

Sheenah sells mangoes

BY ARNOLD MUGABE

Every mango season, between November and March, the mango tree in Sheenah's compound bends under the weight of ripe mangoes. For years, the mangoes never really belonged to the family. Neighbours helped themselves freely. Her mother's friends who came "to visit", or borrow a matchbox, left with green *buveeras* swollen with mangoes.

Then, last year in June, everything changed.

After an attempted robbery on Sheenah's house, the family acquired a dog, Max. Max wasn't a trained guard dog, but he barked fiercely at the slightest movement. Tied to the mango tree behind the house, Max's presence alone was enough to scare away idle visitors, and neighbourhood children, who normally came for free mangoes after school.

Ironically, both Sheenah and her mum did not like mangoes. So the mangoes ripened, fell, and rotted under the tree.

Sheenah could easily have picked them because she wasn't afraid of Max. But she hated the thought of her mother's idle visitors and neighbourhood children climbing the tree, screeching all evening. So she lied.

"I'm also scared of that dog. I can't go near the tree," she would tell whoever asked her to get some free mangoes for them. The lie was perfect because it made Max seem very dangerous. Anyone thinking of robbing the house again would think twice.

Then came the presidential campaigns.

One afternoon, at the peak of the presidential campaigns, a candidate's campaign truck packed with men and blaring loudspeakers slowed near the fence. Laughing, they stretched their arms over Sheenah's fence, and plucked a full *kaveera* of ripe mangoes from a high branch on the mango tree before driving off.

Sheenah's mum was furious.

"Can you imagine? Those men stole our mangoes!"

"But Mum, we do not even eat them anymore," Sheenah argued. "People fear Max."

"Eh eh!" her mother snapped. "So now the whole of Kampala should eat our mangoes because we are not eating them? Soon another candidate's campaign team will also come and steal them."

"The next time you hear a campaign vehicle approaching, go outside and stand guard," she told Sheenah.

The following day when the campaigners stopped, they saw Sheenah, and the driver pretended that he was checking on the car tyre and sped off, embarrassed.

Days later, a KCCA garbage truck stopped outside the gate. In previous months they collected the garbage once a week, but in mango season they collected the garbage almost daily.

The garbage collectors noticed that Max was always leashed and quietly picked fallen mangoes as they returned the bin.

"*Kale gino emiyembe, abakazi bagitunda nkumi satu ku luguddo*," they said casually, (imagine the vendors sell these mangoes for Shs3,000 on the roadside). When Sheenah reported this to her mum, she was outraged again. Then she hatched an idea. They bought a basket. Sheenah would sit by the gate and sell the mangoes to pedestrians.

"How will we price them?" Sheenah asked.

"Simple," her mother said. "Don't sell by size. Sell by choice. If someone points at one, tell them it's Shs3,000. Then offer another for Shs2,000. People always end up buying their preferred first choice"

Sheenah didn't sell a single mango that first day. People laughed, cursed, and walked away.

"These mangoes?" they scoffed. "For Shs3,000? How much did you even invest? I know you got them from your compound! I can see you want 100 percent profit?"

Even when she offered them for Shs1,000, no one bought.

Even worse, Sheenah felt exposed, sitting by the roadside, knowing that her classmate might be stuck in the morning traffic jam in the taxi and see her. On the second day, her fears came true.

A photo of her selling mangoes appeared in the school WhatsApp group with a caption "Earth is hard!", and someone jokingly launched a fundraiser to "help a sister, Sheenah raise capital and expand her business."

Sheenah switched off her phone and ran to her bedroom, to die of shame.

CamScanner