

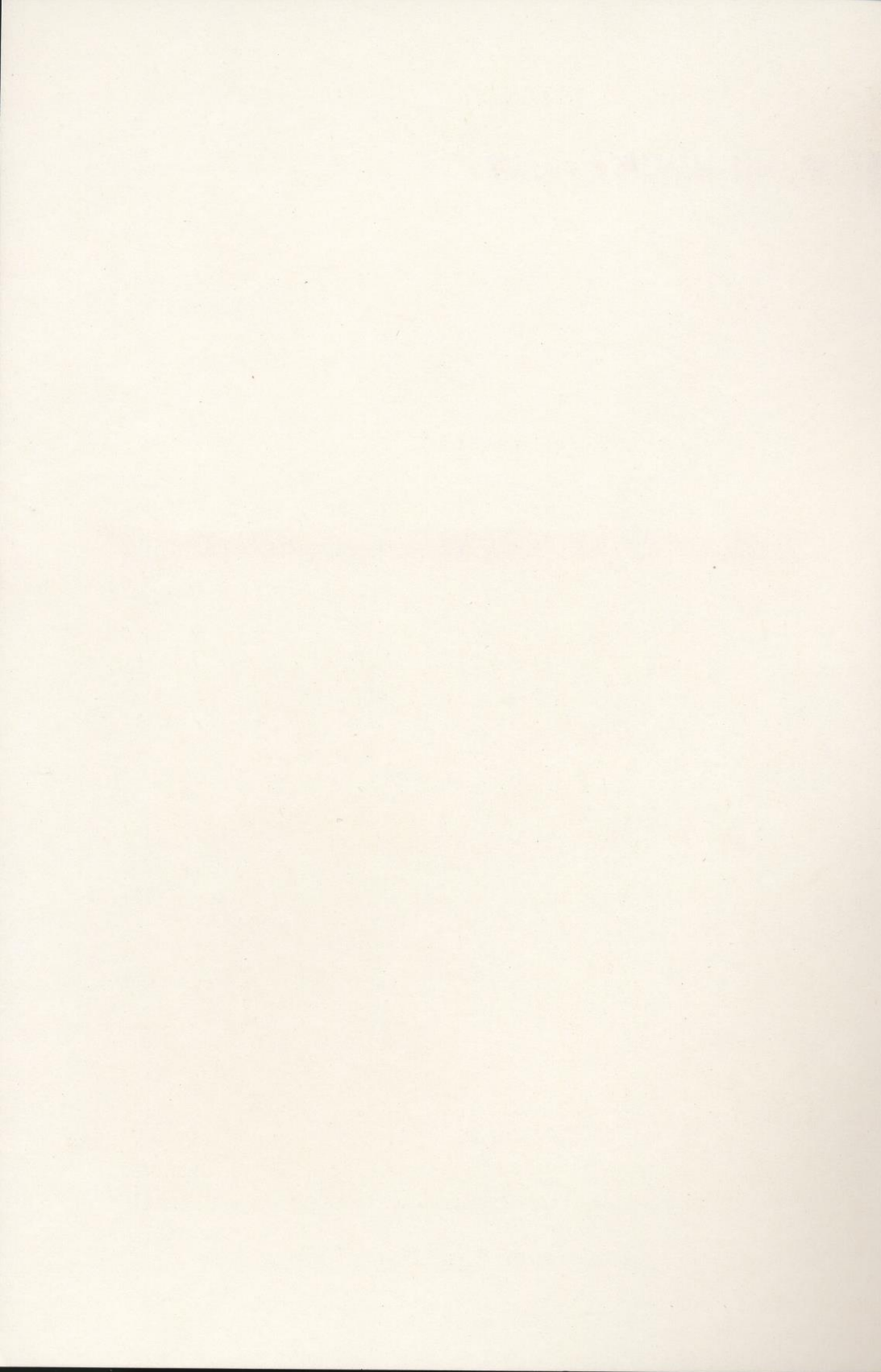
**Doctor Bird**  
*Reading Series*



# **The Cat Woman and the Spinning Wheel**

*and other stories*







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# **The Cat Woman and the Spinning Wheel**

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**Ian Randle Publishers, Kingston**

## The Cat Woman and the Spinning Wheel

Once upon a time there was a man who was going a far way. He had been walking through the woodland for days. He was very tired and hungry. Suddenly, he came upon a little house. He said to himself, "I wonder if there is anyone at that house. I am so hungry. I would give anything to have a piece of cornmeal pudding right now."





Just as he said this, a woman came out of the house. Her skin was pretty, and her eyes were black as coal. When she walked, she looked as if she was dancing.



"Oh, what a lovely woman," the man said to himself. "I have never seen anyone so lovely."

The woman laughed and said, "You look so tired and hungry. Would you like to stop and have something to eat?"



The man and the woman went into the house, and the woman pulled out a coal pot. Then she cooked a good dinner of salt fish and cornmeal pudding. After dinner she told him to stay and rest for a little. He thought he was very lucky to get food.

"Thank you. You are so kind," he said. "But I do not want to give you any trouble; so I will go on my way."

"It is no trouble," she replied. "I am always happy to help people."

So he stayed to rest.





The next day she gave him food again. She made cornmeal pudding and rice with meat. She was so kind that he forgot where he was going. Every day the woman gave him good food and was nice to him. So he stayed for a long, long time. The man was so happy that he made her his wife.

All went well for a time. Then he began to wonder about the woman. He thought that something funny was happening. Sometimes he would get up at night, and he would not see her. He wondered where she was. He thought he would try to watch her to see what was happening.



So one night he went to bed but did not sleep. He shut his eyes so that the woman would think he was sleeping.

As soon as she thought he was sleeping, she jumped out of bed. She pulled out the coal pot and lit it. She took a spinning wheel from a corner of the room and put it beside the coal pot. All this time the man was watching her from the corner of his eye. He wondered what she was going to do. Soon the coal pot was red hot. The woman sat on it. She began to spin off her skin using the spinning wheel! As she did this, she sang:

"Turn and spin.

Come off skin.

Turn and spin.

Come off skin."





To the man's surprise, the woman's skin came off. And suddenly she turned into a great big cat!

She put her skin under the bed and said, "Stay there, skin, till I come back. I'm going out to have some fun." Then the cat woman jumped through the window and ran into the woodland.

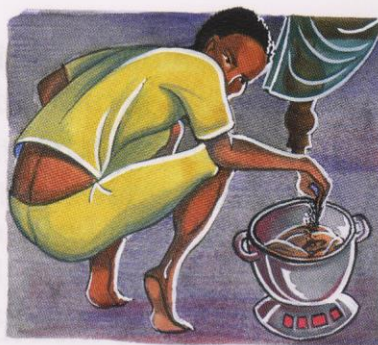
The man opened his eyes and thought about what he had seen. He now knew that the woman was bad. "I must think of a way to get away from this woman," he said to himself.





So he took out her skin. Then he found some salt and pepper. He filled the skin with the salt and pepper. Then he put it back under the bed. He went to bed so that the woman would think he was sleeping.

After a time, the cat woman came back. She had enjoyed herself, and





she was laughing. She laughed as she took her skin from under the bed. She laughed as she began to put on her skin. But suddenly she stopped laughing. The pepper and salt began to burn her. She looked ugly as she began to bawl, "Whoi! Whoi!" She tried to get out of her skin, but she could not. She bawled and bawled as the salt and pepper burned her more and more. Then she turned around and around and fell down dead.

And that is how the man got away from the cat woman.



