

THE BULLY LOSES

By Valerie Crichtlow

Somehow Jerri had always known that Carol Gordon was a coward. She didn't enter school like many children do - quietly or shyly. She descended upon everyone at Chacaban Government School. She was placed in Standard Four B, just adjacent to Jerri's class, Standard Four A. Most of the troublemakers in the school were in Four B. They seemed to stand at the headmaster's desk just as often as they sat at work in class. They wasted time making monkey faces at others next door.

Carol was always picking on others, trying to start a quarrel. Jerri had always felt that she could not accomplish half of the threats that she made so often. Carol looked forbidding enough. At ten, she was taller than others of her age, and slim with long striding legs. She had thick black hair, always neatly tied back with white ribbons. Her blue and white uniform was clean, and so too were her white shoes and socks. Yet her speech was vulgar, and her manner coarse. She walked like a "badjohn", chest out front, legs and arms thrown awkwardly around. She bullied the girls, and the boys got their share as well. They in turn would call her names like "big teeth", "bamboo legs", and "lamp post."

It didn't take Carol long to notice Jerri. She harrassed most those who ignored her. Jerri was quiet, and bothered no one, and this had a magnetic effect on Carol. Many afternoons, on their way home from school, she and her group would follow Jerri and her friends, taunting and threatening them.

"Don't bother with them," Jem advised Jerri, seeing her troubled look.

He was always there to defend her, and for this, she was glad. One afternoon while on their way home, one of Carol's pals, a sulky looking girl named Yvette, suddenly slapped Jerri on her shoulder. Jerri just kept on walking, but Jem and others were displeased.

"Why you didn't hit her back?" they demanded, vexed at her timidity.

Jerri was hurt and angry, but held back the tears and tried to look brave.

"Girl if you was my sister, I would fix you up real good for not hitting her back."

This was Merle, an older girl, who lived next door to the Fields. They all felt that Jerri should retaliate. Jerri on the other hand didn't like fights. She couldn't bear to be a part of such an ugly scene, the clawing and scratching, the torn, filthy clothing, and the shouting and screaming from those around.

Fights were common at Chacaban Government School. Many scores were settled, many arguments were won with fists after school on the roadway at a safe distance from the school compound. Sometimes, after leaving school, children up ahead could be seen running and shouting, "heave heave." Further along the road, a croud of screaming, excited children milled around a warring pair. Whether male or female, they battled it out on the ground. Long hair was yanked, eyes

poked, faces punched and scratched, and clothes torn.

Those who encircled them did nothing to stop the fight. They egged them on, dazed by the sweat and the possibility of blood. The fight would end when the aggressor felt that he had done enough damage, or with the timely intervention of a passing adult. Jerri never enjoyed those scenes. She always pulled Jem away whenever a fight broke out. Jerri was right. Sometimes after a particularly vicious fight, the two battle-scarred individuals would be ordered by the headmaster to identify all spectators of that event. At those times, Jerri would sigh with relief. Their names would not be called.

Carol continued to torment Jerri on afternoons after school, threatening her for most of the way home.

"One o' dese days ah go disfigure yuh face with dese..." she would shout, displaying her long, vicious-looking finger nails. Carol imagined that Jerri was a coward, and one day, she went a bit too far.

It was recess time one day, and Jerri and her friend Ann-Marie went strolling as usual, arm in arm around the school yard. They sauntered to the back of the school. There, as usual behind the fence sat the vendors, doing their usual trade. These women sat on small wooden benches that stood upon slabs of wood which ran across a wide drain.

Their trays were laden with the usual goodies that looked tempting and delicious. There was mango anchar, pholouri with chutney, kuchela, curried channa, sugar cakes, corn cakes, meat-eyes, benna balls, and shave-iced press cool and refreshing. There were the usual groups of children jostling at the fence to purchase something. Their high-pitched voices created quite a din. Cries of "penny press Miss May", "Leela five cents anchar", "two packs o' channa", filled the air. Jerri and her friend bought their goodies, and continued on their walk, munching happily. Suddenly a sharp familiar voice from behind broke in on them with:

"Jerri Jerri yuh head like a berri."

The two girls spun around, only to behold the unwelcome face of Carol Gordon. She wore her usual silly grin. Jerri's heart thumped heavily, for she knew that there would be trouble.

"Aha..." Carol cried, "today today ah will disfigure yuh face with dese nails...ah go scratch yuh eyes out." She displayed her claws.

Jerri prayed softly under her breath. By now a few curious onlookers had gathered.

"Touch me, and I'll make you sorry," promised Jerri hotly.

Carol lifted her long leg and stamped Jerri in the chest, knocking her back against the wall. Jerri saw stars, as her sugar-cake tumbled to the ground. She was angry. She pounced on Carol, attacking wildly, cuffing and slapping her in the face and chest. She was aware of some shouting and cheering somewhere nearby. "Yeah man beat de bamboo, give she licks," she heard one boy shout.

"Is licks like fire...fire in de bamboo patch," came another voice.

She kept up the attack, all the while expecting to feel her flesh scratched and torn by Carol's menacing claws. But no such thing happened. Carol's arms flayed wildly in the air above her head. She towered over Jerri, and yet never hit her once.

The fight was over just as abruptly as it had started. Carol stood staring at Jerri in confusion, as Ann-Marie led her friend away triumphantly.

"Jerri girl, I so proud of you," she laughed, helping Jerri to tidy herself. "Ah bet she doh bother you again."

Ann-Marie was right. Carol never bothered Jerri again after that. Jerri had always known that Carol was only a bully.