You see, my sister, Ziporah—we call her Zippy for short—she lives in Brooklyn, just a short subway ride from

where we'll be rehearsing. She's in the show, too, so we figured Mango could stay with her. Zippy would be her chaperone."

"An actress?" Mom laughed. It was not a nice or funny laugh. No. It was a dismissive, *you must be out of your ever-loving mind* kind of laugh, and I could see the color of Bob's sunburned pink skin deepen to purple.

"Do you really think we're going to let our little girl go to New York and shack up with some someone we don't even know or trust? Come on now, Mr. Bob. I don't mean to be rude, but what kind of parents would we be if we'd give in to such foolishness?" She went on laughing as she looked over at Dada, seeming to expect him to laugh along with her, but he looked like he was deep in thought.

Bob was quiet and slumped forward a bit. I took a deep breath as I watched my dreams of an exciting summer in the Big Apple fizzle away. Yes, I wanted to say something, but arguing with Mom was like trying to win a battle with a tank when all you're armed with are spitballs and a straw. Then an idea popped into my head and I couldn't help myself. I blurted out, "What about Aunt Zendaya?"

Dada, who was standing at the stove putting the lid back on the pot, chimed in, "Yes, that's a great idea!" To me, his voice sounded like a trumpet announcing the arrival of the cavalry coming to save the day.

Mom's laughter wound down abruptly, she slowly turned to me, "What about her?"

"She's my aunt. She's family."

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Mom shot back, “I’ve known my butter-brained sister a lot longer than you.”

Her tone was sharp, and for a minute it felt like all of the air had been sucked out of the room. Dada put down the wooden spoon he’d been using to stir the pot, lowered the heat on the stove, and came to the table to sit across from Mom.

“You and I both know we can trust Zendaya with our children. She’s their auntie, and she loves them. She’d be over the moon to have Mango for the summer. She’s been bugging us about it for years. And we both know we can trust Mango to take good care of herself. We trust her to take care of Jasper by herself when needed.”

“I know, but—”

This time, Dada held his hand up, though more like an orchestra conductor than a traffic cop, shushing Mom. “Hear me out, okay? It would only be for, what, six weeks?” He looked to Bob, whose shoulders were beginning to re-inflate.

“Yes, only six weeks. Four week rehearsal and a two week run of the show.”

“She’d back home in time for school?”

Bob’s whole body began to re-inflate with hope. “Oh yes, definitely. No matter what.”

Dada leaned across the table toward Mom. “Think of the experience she’d have. Instead of sitting around the house here all summer, watching TV and hanging out, Mango could learn what it’s like to have a real job by going to New York

and doing a show with professional actors. It's an amazing opportunity!"

"Are you serious, Sid? You can't be. I don't believe you could want this."

"She wants it." Everyone turned to look at me. "Look at that sparkle in her eyes. She's been a changed girl since the first night of *Yo, Romeo!*" Dada said to Bob, "You should see the way she floats around here, singing the songs from your show over and over. I've even caught her looking in the mirror acting out her role when she thought no one was watching."

"Dada!"

"It's true, I've seen you. So tell me, Mango, do you want to go to New York and do the play?"

"More than anything. Yes!"

Dada turned to Mom. "We can keep her here and she will be frustrated and resentful all summer, or we can let her go and allow her to grow and learn and blossom."

Mom seem to consider it, then shook her head, no.

I spoke up, "Destiny Manaconda was ten when she started out, and look at her now."

Dad joined in, "What about that boy whose poster you have inside your closet? What's his name again?"

I'm not sure why, but at the mention of my BCF, I felt the heat rise in my cheeks as I answered, "Gabriel Faust?"

"Yeah, that's the one, wasn't he like five years old when he starred in the TV show you couldn't get enough of? You liked him too, Margie! You'd always crack up laughing when

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he'd say in that squeaky little voice, 'Brats rule, fools drool!' Remember?"

Mom didn't say anything. Instead she got up and walked across the room to pick up Jasper. She grimaced when she got a whiff of his diaper and left the room to change him.

Dad watched her leave and then turned to Bob. "When will you need Mango in New York?"

"Uh . . . Monday would be great. I know it's just a few days away, so if that's too soon, we could rehearse a few days without her, seeing as she knows the part and all."

"We'll do our best to get there for the first day. We'll have to work things out with her aunt."

"Of course." Bob stood and held out his hand, and Dad rose to shake it. "Thank you so much," Bob said, "Really, thank you!"

"No. Thank you for giving my girl this opportunity."

Bob nodded and turned toward the door. "I'll have our producer call you with all the details."

Dada said, "Where ya think you a goin', suh?" His Jamaican accent was bursting from his mouth like a breeze from the island, blowing all the tension away.

"Uh . . . I was . . . leaving?"

"Come now, mon, no one step in Jamaican kitchen with dem food dere cookin' and leave with dem belly not be full. Sit down and eat!"

I had never loved my Dada more than I did at this moment. My eyes overflowed with grateful tears. I blurted,

“I’ll start packing,” and ran to my room before I started blubbering and embarrassing myself in front of Bob.

I was wiping my eyes on my T-shirt when I saw my phone on the bed. There was a text message from Izzy.

I

thx 4 not coming or calling

I

I spent all morning baking the tres leches and you couldn’t even text to cancel!

I

I thought we were besties now. But I guess I was wrong!

Oh no. I had been on my way to Izzy’s so Jasper could enjoy the dessert she’d made just for him when I ran into Bob, and . . . in all the excitement, I completely forgot about Izzy. Talk about butter-brained! I had a lot of apologizing and explaining to do.