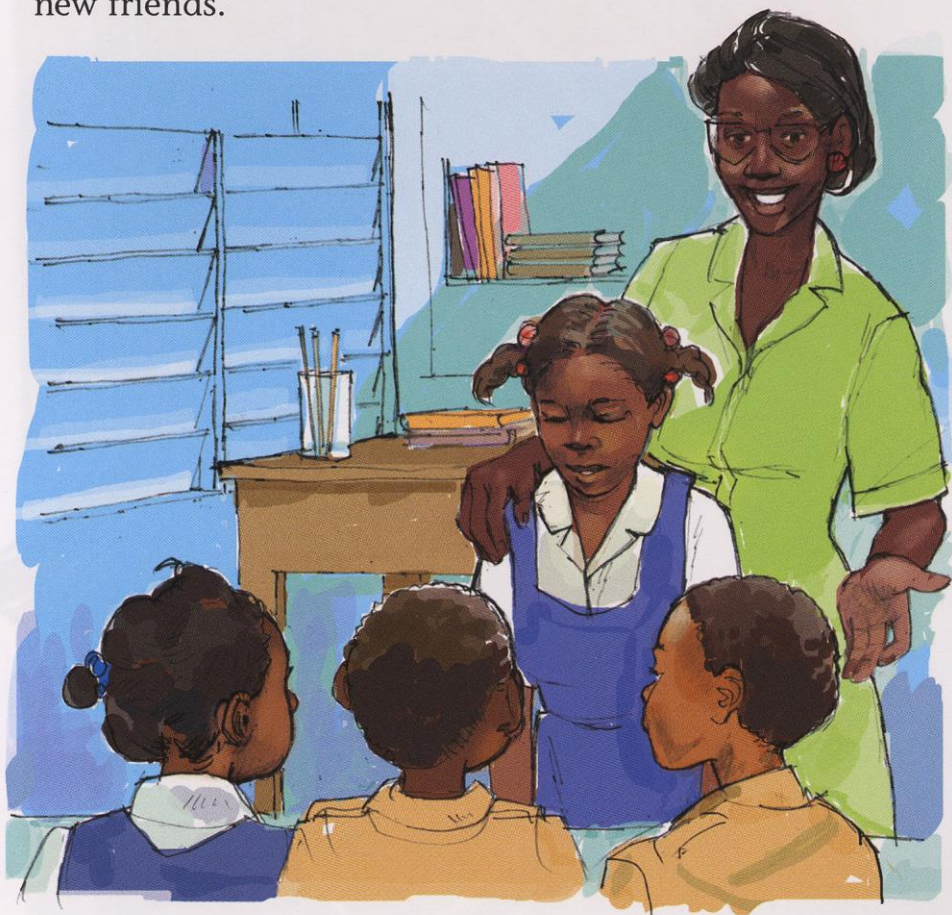


## Can Annie Make Friends?

It was Annie's first day at this school. She was a little afraid at first. But Miss Spence, the teacher, was nice to her and showed her where to sit.

"This is Annie," said Miss Spence to the class. "She has just moved into town. I know that you will make her feel at home."

The boys did not pay her any mind, but some of the girls had kind faces. Annie started to feel better. She missed her friends from the other school, and she wanted to make new friends.





The first class of the day was reading. The teacher was calling on all of the children to read. They made many mistakes. Then she called on a girl named Lena. Lena was a tall girl. She looked smart, but she did not have a kind face. She read in a loud voice and only made three mistakes.



"Thank you, Lena," said Miss Spence. "That was good. I wish more of you children would read like Lena."

Lena looked around in a very boastful way.

"Now," said Miss Spence, "let us see what you can do, Annie."

Annie did not know she would have to read on her first day. She was frightened of reading in front of all the children. She started in a small voice. But as she read, she became braver. She read well and did not make any mistakes.



"Very good, Annie," said Miss Spence. "You did not make any mistakes!"

Annie was very happy and proud that she had done well on her first day. Then she saw Lena's face. Lena's face looked vexed and ugly, and Annie did not know why.

At lunch time Annie looked for somebody to talk to. She wanted to be friendly. To her surprise, nobody looked like they wanted to talk to her. Most of the girls walked around with Lena. Not even the girls with kind faces would talk to Annie.



Annie tried to show that she did not mind. But she was sad. The next day things were no better. Lena made more than three mistakes in reading, but Annie did not make any. Lena looked very vexed.

At lunch time Lena and the other girls played games. But nobody would play with Annie. In classes it was also bad. If Annie said anything, the girls would laugh and make funny sounds.

This happened day after day.



Miss Spence knew what was happening. So one day when the girls laughed at Annie, she talked to them.

"That is enough," she said. "You are foolish children. We must be nice to our new friends."

When Lena saw that Miss Spence was kind to Annie, she was even more vexed. After school, Lena told the other girls bad things about Annie, and she began to tease her.

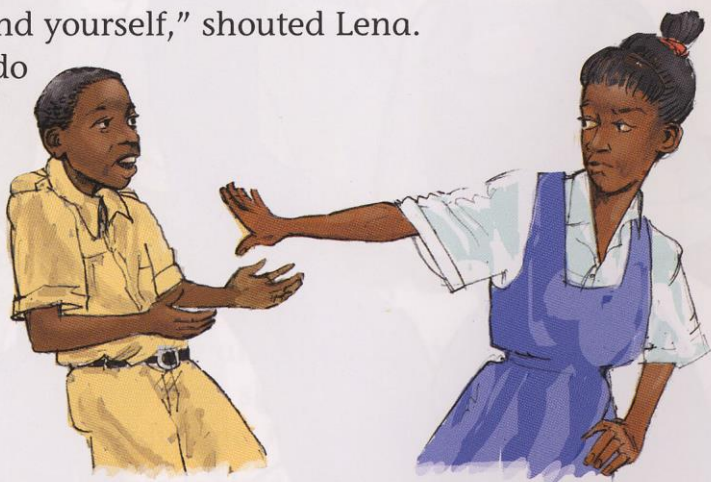
"What a way this new girl is boasty," shouted Lena. "She thinks she can read better than us. What a way she is boasty."

"Yes," said the other girls. "What a way she is boasty."

Annie tried not to, but at last she started to cry. Lena was happy to see Annie cry. She teased her even more. "Cry, cry! Annie is a nanny! Annie is a nanny!"

One big boy felt sorry for Annie. He said to Lena, "Why are you doing that? Leave the new girl alone. She is not troubling you."

"Boy, mind yourself," shouted Lena. "This is to do with girls. Walk off!"



Even the big boy was afraid of Lena. He went away to play with the boys. Nobody could help Annie.

Lena and the girls just went on shouting, "Annie is a nanny! Annie is a nanny!"



Annie cried all the way home. She had not done anything wrong, but she could not make friends. When she got home, her mother and father saw how sad she was.



"What is wrong, Annie?" asked her mother.

"I don't want to go to school tomorrow," replied Annie.

"But why?"

"I don't like school, Mama," she said.

"But, Annie," said her mother, "You have always liked school."

Annie started to cry again. She did not know what to say.

"Why are you crying, little Annie?" asked her father. "Aren't the children nice to you?"

"No," replied Annie, in a small voice. "They are not kind to me. I want to be friends, but they tease me."

"But why do they tease you?" he asked.

"I think it is because I read better than Lena," said Annie.

"Who is this girl Lena?" asked her mother.

"She is the girl who was the best reader in the class," said Annie. "But now I am the best because I don't make any mistakes. So they say I am boastful. But I am not. Maybe if I try to read badly, they will like me."

"What?" said her father. "No, Annie. You are a good reader. You are to be proud of that. We know you are not boastful. You must not try to make mistakes. You would not be honest with yourself if you did that."

"But what am I to do?" cried Annie. "Lena and the girls tease me and say 'Annie is a nanny'!"

"Well, that is foolish of them," said her father. "Nanny was a great woman."

"But I don't think they mean that Nanny," said Annie. "They mean I am foolish like a nanny goat."

"Oh," laughed her father. "Well, you just tell them that Nanny was a great woman. Nanny was brave, and you must be brave."

Annie did not know if that would stop them. But she thought that she would go to school after all. She would have to try to be brave.







The next day at school Miss Spence called on the children to read. Lena read and made three mistakes. Then it was Annie's turn to read. As she was reading, Lena threw a paper ball at her. It hit Annie on her back. She jumped and made a mistake.



"Annie made a mistake," Lena said in a quiet voice.  
"Annie is a nanny."

The children laughed.

Lena thought Miss Spence had not heard. But Miss Spence had heard. She also saw when the paper ball hit Annie.

"Who did that?" she called out. Nobody said anything.

"The girl who did that must be honest and say so," said Miss Spence.

The class became very quiet. The boys looked at the girls. They were happy to see that Miss Spence had caught up with them. And the girls looked at Lena. They wondered what would happen.



Miss Spence knew that it was Lena. But Miss Spence wanted her to be honest and say that she had done it.

"Annie," asked Miss Spence, "do you know who is teasing you?"

Annie was afraid to say anything. Then she said to herself, "I must be brave."



"I think so," said Annie, "but I do not want to tell on her. She is calling me Nanny." Annie went on. "But Nanny was a brave woman. I do not know if this girl is brave enough to say she did it."

The children looked surprised. They wondered what would happen now. Nobody had ever said something like that about Lena.

"You are right, Annie," said Miss Spence. "Nanny was a great Jamaican. We are proud of that. It is wrong to tease anybody by calling her Nanny. And it is wrong to tease any child, at any time."

Still, Lena said nothing. She was trying to look as if she had not done anything. But the children now knew that she was not brave enough. They began to call out: "Lena, it is you. Say so. It is you!"

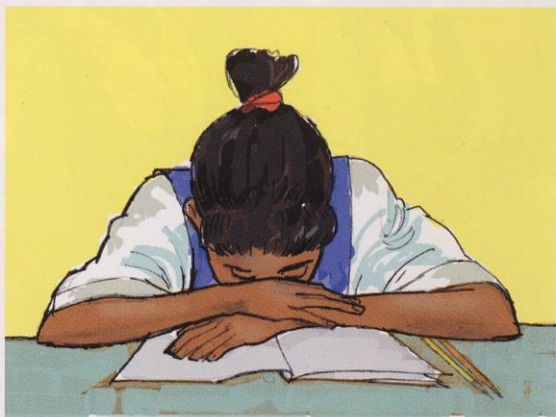
Lena started to cry. "I didn't mean to do it," she said in a small voice.

