



THE TWO COUSINS

THE RIVER OTTER AND THE SEA OTTER

by Janet Jagan

It was just a matter of time before the two cousins met. Barney the fresh water otter and Salt Face the ocean otter had been communicating for ages in their own language, unknown to humans. They knew of each other's presence in nearby waters, but there were obvious problems.

Could Salt Face swim into river water and survive, or could Barney venture into the sea and be able to cope with all the problems of the ocean, including unknown predators and salty water?

Finally, after lengthy talks flashed over the waters in their own language, it was agreed that they would meet at the point where the sea and the river join and that was outside the Georgetown harbour, along the extended jetty that went out to the sea. After all, Barney was told, dolphins which are sea animals, come to the point, the furthestmost place on the jetty going from the Demerara River into the Atlantic Ocean.

Thus, one day Barney, the boisterous, snorting, loud, bold and beautiful river otter swam to the end of the jetty in the Demerara River and waited for his cousin Salt Face to show up. Barney wasn't there long before he heard a snorting and wild splashing of water and saw a beautiful brown otter leap through the water like a bucking horse. It was Salt Face, and he was big and handsome and also very noisy like his cousin Barney.

They swam around one another, sniffing and splashing joyfully in the water at this unusual meeting of cousins, who looked a bit alike but who each lived in very different conditions. Their noses met and they looked each other in the eye. "I'm bigger than you," said Salt Face. "I can scream louder," said Barney and dashed into the water searching for fish. Each brought up to the surface a large fish, each about the same size. "I'm the fastest of all water dogs," said Barney, referring to the name used for otters in Guyana. "Do you really believe that?" said Salt Face and challenged Barney to a race. They raced to a small boat in the sea, both reaching it at the same time.

"You know," said Barney, "we're cousins and that's why we're both so fast and we're both such good fishermen." Then he admitted. "It's a little hard for me in the salt water. Swim with me into the fresh water and see if you like it." They swam into the Demerara River. "No" said Salt Face. "This water isn't nice. I like the ocean water."

And so it turned out that each otter loved the waters he grew up and had lived in his whole life. They agreed that it would not be possible to exchange locations because that was the difference between the two. And they agreed to accept their differences but at the same time, recognize their kinship. "We may be different in some ways, but we are also the same in other ways" said the two otter cousins.