

ORANGE ROSES, PINK CARABAOS,
AND BROWN NANAYS

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Summary

Seven-year old Jamaine loves to draw unusual pictures and loves to write stories and poetry. She is fascinated with colors and dreams of having different kinds of pens with varied colors. She is fascinated with words and dreams of writing her own storybooks. As she daydreams about the things she will draw and the stories she will write, she discovers that she has a lot of things in common with her mother—including her beautiful brown skin and the naughty twinkle in her eyes.

Jamaine loves to draw. She also loves to write. She sits by the big wide capiz window of their house and draws a little flower on a piece of grade 2 pad paper.

One petal, two petals, three petals, four petals, five petals . . .

She plans to draw a beautiful rose with many, many petals. Then she will write a poem about her drawing. She will color the rose orange and she will give the drawing and the poem to Nanay and Tatay.

Jamaine knows what will happen to her *obra maestra* as Nanay calls everything Jamaine makes. Nanay will either put it in a colorful photo album that she keeps in a cabinet near her bed. Or she will put it in a frame and display it on the wall of her cubicle in the school where she teaches.

Jamaine draws more petals. The pencil feels good and right in her

hand. Yet, she lets out a sigh. Haaaaaaaay! How she wishes she could draw with pens instead!

Pens. All sorts and all colors of pens. Ball pens, sign pens, gel pens. She will use a red gel pen to draw the petals of the rose. Then she will use a green sign pen for the leaves. She will shade the petals with...

What is that color that is like red but brighter and nicer to the eyes? That color that has a beautiful name that is hard to spell... Ah! Fuchsia! Fuchsia—it's a beautiful color and a beautiful name.

Jamaine likes to say fuchsia in her mind. She likes saying it aloud, too. FUCHSIA. Sometimes she holds the *ssssssss* sound a little longer as if she is telling somebody to be quiet. Jamaine will use fuchsia to shade the petals of her rose—once she gets to use gel pens and sign pens.

But she cannot do that yet. Nanay said Jamaine will not get to use pens until she is in grade 3. That is the school rule she says. And if she will be allowed to use pens in school, these will just be ball pens.

“Nanay, what if I just use my pens at home? I promise not to bring them to school.”

“No, Jamaine. Wait till you are in grade 3. Won't that make things in grade 3 a little more special?”

Haaaaay. Nanay has a strange way of making things special.

Jamaine just doesn't get it. Why can't grade 2 kids use pens in school? Why should they use only pencil?

Jamaine finishes her drawing of a rose. It's time to color it. For now she can use only her crayons and not gel pens or sign pens. First, she outlines the petals with a red crayon. Then she shades the inside of each petal with an orange crayon. She uses even and up-down strokes for shading. She smiles to herself. Isn't it nice to make things as she pleases? Where can one find a rose with red outline but orange petals?

She promises to practice drawing and writing. She will never stop practicing until she is really very good at doing these things. Someday, she will be able to draw all the interesting things that she sometimes sees on her way to school. Like the jeepney of Mang Ikong that moves real slow. Jamaine thinks it is really a turtle in disguise. She will draw that jeepney shaped like Pong Pagong and color it with different shades of green.

She will also draw the beautiful things she sees when she rides a ship to Aklan with Lola and Lolo. Like the flying fish that seems to follow the ship, or the fishermen waving to Jamaine in their little boats, or the reddish orange sun that seems to rest at the far end of the sea. It will be nice to use the silver gel pens for the flying fish and red sign pen for the sun.

Better yet, she will draw the stories that Lola and Lolo have told her. Well, she will not only draw—she will write about them! She will write books and draw the pictures, too—like Dr. Seuss. Dr Seuss is her super favorite. He writes such funny stories and draws such wonderful pictures.

When she writes and draws a book about Lola and Lolo's stories, that will surely make them happy. She will write about how Nanay rode a big carabao named Mayo when she was as young as Jamaine. Nanay was one active little girl! She would climb mango, *camachile*, *caimito*, and guava trees. She would also swim in the river near their house and play *patintero*, *syato*, and *agawang base* with her friends. Nanay could always be relied upon to “save” her teammates and their base because she was such a fast runner. She could outrun any boy in their barrio. She was rather naughty, too. One time she tried to drive the neighbor's jeepney and she almost hit a tree! She surely drove Lola and Lolo crazy.