"Well, you have done wrong, Lena," said Miss Spence.

"But the rest of you girls are also wrong. You also teased Annie. You must help a new girl feel at home. Lena is to say she is sorry for what she did today."

Lena did not want to say she was sorry. But she said it because she was afraid that the other girls might not be her friends. They were vexed with her now because they were all in trouble.

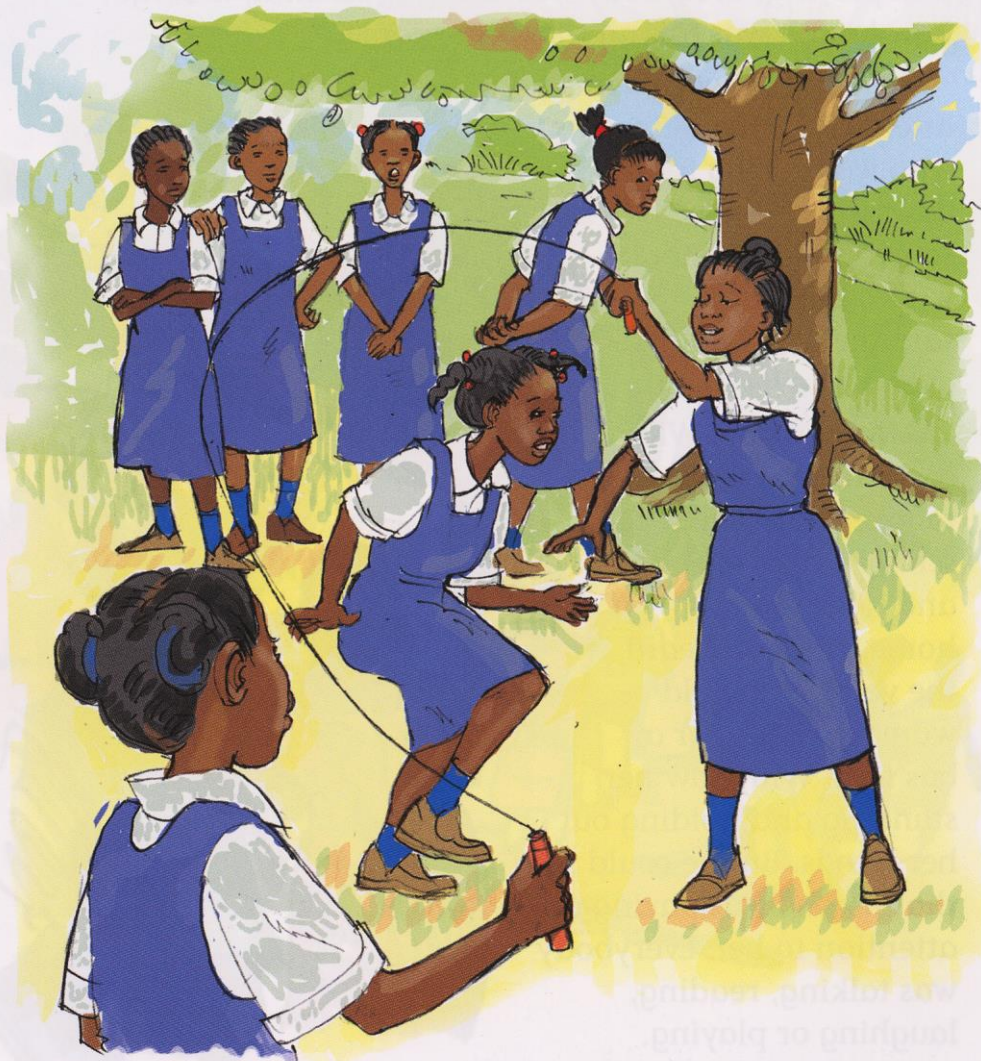
At lunch time the girls all wanted to talk to Annie. Nobody wanted to talk to Lena.



Annie was happy. She felt Lena was a bad girl, but it was her turn to show that she could be kind. So she said to the girls, "Let us all be friends."

Lena was not happy about this. But she was still afraid that the other girls would not play with her. So she went to talk with them and tried to be nice.

From that day on, all the girls wanted to play with Annie. Annie had made friends, after all.





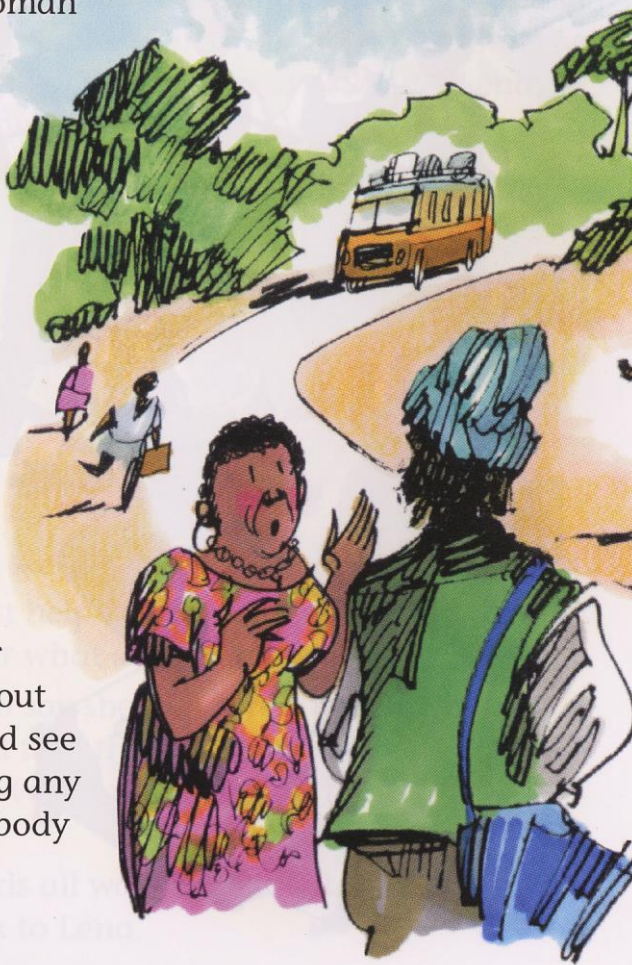
## Good Follows Good

There were many people at the bus stop. School was over, and the children were waiting for their bus. There were also big people waiting there.

Some of the big people were reading newspapers while others were talking. The children were laughing and playing. Everybody was doing something to forget how long it was taking the bus to come.

But nobody was paying attention to the old woman who was asking for a bus fare. "Please, somebody help me with a bus fare," said the old woman, over and over again.

After a while, Willy came to the bus stop to take the bus. His school was over, and he was going home. He soon heard the voice of the old woman asking for a bus fare. Willy saw her standing and holding out her hands. But he could see that no one was paying any attention to her. Everybody was talking, reading, laughing or playing.









Willy stood there looking at the old woman. She was very old and held her back with one hand. He was sorry for the old woman. She looked too old to walk very far.

"One day I will be very old too," thought Willy, "and I might need help like this old woman. Will people help me when I am old?"

Willy stood there for a while looking at the old woman.

"I wish I could help her with a fare," thought Willy, "but I only have my own bus fare."

After a long time the bus came. Everybody ran to the door and pushed. They nearly pushed down the old woman as she held out her hand.

"Will somebody please help me with a bus fare?" said the old woman as everybody pushed to get into the bus.

Willy wanted to go into the bus. But when he looked back at the old woman, he could not move. Everybody was leaving her at the bus stop. He felt very sorry for her.

Then Willy thought quickly, "She cannot walk very far. She is too old. But I am young and strong. I cannot be like the others who are not paying any attention to her. If I walk, I will soon reach home. It would be fun, too."

Nearly all the people had gone into the bus. Willy walked over quickly to the old woman.

"Here is a bus fare, Miss," he said. "Come quickly, and let me help you into the bus before it moves off."

