



The sweet
taste of
Happiness

COLOMBIA 



Winter fills the snow-covered streets of a desolate town, where a father and his son wait for a bus to take them home. Standing still under a rectangular bus stop, they feel like they are inside a freezer.

"How long for the bus to arrive, father?" Thomas asks, exhaling puffs of fog.

"About twenty minutes", Eric, his father, replies, checking the time on the phone inside his pocket without taking it out of his thick jacket.

"Uggh!" Thomas is frustrated, keeping his eyes on the poster of a brilliant blue sea and sunny, palm-lined beach.

Eric looks at his son and says, "You know Thomas? I know a place like that, with warm sandy beaches and soothing waves. The breeze caresses your skin, and right now the weather is as warm as the steam of a hot bath. Over there you don't need gloves, thick jackets or boots. It's so nice that they sell happiness."

"Happiness?" Says Thomas, wrinkling his freckled nose.

"Yes, happiness".

"What do you mean?"

"This happiness is brown, round and about the size of a tennis ball. And you eat it..." says Eric, smiling at his son.

"Happiness you can eat?" Says Thomas, forgetting the cold.

"That's right" It's sold ten thousand kilometers from here, in a Colombian city called Cartagena, by the Caribbean Sea. It is prepared by women called Palenqueras. They stroll around the city, walking to the rhythm of the waves, balancing large metal bowls full of fruits and candy on their heads, as they call out:

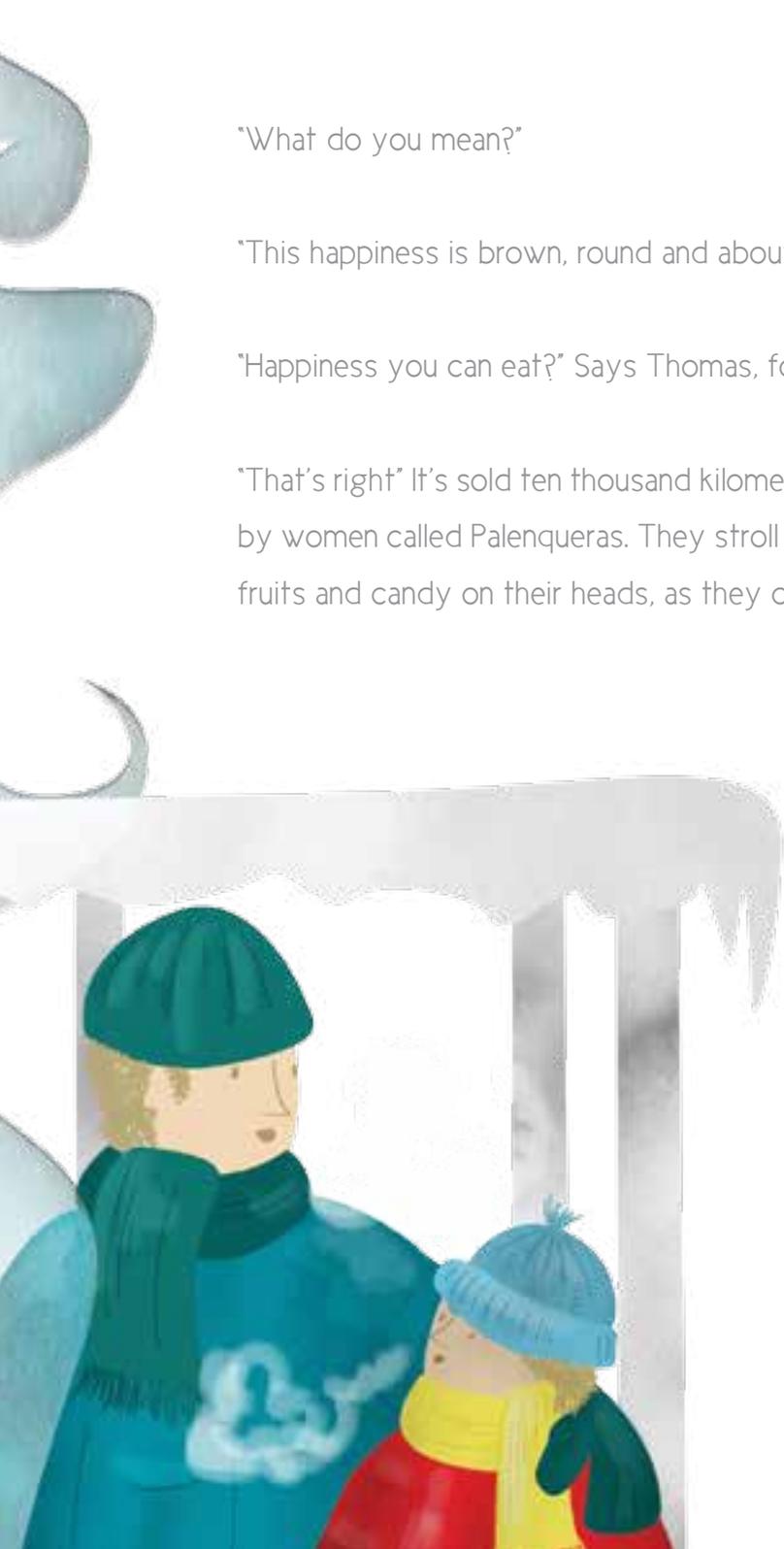
"Cocadas! Happiness!"

"The Palenqueras" Eric goes on, "wear long colorful skirts and wrap their heads with bright scarves, just as their ancestors who came from Africa as slaves. These slaves achieved their freedom in the place where the heirs of their race and culture now live, Palenque de San Basilio, near Cartagena."

"And what does this happiness taste like, father?" Asks Thomas, intrigued.

Eric rubs his hands to keep them warm, and says:

"The Palenqueras cook happiness in huge pots over a large fire. First they add a handful of millet, a cereal that pops when you cook it, just like popcorn.



Next, they add an amber-colored sweetener, as tasty as honey, called panela. Then they throw slices of fresh coconut into the pot. And after that, smiling as they stir the mixture with a wooden ladle, a cloud of steam fills the air and smells so wonderful you just want to eat it.

Eric closes his eyes, elated. "Finally, the Palenqueras knead the mixture and roll it into a ball, and when you bite into it, ohhh...."

"What happens when you bite into happiness, father?"

"When you bite it, it crunches like the tastiest popcorn, and then you feel the sweetness of the panela washing over your tongue and the freshness of the coconut dancing on your palate. Each bite makes you smile. Every bite is happiness."

"Mmmm, I want one" says Thomas.

"For hundreds of years, the Palenqueras have been making happiness with their own hands, and the most delicious desserts you could ever dream of, Thomas. But you know what is the greatest magic when making happiness?"

Thomas opens his eyes, waiting...



“The Palenqueras say that in order for it to have the best taste, they have to be happy when they prepare it. Without their happiness, without their smiles, this treat will not sweeten your soul and your palate. The secret ingredient is happiness.”

Thomas imagines the Palenqueras and in his mind he tries to savor the happiness that has kept them warm as they wait. He is so distracted he does not notice the bus arriving like a ghost breaking through the fog and the cold.

“Let’s go, Thomas,” says Eric holding out his hand, “or we will have to wait another 25 minutes.”

Fact Sheet:

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The end



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