

TOUGH TIFF'S BAD DAY

CHAPTER TWO

I looked up at the sky. Clouds were moving to cover the sun. I like watching clouds and picking out shapes in the sky. One cloud looked like a lion. Another looked like a smiley face. I smiled back.

My neighbor, Mrs. Posey, grows roses in her yard. I touched one of the flowers, careful not to prick my fingers with the thorns, and took a deep sniff. It smelled sweet and fresh.

The sky changed quickly. The sun was completely covered by clouds, and what was blue had turned gray. I heard thunder in the distance and trembled. I don't like loud noises, especially the sound of thunder.

"It's a good thing I keep an umbrella in my book bag," I said. "This won't be so bad."

I spoke too soon.

It began to rain. It rained hard, stinging rain. Not soft, drizzling rain.

The wind was so strong that it snatched the umbrella from my hand and blew it away. My history report on Wilma Rudolph blew away, too, and my math homework fell in a mud puddle.

"Oh, no!" I screamed. I was drenched. The raindrops were cold, like the freezing water in my shower.

"I'll help you, Tough Tiff," I heard a voice say. It was my friend Reggie.

Reggie grabbed all my papers and covered me with her umbrella. She gave me a towel from her gym bag.

"Thanks for getting all my homework pages, Reggie." I put the wet papers back in my book bag and made sure to stay under her umbrella. I thanked her for the towel, too.

"It's no problem," Reggie said. "I have swim practice after school today. I have plenty of towels."

Reggie is captain of the swim team at Charles Drew Elementary School, and her goal is to swim in the Olympics one day. I promised her that I'd be there to cheer for her.

"How is your morning going?" she asked.

My glasses slid down my nose. "I'm having a bad day."

"What's wrong?" Reggie sounded concerned.

I dried myself off and told her all about it.

"First my alarm clock didn't buzz. Then my shower felt like tiny ice cubes. Then toothpaste globs dripped, dripped, dripped all over my favorite pink shirt. Then my hair went left when I brushed it right. Then I had to eat unsoggy cereal for breakfast, and there was no grape juice. Then I spilled my orange juice. Then Chew grabbed my glasses and ran under my bed. Now all my papers have blown away, and I am soaking wet."



"Don't worry," Reggie said. "Everyone has bad days sometimes. I caught all the papers that blew out of your book bag, and you can share my umbrella." She gave me a hug. "I'm sorry you're having such a bad day, but it will get better. See, there's Bus Number 3 now."

I felt relieved. I couldn't wait to get on the bus and out of the rain.

"I'm dry now." I handed Reggie her towel. "It's soaked," I said.

She folded it and put it back in her gym bag. "That's okay. I have plenty of towels."

"You're such a good friend, Reggie," I said. "This day isn't so bad."

I spoke too soon.

We hurried to get in line behind the other kids who were boarding the bus, but we were too slow. Bus Number 3 pulled away from the curb before Reggie and I could get on it.

"Wait! Wait!" we yelled, but it was too late. The bus splashed water on our clothes and blew exhaust in our faces as it sped away.

"Great. Now I'll have to ride Bus Number 4 with Meanie Greenie," I said.

I don't know anyone else like Carlos Green. He's mean to everyone, even when



no one is bothering him. I wasn't looking forward to seeing him at all.

"I'm having a bad day," I said.

"Cheer up, Tough Tiff. At least we're here together," Reggie said. "Look, here come Gus and Richie. They'll keep us company."

Gus and Richie are the funniest two kids at Charles Drew Elementary School. Reggie and I always have a good time playing with them and telling jokes.

"Hey, Reggie. Hey, Tough Tiff," Gus said. He was carrying his trumpet. He takes his instrument with him wherever he goes.

"What are you two doing here?" Richie asked. "You usually take the earlier bus."

Richie was wearing a raincoat covered in space shuttles. He wants to be an astronaut when he grows up.

"It's a long story," I said. "I'm having a bad day."

"What happened?" Richie asked.

I told him all about it.

"First my alarm clock didn't buzz. Then my shower felt like tiny ice cubes. Then toothpaste globs dripped, dripped, dripped all over my favorite pink shirt. Then my hair went left when I brushed it right. Then I had to eat unsoggy cereal for breakfast, and there was no grape juice. Then I spilled my orange juice. Then Chew grabbed my glasses and ran under my bed. Then all my papers blew away, and I got soaking wet. Now I've missed the early bus. I'll have to ride Bus Number 4 with Meanie Greenie."

"I'm sorry all that stuff happened to you," Gus said. "Everyone has bad days sometimes."

"That's right," Richie said. "We're all here together now. Your day will get better."

I wanted to believe him, but I felt so frustrated, and I was miserable waiting outside in the rain.

The four of us huddled together to block the howling wind and pouring rain. Gus squeezed the handle on his trumpet case. Richie pulled the hood of his raincoat over his head. Reggie and I shared her umbrella.

"I have an idea," Gus said. "Let's play 'What Am I' until the bus comes?"

"What Am I" is one of my favorite games. One kid gives clues, and the other kids have to guess what he's talking about.

"I'll go first," Gus said. "I go up, but I never come down. What am I?"

I scratched my head. "Are you a cloud?"