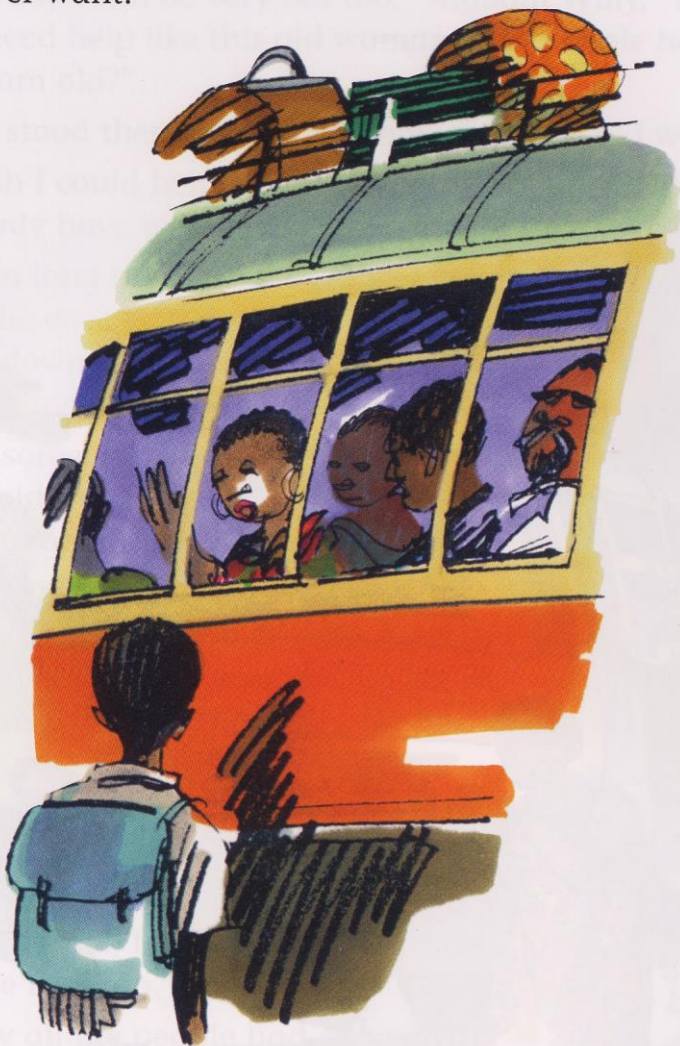






Willy held her hand and followed her to the door of the bus. As she sat down, she looked back and smiled.

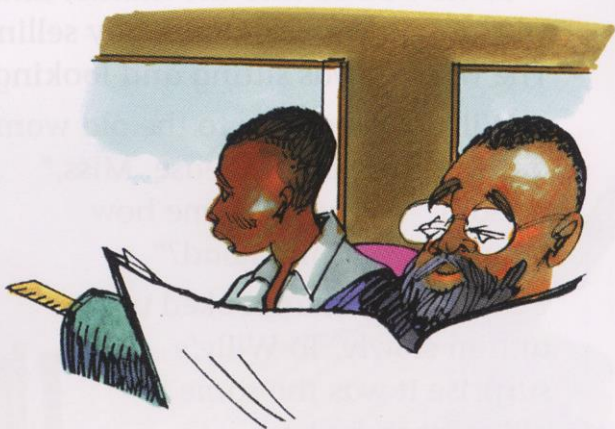
"May God bless you, my son," she said. "May you live and never want."



The bus bell rang, and the door shut. Then the bus moved off, leaving Willy standing alone at the bus stop.

Willy started to walk home. He walked on the back roads. This way his walk was not very long. Soon he was home.

Many days passed and Willy had almost forgotten about the old woman. One day he wanted to reach home early. So, after school, Willy ran quickly to the bus stop. As he ran, he saw a bus. The people at the stop were getting into the bus. He did not want it to move off and leave him. He ran and jumped into the bus so quickly that he forgot to look at the number.



After riding for a while, Willy looked out of the window. He saw that the bus was driving on a road he did not know.

"Oh! I must be on the wrong bus," Willy said to himself. He quickly rang the bell and got off at the next stop.

"Now I do not have any money to take another bus," said Willy. He started walking down the road. He did not know where he was going or how he would get a bus fare.





Soon he came to a market. "I must go into the market and ask somebody to tell me how I can find my way home," he thought.

So he walked into the market and looked around. He saw an old woman and a boy selling fruits in a corner. The woman was sitting and looking down into her basket.

Willy walked over to the old woman and the little boy. "Please, Miss," he said, "can you tell me how I can get to White Road?"

The old woman looked up at him slowly. To Willy's surprise it was the same old woman he had helped at the bus stop.

"But wait!" she said, "You are the little boy who helped me one day at the bus stop. You were the only one who paid me any attention."

"Yes," said Willy. "How are you?"

"I am OK," said the old woman. "And this is my grandson, Albert. He helps me with my fruit basket."

Willy and Albert looked at each other and smiled.

"What are you doing here?" said the old woman to Willy.





Willy began to tell her how he had taken the wrong bus and had to get off. He told her he did not know where he was and that he had no more bus fare. He wanted to know where he could walk to go home.

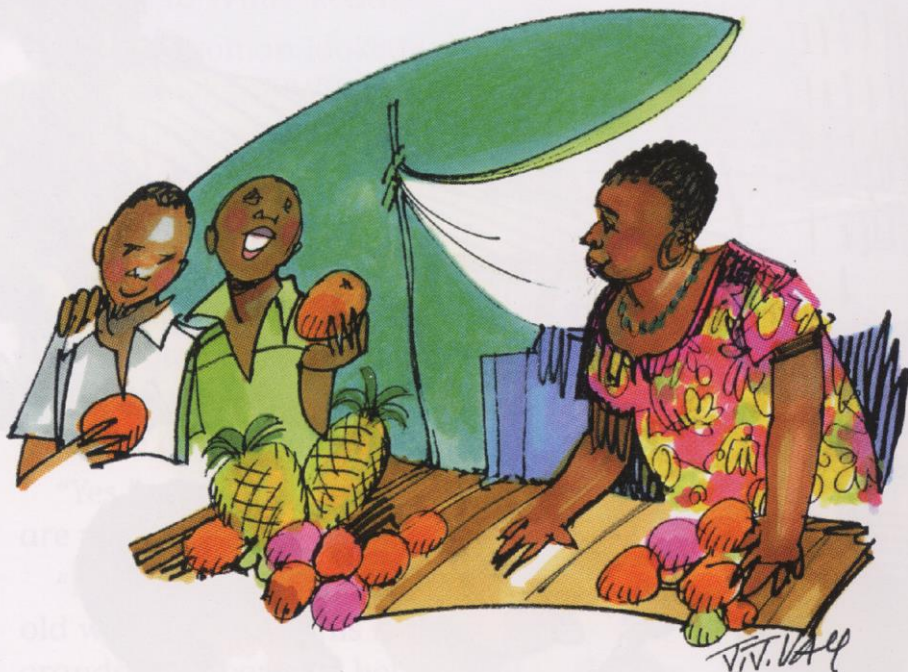




"Oh! I see," said the old woman. "Well, here is enough money to take two buses home. Albert will follow you to the bus stop to catch the first bus. He will tell you where to get off to catch the other bus you need to get home."

Willy did not know what to say. After a while he smiled. "I did not know I would ever see you again, Miss," he said.

"Yes, Son," said the old woman, "that is how life is. If you do good in life, good will follow you. Here are some fruits. They are very sweet."



Willy was very happy that he had done a good thing. He did not dream that one day the same person he helped would be the one to help him.

Willy thanked the old woman and said good-bye. Then he and Albert ran off to the bus stop.

## Broom-Man

Lennie walked down the road to the new housing scheme. He had some brooms on his head. The morning was hot, and the brooms were heavy. But Lennie was happy to be on the road. It was something different to do.

It was Sunday. Lennie's father was sick and could not work today. He was a broom-man, and Sunday was his best day for selling. That was why Lennie was trying to sell the brooms for him.

The breeze was cool, and it was not far to the housing scheme. Lennie was enjoying the walk.

"Lennie!" he heard someone calling. His friend Trevor was running after him.





"Where are you going?" Trevor asked.

"To the new housing scheme," Lennie said. "I am going to sell brooms for my father."

"I don't have anything to do," Trevor said. "Let me come with you."

"OK," said Lennie, "but you have to behave yourself. I know you. I don't want any trouble."

"Sure, man," said Trevor. "I will behave."

By this time they had come to the first street in the housing scheme. The houses were small but pretty.



There were many trees and flowers. There were not many people. Lennie started to call out:

“Broo-oo-oom-man! Broo-oo-oom-man!

House broom! Yard broom!

Car broom! Broo-oo-oom!”





He said it over and over again. He made it into a little song. He was enjoying himself, walking and singing in the breeze.

A little way up the street was a big ugly dog. It was not barking. It was just standing behind a gate looking at them.

"Ugly old dog," Trevor said. "Just let me get a rock and lick him."



"Leave the dog alone," Lennie said. "What are you troubling it for? It is not troubling you."

Trevor did not put down the rock. As he passed the gate, he hit the dog with it. The dog started to bark. A man rushed out of the house.



"Get away," he called out. "You people only want to make trouble. Get away from here."

Trevor ran away laughing. But Lennie did not think it was funny.

