



My Friend's Palm Plantation

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Beddu and his mother live in a village in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Beddu usually helps Mother sell snacks at a nearby market. “The market is crowded today!” says Beddu. “I hope our snacks sell out fast.”



“Bolu peca, dange, tenteng, apang!” Beddu shouts. Each is the name of a local snack made by his mother. His voice can be heard clearly from far away.



By noon, all the snacks had been sold. Beddu is excited. He and his mother can go home early.

“We should make more snacks for tomorrow, Mother!” Beddu suggests while tidying up the stall. Mother only smiles at Beddu.



Mother then remembers that they used up all the palm sugar.

“Let me go buy it, Mother. You can go home,” Beddu offers.

He knows that Mother needs to rest. After all, she has to make snacks again tonight.



Beddu buys the sugar from his classmate Sanna's stall. Sanna's palm sugar tastes better than anyone else's here in the market. Sanna's family makes it from scratch.



Unfortunately, there is only a little palm sugar left at Sanna's stall. It is not enough for Mother to make snacks. Beddu needs a lot more.

"We have more sugar at home, Beddu. You can come with me to get it," Sanna offers.



It's time for Sanna and her father to go home.

“You can follow me on my bicycle, Beddu!” Sanna says.

Beddu wants to go with Sanna. He has never been to her house. It is not close to school. And his mother needs the sugar tonight.



Beddu follows Sanna on his bike. They ride on steep, hilly roads in between cliffs and chasms.

Sanna is very good at riding her bicycle. Beddu often falls behind and has to pedal faster to catch up to her.



At Sanna's house, Beddu meets her mother, older sister, and younger brother. He notices they all have marks on their skin like Sanna. Beddu follows Sanna to get the palm sugar.



“Oh no!” Sanna exclaims. “There is no more palm sugar. A buyer just came to buy it all.”

Sanna thinks. “Do you mind waiting for a moment? There are some in the mold. We have to wait until it sets.”

Beddu has no choice but to wait.



“I’m going to the backyard,” Sanna said, quickly disappearing through the back door. Beddu follows Sanna to the palm plantation behind the house.



“Sanna...where are you?” Beddu shouts as he arrives at the plantation. He doesn’t hear any answer from Sanna. He sees only palm trees everywhere.

Beddu looks for Sanna, but then he hears something.

Thug...thug...thug!



Beddu looks around. Ah! He knows where the sound is coming from!
Sanna is hitting the tree repeatedly.



“Every morning and evening, I pick trees with male flowers,” Sanna explains. “I hit and shake the tree like this so that it produces more sweet sap.”

Oh, now Beddu gets it. That’s how Sanna’s palm sugar is made.



Beddu tries to climb a nearby tree. But as he looks up the tree, he feels unsure.



This tree is too tall for me. What if I fall? Beddu thinks. He immediately climbs down the tree. Meanwhile, Sanna has already moved to another tree. Beddu follows her from the ground.



Sanna tells Beddu not to climb the trees, since he isn't used to doing it.

"I will not climb up, but I can shake this branch," Beddu says. "This palm tree is shorter than the others."



However, shaking the palm tree needs a lot of strength. Beddu cannot do it any longer. He stops and watches Sanna work.

Sanna is very skilled in her tasks on the plantation. Every day, Sanna has to take care of the palm trees and tap the sap. But it is too hard for Beddu.



As Sanna moves to another tree, Beddu pauses because he finds something interesting.

Tiny fruits are scattered around his feet. He picks them up one by one.

“Those are palm fruits,” Sanna shouts from the trees. “After being processed, these fruits will become sugar palm fruits. We will rinse, drain, boil, and press them. But be careful not to—”



Sanna doesn't get to finish her sentence, because Beddu gives a shout.

“Whoa, whoa! It hurts! It hurts and itches!”

Beddu yells while shaking his hand.

Sanna immediately climbs down the tree and grabs Beddu's other hand. They quickly run to the house.



“The sap from the palm fruits can hurt our bare skin. We must be careful!” Sanna’s father says. He hands over some black powder. Sanna’s parents made it from the charcoal of palm fibers. Sanna’s older sister rubs the powder all over Beddu’s hand.



In the evening, the palm sugar has set perfectly and can be removed from the mold. Beddu is glad that the sugar for Mother is ready.

He is even happier when Sanna's mother gives him a bag of sugar palm fruits. He can finally try the fruits that made his skin hurt and itchy!



Beddu says goodbye to Sanna and her family.
What an exciting day for Beddu!

The Tobalo People

The characters in this story are Tobalo, an indigenous tribe in Indonesia. The name Tobalo is related to a hereditary skin condition experienced by this tribe. "To" means people and "balo" means striped, referring to a distinctive skin pattern of many Tobalo.

Palm Fiber Powder

When the sap of the palm fruit hurt Beddu's hand, he was treated with a black powder made from palm fibers.

Palm fibers are the hard, black strands that protect the ends of palm fronds. In Indonesia, palm trees produce fibers when they grow on land that is between 100-500 meters (328-1,640 feet) above sea level. The trees usually have to be more than five years old to produce the flower cobs that later turn into fibers.

The palm fibers are burned into charcoal,

then pounded into powder. The powder can be rubbed onto skin to reduce pain caused by touching palm fruit sap.



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Original Story

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