But Lola said that Nanay could be such a lady when she wanted to. In her teens she would go to a *baile* during fiesta and be the best dancer of the night. She would also dance and sing during the school programs. One of Jamaine's favorite pictures of Nanay is the one in which she was wearing a beautiful *baro't saya* during the Linggo ng Wika celebration. The saya had big stripes in dark brown and white. Nanay was smiling her naughty smile in that picture. She had that twinkle in her eyes—very much how Jamaine's eyes also twinkle when she has a “secret” to keep. She once asked Nanay why she was smiling that way in the picture. Nanay smiled her naughty smile once more and happily whispered to Jamaine,

“Because I was keeping my blue pet frog under my saya...”

Jamaine smiles to herself again. Lola said that Jamaine is really Nanay’s daughter. Lola has seen how Jamaine can also out-bike any boy her age. If Nanay is a fast runner, Jamaine is a fast biker. Jamaine likes the feel of the wind on her face when she rides her bike. Yet, she also wants to ride a carabao like Nanay. Lolo promised her that she could do that come summer vacation. Isn’t that exciting—riding a carabao! Jamaine pictures herself riding a really huge and beautiful carabao. It is no ordinary carabao—it’s a pink carabao. Even the horns are pink! Hi-hi-hi. Lolo will be so surprised when he sees that Jamaine has turned his carabao pink.

Jamaine continues to color the petals of the rose. Then she colors the stem brown. BROWN. Brown is a beautiful color too. Warm to the eyes. It’s the color of *champurado* and Choc-Nuts. It’s the color of Jamaine’s skin as well. Jamaine touches her left arm and smiles. Tatay said he is happy that Jamaine got the color of Nanay’s skin. The first time Tatay saw Nanay was in a dance party in school. Nanay stood out because most of the young women were fair-skinned. Tatay asked Nanay to dance and he said his life was never the same again.

Jamaine has finished coloring the rose. It’s time to write her little poem. It has to be a special poem—perhaps like a birthday present for her self. It’s the twenty-eighth of February. She will celebrate her eighth birthday the next day. Her birthday comes only once every four years. Nanay and Tatay have teased her that it is only her second birthday. She is turning two—not eight years old. She knows Nanay and Tatay will make that day extra special for her. Then in June she will get to use pens when she enters grade 3. Nanay promised her that she gets to use not only the blue and red ball pens that grade 3 kids use but all the colors she wants to use! Mother even promised that if Jamaine would save part of her everyday baon, she would be able to buy the other special colors of the gel pens—the gold, the silver, the baby pink, the sky blue, the sea green! Ah, Jamaine already feels happy just thinking about all the colors of gel pens she could have. Nanay said there are more than seven million colors that the human eyes can see. Oh, goodness! Jamaine knows that seven thousand is already more than she can imagine. How colorful can seven million colors be? That could also be like being seven million times happy.

Maybe she will write a poem about being happy.

*It is happy to be a rose
With a smell so sweet to the nose*

She reads her poem aloud. She likes the rhymes. But there is something more she wants to say. About the color. About having a different color. It is also happy to be different. She adds another line.

It is happy to be orange and red

Now, what word rhymes with red? Bed, said, Ted, head... Oh! She knows the next line!

And dream pretty dreams in my head.

She now reads the whole poem aloud:

*It is happy to be a rose
With a smell so sweet to the nose
It is happy to be orange and red
And dream pretty dreams in my head.*

Jamaine writes her name below the poem. Then she puts her drawing on the door of the refrigerator. Nanay will see it when she comes home.

The next morning, Jamaine hears her poem . . .

“And dream pretty dreams in my head . . .”

Jamaine opens her eyes and sees Nanay and Tatay reciting her little poem over and over again. They are holding a little round cake. On it is a little doll on a swing. Behind Nanay and Tatay are Lola and Lolo holding some gifts.

“Happy birthday, Jamaine!” they happily say together.

“Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!” Jamaine jumps from the bed and hugs and kisses Nanay, Tatay, Lola, and Lolo.

“Open your gifts, *apo*,” Lolo tells her.

Jamaine opens the first gift and how her eyes widen! A set of six ball pens—with six different colors. She opens the next gift and she cannot believe what she sees—sign pens! Red, blue, black, green, violet sign pens. Oh, this is too much. She gives Nanay, Tatay, Lola, and Lolo more hugs and kisses.

“You are not yet done. You have more gifts to open, *anak*,” says Tatay.

Jamaine opens the third gift and finds a dozen gel pens. Oh, such beautiful colors—including fuchsia and gold and silver!

The last two gifts make everything simply perfect—a big sketchpad for her drawings and a big pretty colorful notebook for her stories and poems.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you! Now I can draw bigger pictures and write more stories and poems.”

Nanay gives her a big warm hug and whispers, “How about drawing for me a blue jeepney shaped like a frog?”

Nanay’s eyes twinkle.

Jamaine’s eyes twinkle back.