"My father says it is people like you that give us a bad name," he told Trevor. "It's a pity you can't behave yourself."

The dog was still barking, so they turned down the next street. Lennie was calling out again:

"Broo-oo-oom-man!  
House broom! Yard broom!  
Car broom!  
Broo-oo-oom-man!"

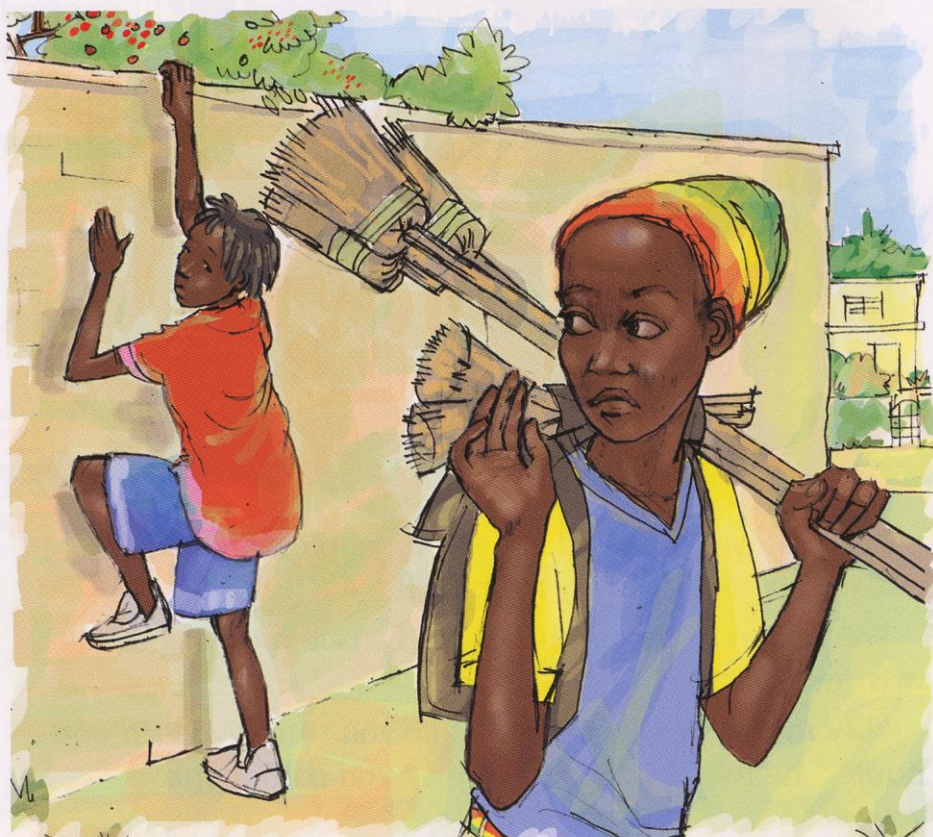
Now and then he stopped.

A man bought a yard broom.

A woman told him, "No, thank you. Not today."



Then they came to a house on the corner of the street. There was a big cherry tree in the back yard. It was near the wall, and it was full of red cherries. Trevor was just going to pick some.



"Leave the people's cherries alone!" said Lennie. "If you want some, you must ask."

"Cho!" Trevor said. "You think these people would ever give me any?"

"Maybe yes, maybe no," Lennie said. "But my father says you should still ask first."

As they were talking, they turned the corner. Trevor stopped. There was a police car at the front gate of the same house.

"Trouble!" Trevor said. He was frightened. A big policeman was standing beside the car, talking to the woman from the house. He was writing in a little book. As soon as he saw the boys, he looked vexed.



"You boys! Come here!" he called.

"Let us run," Trevor said quietly.

"Why?" asked Lennie. "I didn't do anything."



He walked up to the policeman and put down the heavy brooms. Trevor did not come. He stayed at the corner, beside the wall.

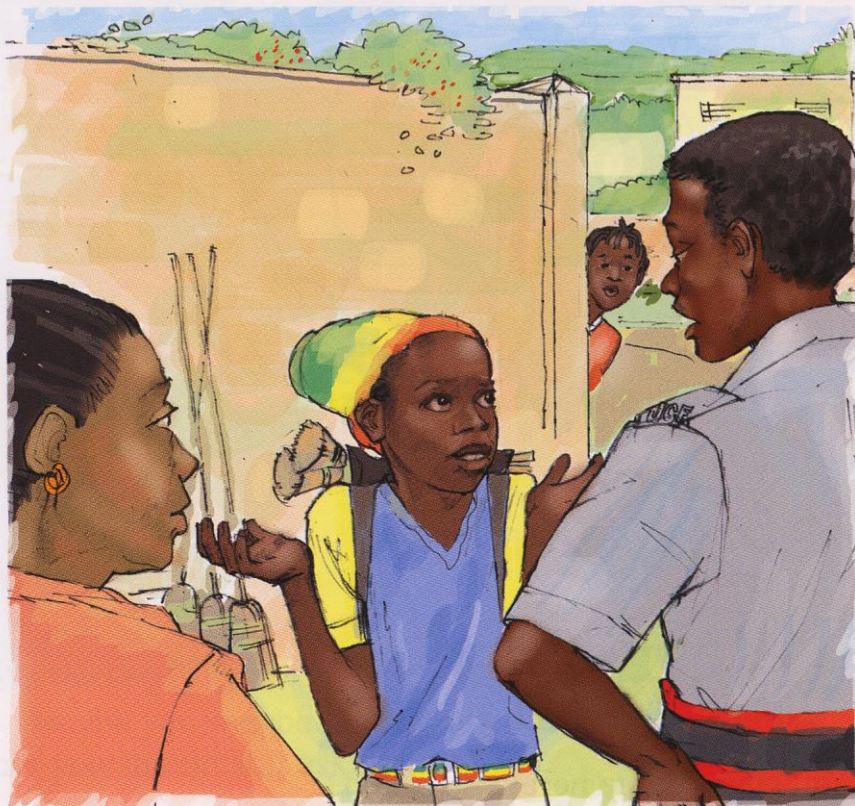
"Good morning," Lennie said. He looked right in the policeman's face.

"What are you doing here?" asked the policeman.

"I am selling brooms," said Lennie.

The policeman started writing in his book.

"Oh, so you are a broom-man," he said. "So you would know these houses well. And you would know when people leave their things outside at night, eh?"



"I don't come here all that much," Lennie said. "It is my father who always comes."

"Oh!" the policeman said. "So your father is in it too! Call him for me. Let me talk to him a little."

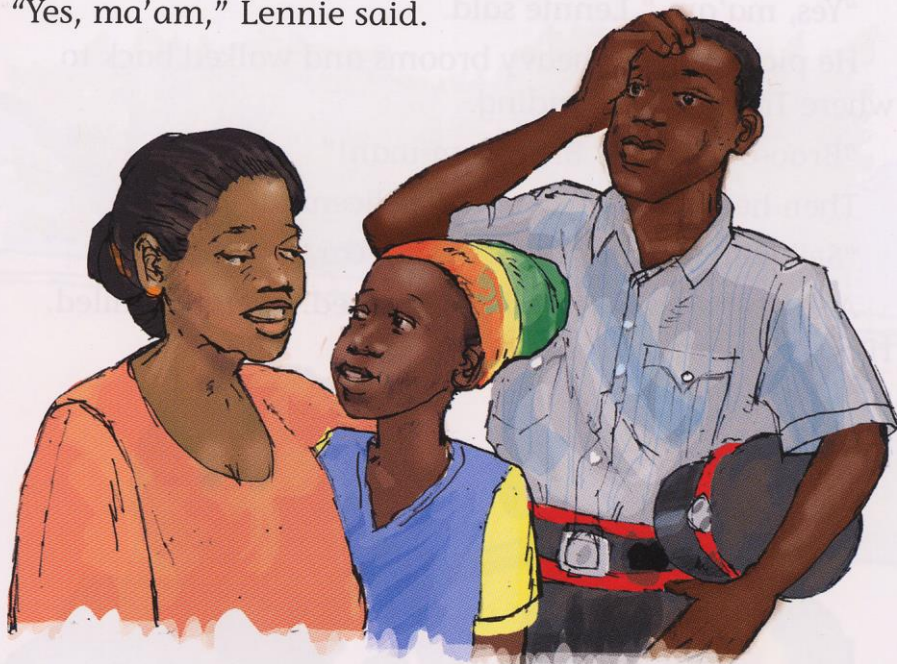
The policeman was smiling, but it was not a pretty smile. He was writing in his book.

"My father is not here," Lennie said. "He is sick. That is why I am doing the selling."

"What a pity," said the policeman.

All this time the woman was looking hard at Lennie. Now she said, "Brother Daniel is your father?"

"Yes, ma'am," Lennie said.



The woman smiled and turned to the policeman. She put her hand on Lennie's head. "This boy would never trouble anything that is not his," she said. "His father is a good man. Every Sunday when he comes with his brooms, he and I have a long talk.

We talk about the Bible. His church is different from mine, but they teach the same things. They teach that we must love and do good to one another."



The policeman shut his book. "It is a pity more of them don't follow that teaching," he said.

"It is the same in every church," the woman said. "You have good and bad in every church. His church is no different."

The policeman turned to Lennie. "All right, boy, you can go," he said.

"Tell your father I am sorry to hear that he is sick," said the woman.

"Yes, ma'am," Lennie said.

He picked up his heavy brooms and walked back to where Trevor was standing.

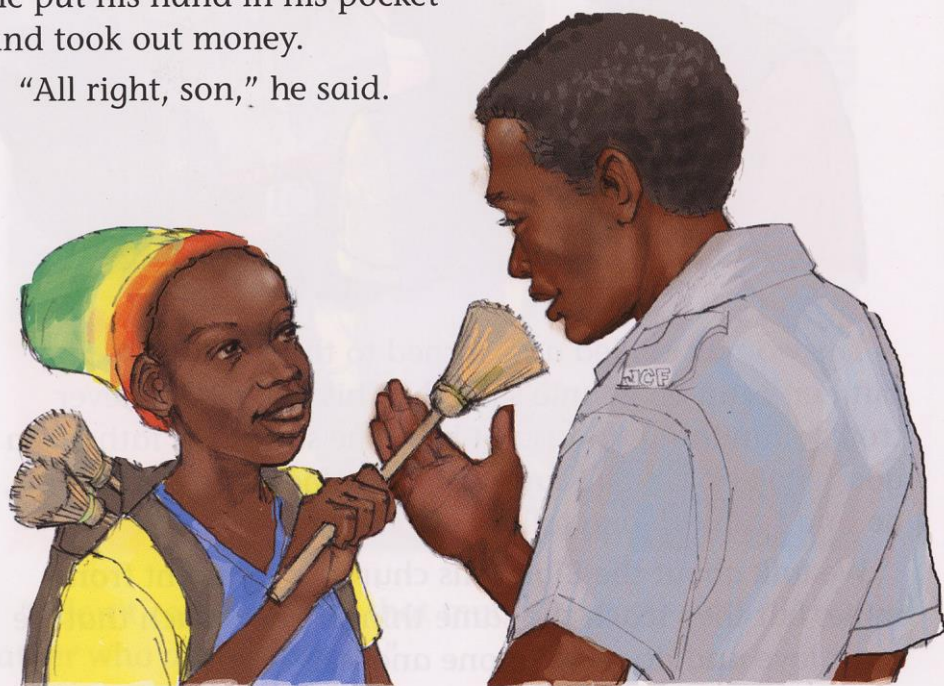
"Broo-oom-man! Broo-oom-man!"

Then he walked back to the policeman.

"Sell you a small broom for the car, sir?" he said.

At first the policeman looked vexed. Then he smiled. He put his hand in his pocket and took out money.

"All right, son," he said.



At the same time Trevor called out, "Can I pick a cherry, Miss?"

"Of course," the lady said. "Pick from outside the wall. I am happy you are not like some of the other boys. They think they can just pick as they like without asking anybody."

Trevor looked at Lennie and Lennie looked at Trevor. The two of them started to laugh. The policeman and the woman could not tell what they were laughing about.





## Sound at the Window

Sam came running into the front room. His eyes looked big and frightened. "Somebody is at the window," he said.



Dennis and Mary were reading at the table. They looked at Sam with surprise.

"What are you talking about?" asked Dennis.

"Somebody is knocking at the window," replied Sam in a low frightened voice.

"What window?" asked Mary.

"The window in the bedroom," replied Sam. "I was just going to sleep when I heard somebody knocking."

"You were dreaming again," said Mary.

"I was not. I tell you I heard it," cried Sam.

"Don't be foolish," said Dennis. "Nobody is at the window at this time of night. You had better go to bed before Mama catches you."

"I am not going back alone," said Sam.

Just then their mother shouted from her bedroom, "Sam, is that you? What are you doing out of bed?"

"Dennis and Mary are not in bed, Mama," Sam called out.

"Well, you are little. You go to sleep first," replied Mama.

"Yes, Mama," said Sam. But he did not move. He looked so frightened. "Please come with me," he said to the other children.

"OK," replied Dennis. "I'll come and show you that nobody is there."





The children went into their bedroom. Dennis opened the metal louver windows and looked out. "I told you there is nobody there," he said. And he shut the windows again.

"But I heard it, I tell you. I heard it!" shouted Sam.

"Mind Mama hears you," said Mary in a low voice. "I will stay with you till you go to sleep." Sam got into bed, and Mary sat in a corner of the room. But they did not hear any sounds at the window that night.



The next morning Dennis laughed at Sam as they were going to school.

"Who knocked on your window, Sam?" he asked. "Did he knock you down?"

"I heard a sound," cried Sam.

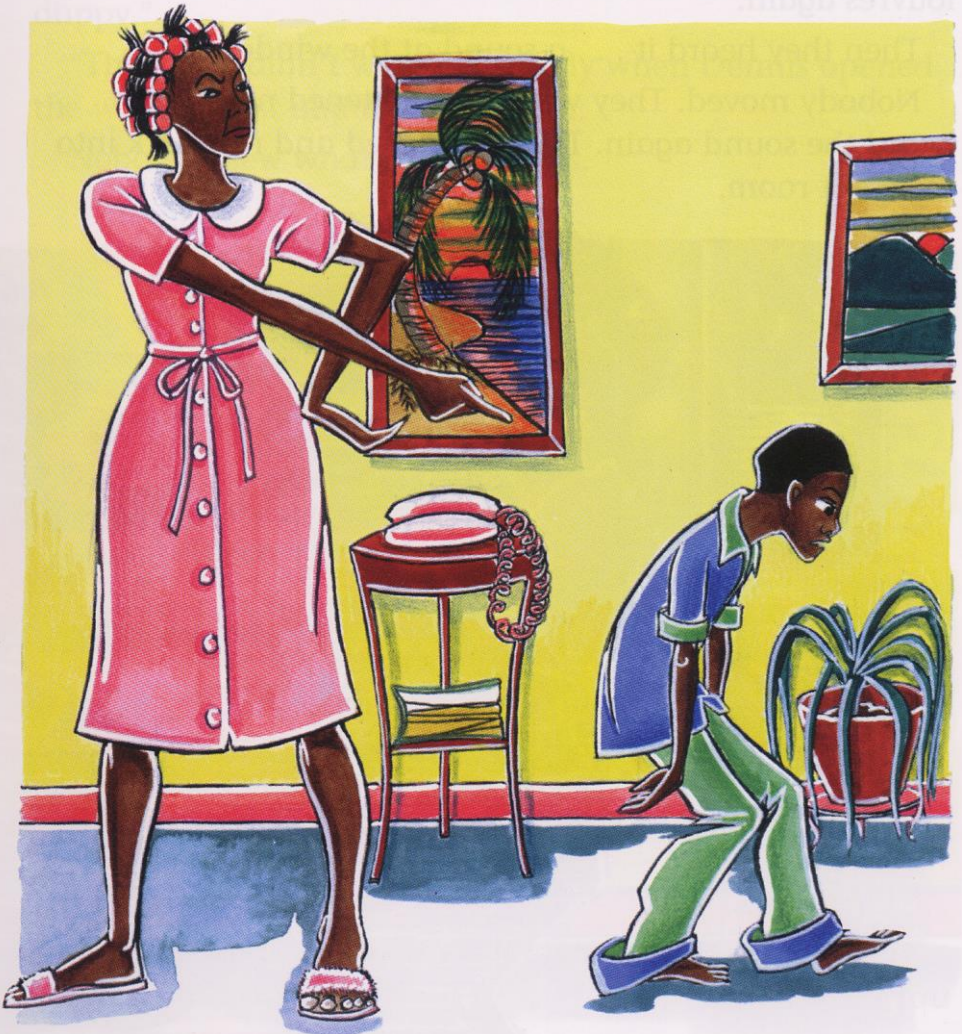
"Oh, stop it!" said Mary. "We are going to be late. Hurry up!"

Sam was happy at school. But that night, as it got late, he started to feel afraid.

"What is wrong, man?" asked Dennis. "Are you frightened?"

"No, I am not," said Sam. But he tried his best to stay up late.

After a while their mother came into the front room where the children were playing. "Sam," she said, "is that you out of bed? Please go to your room, right now!"





Sam walked slowly into his room and got into bed. It was very dark and very quiet.

Sam stayed in his bed for a long time with his eyes open. But he was very tired. Just as his eyes started to shut, he heard the noise again.

Sam jumped up and ran into the front room. "Somebody is knocking at the window," he shouted. "Come quickly!"

They all went into the bedroom. "Oh, man, you are such a foolish boy," said Dennis, as he went to open the metal louveres again.

Then they heard it . . . a sound at the window!

Nobody moved. They were all frightened now. They heard the sound again. They all turned and ran back into the front room.



"I told you," said Sam. "I told you I heard it."

"Oh, it must be a tree knocking on the window," said Dennis. He tried to sound very brave.

"But there is no tree next to the window," said Mary. "I think it's a gunman."

"A gunman," replied Dennis. "Don't be foolish! A gunman is not going to knock at the window."

"I think it's a duppy," said Sam in a low voice.

"A duppy!" said Mary. "There is no such thing as a duppy."

"Then why didn't we see anybody when Dennis opened the window last night?" asked Sam.

Nobody knew what to say to this.





Just then their mother came into the room. She saw how frightened they looked. "What has happened to all of you?" she asked.

"We heard a knocking at the bedroom window, Mama," said Mary.

"A knocking?" said their mother.

"Well that is what it sounded like," said Dennis.

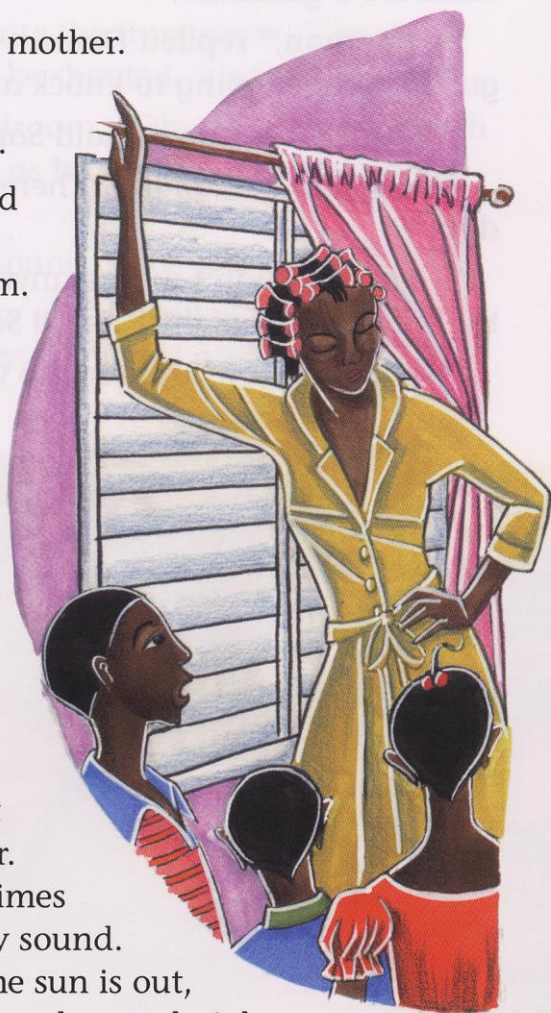
"Let us go and look," said their mother, and they all went back into the bedroom.

Suddenly . . . there was the sound again . . . and then again. The children looked at their mother.

"Oh," she laughed. "That is just the sound of the metal louvres."

"The metal louvres?" asked Mary. "How can they make a sound?"

"Well, I don't know a lot about it," said their mother. "But I do know that sometimes at night they make a funny sound. You see, in the day when the sun is out, the metal gets hot. And on such a cool night as this the metal makes that sound as it cools down. Ask your teacher to tell you more about it when you go to school tomorrow. There is nothing to be afraid of. Now, everybody into bed. It is very late."



"Well," said Mary, as they went to bed, "just think of that!"

"I told you it was nothing," said Dennis.

"But you didn't think so when you heard it," said Sam.  
"You are always calling everybody foolish. You are foolish. You were afraid just like us."

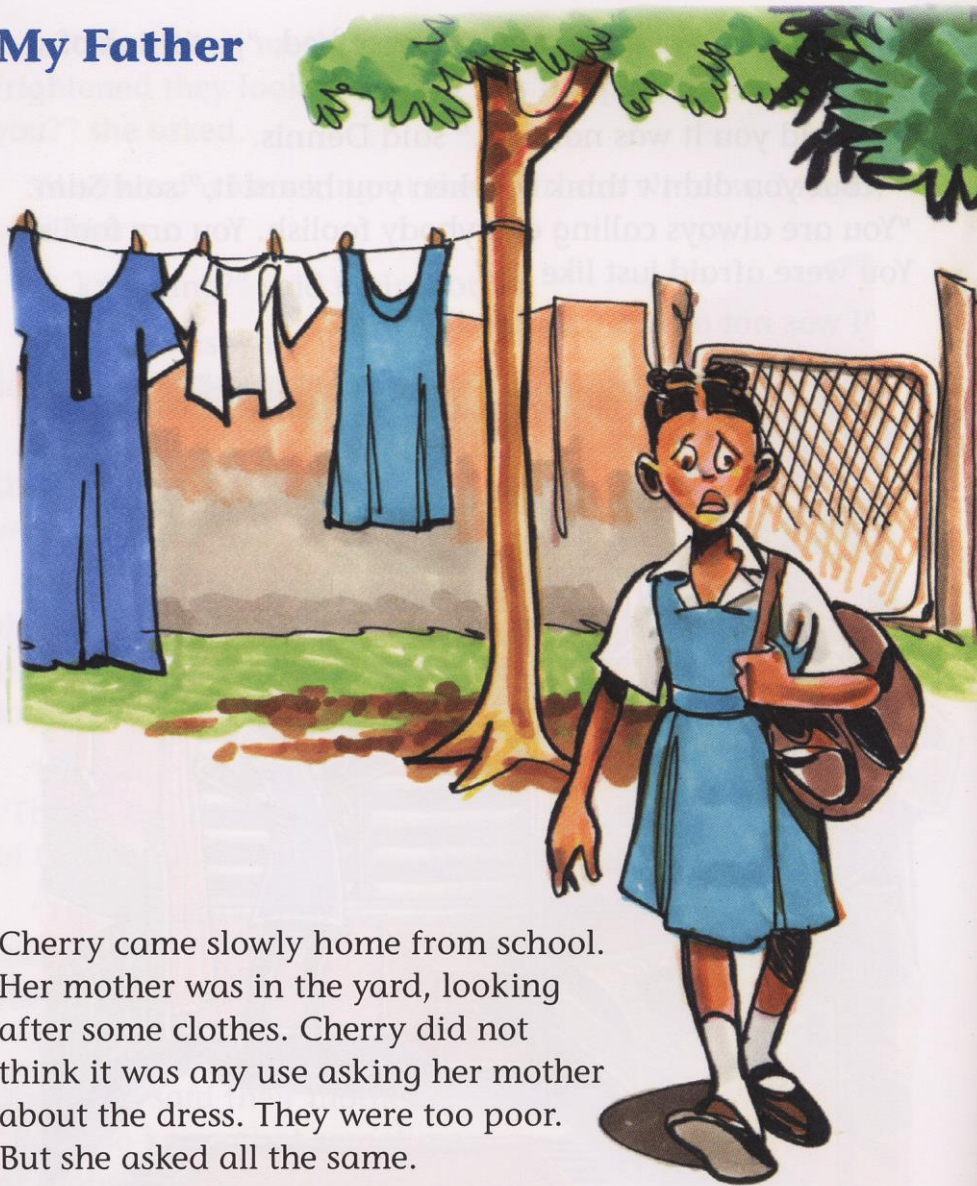
"I was not afraid," shouted Dennis.



"Oh, stop it!" said Mary. "Mind Mama hears us. If we don't go to sleep now, we will be late for school in the morning."



## My Father

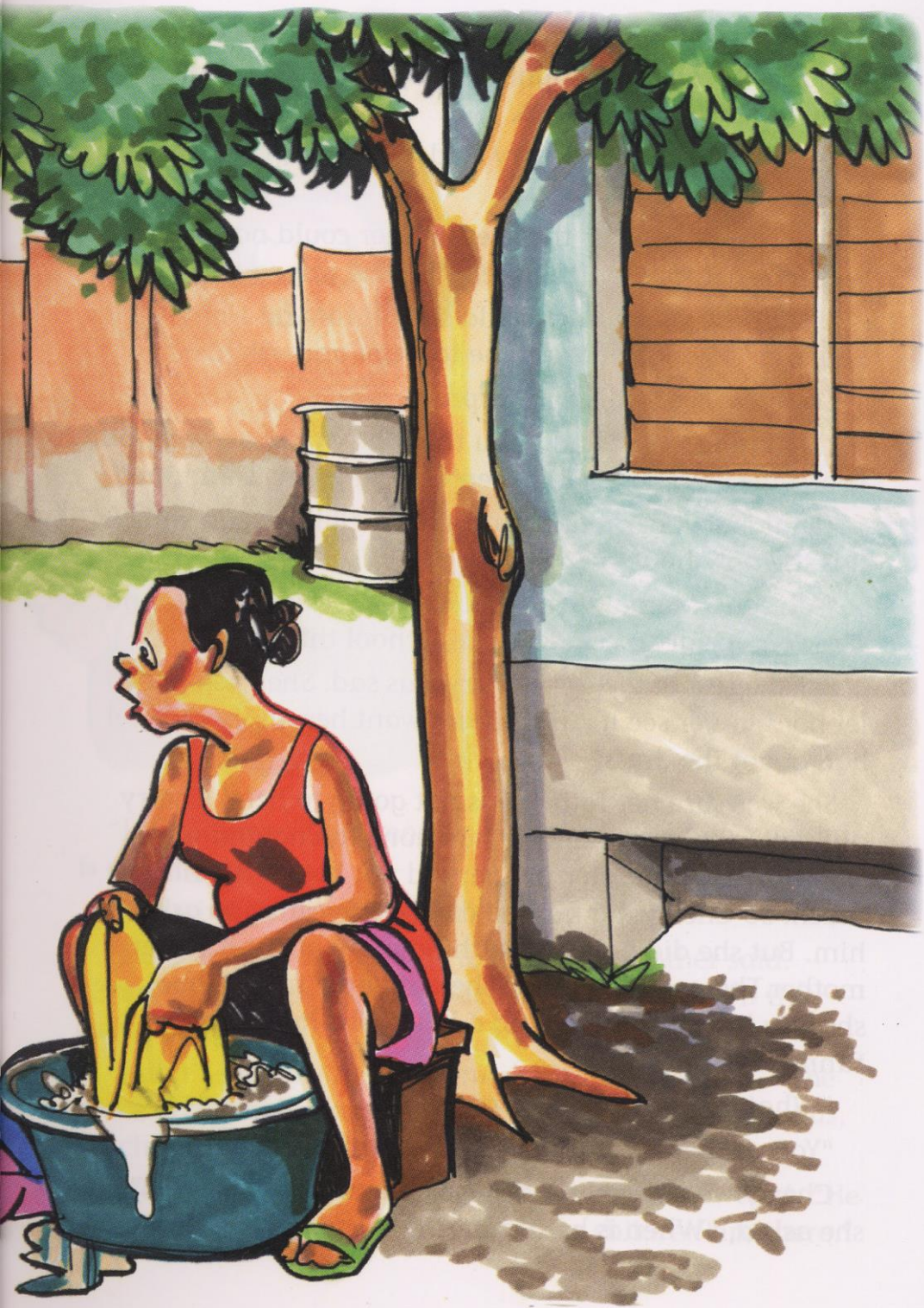


Cherry came slowly home from school. Her mother was in the yard, looking after some clothes. Cherry did not think it was any use asking her mother about the dress. They were too poor. But she asked all the same.

"All of us in the class have to get a white dress for the Festival Concert," Cherry told her mother. "It must be a long dress. Do you think you can manage to buy one for me, Mama?"

Her mother shook her head.







"It is a lot of money for a dress like that," she said. "And things are really hard right now. I just don't see how I can manage it."

"All right, Mama," Cherry said. "I can see that things are hard. It is OK."

She turned away so that her mother could not see her face. But her mother could tell that she was sad.

"I suppose your father could send it for you from England," she said. "Want me to write and ask him?"

Cherry looked at her in surprise.

"My father?" she said. "You think he would answer you? Look how long now you haven't had a letter from him!"

"That is so," her mother answered. "But we can still try. It is the only hope."

"All right, Mama. Write if you want," Cherry said. And she went inside to put down her school things."

For the rest of the day Cherry was sad. She tried not to let her mother see it. She did not want her mother to feel bad about the dress.

She was sure her father was not going to help. Cherry did not even know him. He had gone to England when she was very little. Her mother did not hear from him much. So Cherry did not see the use of writing to ask him. But she did not say anything more about it to her mother. The next day, when she got home from school, she saw her mother holding a letter. She had a very funny look on her face.

"What is it, Mama?" Cherry asked.

"Your father is coming home," her mother said.

Cherry was so surprised she could not say a thing. Then she asked, "When is he coming?"



"I don't know," her mother answered. "He only says he is coming soon."

"But what is he coming for?" asked Cherry.

"He is coming back home to live," her mother said.

"Everybody wants to come back home in the end if they can manage it."

"I don't see how he can come here," Cherry said. "The place is so small already. It can't even hold the two of us, much less . . ."

"He is not going to stay here," her mother answered. "He has his place in the country. His other children are there."



"Oh, I see," Cherry said. "If that is so, he can always come. I don't care."

"You should be glad that you are going to know your father," her mother said. But she did not sound very happy herself.

Cherry did not answer. She walked away and sat by herself under a tree in the yard. The breeze was cool there. She did not know what to think.



Her mother was poor, and there were many things they did not have. But they managed all right. And she was a good mother to Cherry. Cherry loved her. So she did not want anybody to come and trouble her mother.

But still, a father is a father. And if he could help them with money, they would not be so poor. She just did not know what to think.

Cherry did not get much sleep that night. When she went to school the next day, she told her friend, Precious, about it.

"My father was different," Precious said. "He was very good to us. He is dead now, and I miss him."

"I don't know if I want mine to come," said Cherry. "I don't know how I am going to behave. Suppose I don't like him?"

"But he is your father!" Precious said in surprise. "You have to love him."

"Then he should love me too," Cherry said. "And if he loved me, how come he didn't do anything for me all this time?"





"I don't know," Precious said. "Some fathers are good, and some are not so good, I suppose. I hope yours will turn out OK."

"I hope so, too," Cherry said. "But I feel funny about it. I don't even know what to call him!"

When Cherry got home after school her mother was not there. Cherry was glad. She put away her school things and picked up the broom. This was the day when her mother went to buy goods to take to market. If Cherry could manage to fix up the place and cook the dinner, her mother could rest when she came home.



After a while, there was a knock at the gate. Cherry went to the gate with the broom in her hand. She saw a man standing there.



"Yes," she said. "What is it?"

The man smiled. "I hope your mother is at home," he said.

"No," Cherry answered. "What do you want?"

"I want to see her," the man said. "And I think I want to see you too, Cherry. What a way you look like her!"

Cherry looked at him hard. "Who are you?" she asked.

"I am your father, Cherry," the man answered.



Cherry was so surprised she could not say anything at first. "But . . . but . . . we only got the letter yesterday!" she said at last.

Her father smiled and came into the yard. He was a big heavy man. He was holding a big bag in his hand. "That's a pity, but letters can take a long time," he said. "I didn't think I would get here so soon, myself."



He showed her the bag. "I have some things here for you and your mother," he said. "I will just put them inside." He took the bag and went into the room.

Cherry stayed outside. She hoped her mother would come soon. She went on working in the yard, always looking at the door to see if her father was coming out.

At last she saw her mother coming home with the heavy crocus bag on her head. Cherry ran to her.

"My father came," she said. "He is inside."

Her mother was so surprised she nearly dropped the crocus bag. She came into the yard, and Cherry helped her to take down the crocus bag.

"You stay here, and let me go and talk to him," her mother said.



Cherry looked on as her mother and father talked at the door. Her father was smiling. But she could not see her mother's face, and she could not hear them. Then her father took up the bag and started to take things out. He gave them to her mother.



Her mother turned and called Cherry. She had a big smile on her face.

Cherry went up to them at the door. Her mother took a dress and put it into Cherry's hands. "How do you like this?" she asked. "Hold it up and see."



It was a long, pretty white dress. It would be just right for the concert.

Cherry smiled. "It is very pretty," she said slowly. "Who told you I wanted a dress like this?"

"Nobody," her father replied. "It was just luck."

"Thank you very much," Cherry said.

"You are a lucky girl," said her mother.

Cherry took the dress. She went and sat by herself under the tree in the yard. She was feeling very happy.

Her father did not stay long after that. He had to go to catch the bus to the country. They gave him something to eat and drink, and then he went.





That night Cherry sat on the bed with her dress in her lap. She was running her hand over the dress.

"Feel all right now?" her mother asked, as she put her hand on Cherry's head.

"The dress is nice," Cherry said. "I am very glad I got it."





Her mother smiled a funny smile. "Well, now that you have your father to give you pretty things, I hope you will not forget your poor old mother," she said. And she turned away her face.

"Don't say that, Mama," Cherry said. "You think that a dress can mean more to me than you? I could always manage without the dress. But I could never manage without you."







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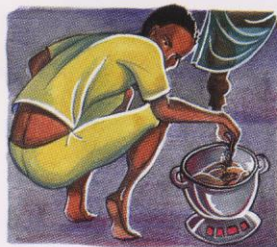
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