"Nope," Gus said.

"Hmm. Are you a balloon? Are you air? Are you a hot air balloon?" Reggie asked.

"Nope," Gus said.

"Then what are you?" Richie asked.

"I'm your age," Gus said.

We laughed.

"That's funny," Reggie said. "I have a riddle, too. I start with the letter 'e.' I end with the letter 'e.' I only have one letter inside. What am I?"

"That's impossible," I said. "You're making that up."

"No, I'm not," Reggie said. "I'm an envelope. Get it? The word starts with 'e' and ends with 'e' and there is a letter in it."

"That's a good one," I said. "My turn. I go all around town, but I never come inside. What am I?"

"I don't know," Gus said. "What are you?"

"I'm the street," I said.

"That was a tricky one, but I have the best riddle of all," Richie said. He tightened the hood on his raincoat. "I lose my head every morning, but I get it back every night. What am I?"

Reggie, Gus, and I thought about it, but none of us could figure it out.

"I'm a pillow," Richie said.



I laughed so hard that my side hurt.

"Thanks for cheering me up, Richie," I said.

"This day isn't so bad."

I spoke too soon.

"Well, well, well, if it isn't Tiny Tiff," I heard an angry voice hiss. I would recognize that voice anywhere. It was Carlos Green, the boy I call Meanie Greenie.

Carlos makes me so mad. I get the angriest when he makes fun of my name. He calls me Terrible Tiff, or Troublemaker Tiff, or Talkative Tiff. Once, when I told Principal Leades that he was bullying kids on the

playground, he called me Tattletale Tiff.

Carlos is bigger than most of the other kids at Charles Drew Elementary School, and he likes to pick on us. No one likes him because he is just so mean.

Reggie stepped in between Meanie Greenie and me. "Leave Tough Tiff alone," she said. Carlos is the only kid who makes her mad.

"That's right," Gus said. He sounded furious. "Tough Tiff didn't do anything to you, so you leave her alone."

"I'm not talking to you Weird Reggie or Goofy Gus," he said. "You shut up and stay out of this. I'm talking to Tiny Tiff."

He marched toward us in the pouring rain. The wind was blowing his bright red hair, and he looked meaner than ever sloshing through those puddles.

"I'm having a bad day," I said. "You better leave me alone or I'm going to..."

"You're going to what?" Meanie Greenie's face was so close to mine that our noses nearly touched. His eyes were narrow and angry. I could feel his breath. I felt hot inside.

"Tiny Tiff! Tiny Tiff! Tiny Tiff!" He danced around in circles and sang it again. "Tiny Tiff! Tiny Tiff! Tiny Tiff!"

"Stop it!" I yelled.

"Make me," he hissed.

My blood was boiling. I know I shouldn't have done it, but I pushed Carlos Green as hard as I could. He fell backward into a huge puddle. He was soaking wet and covered with mud.

I immediately felt horrible. I know better than to push people into mud puddles, even when they are as mean as Carlos Green.

Some kids looked shocked by what I had done. Others laughed and pointed at Carlos all covered in mud. A few turned away because they didn't want to get involved. No one was on Meanie Greenie's side.

"I'm going to get you for this, Tiny Tiff." Meanie Greenie wagged his finger in my face. He was moving so fast that he slipped forward into another puddle. Mud covered every inch of him.

I didn't move. I didn't know what to do.

"Hey, kids. No fighting." Mr. Rhodes, the bus driver, got off of Bus Number 4 and scolded us. I knew I was in deep, deep trouble. "I'm taking the two of you to the principal's office as soon as we get to school," Mr. Rhodes said.

"But I didn't do anything." Meanie Greenie pointed at me. "She is the one who pushed me."

"We all saw you picking on Tough Tiff," Richie said. "You started it."

"That's right. Carlos started it," a boy named Pedro said.

"I don't care who started it," Mr. Rhodes said. "There is absolutely no fighting allowed at the bus stop. Period. You can explain yourselves to Principal Leades."

Mr. Rhodes is a serious man, especially when it comes to fighting and horsing around at the bus stop. "Everyone get on the bus right now," he said.

We filed onto the bus. Meanie Greenie moved to the back by himself. Reggie sat next to me, and Gus and Richie found seats close by.

"I'm going to be in so much trouble," I said. "My parents and I have discussed this. I am absolutely not allowed to start fights."

"But Carlos was picking on you," Gus said. "We all saw him. He was calling you names."

"I know," I said. "I should have ignored him. I didn't have to push him."

"My parents told me that I am supposed to walk away from bullies and find a grownup," Reggie said.

"That's what my parents told me to do, too," I said. "I wish I hadn't pushed him."

"What do you think Principal Leades is going to say?" Richie asked.

"I don't know." I was more worried about what my parents were going to do.

"I'm sorry you're having such a bad day," Gus said.

"Me, too," Richie said. "At least we're on the bus now and not in the rain."

"You're right," I said.

I remembered what Mom and Dad told me earlier in the morning. I couldn't change what had already happened, and there were still things to look forward to during my day.

"The worst is over," I said. "This day isn't so bad."

I spoke too soon.

I was chatting with Reggie, Richie, and Gus when Mr. Rhodes made the final left turn to Charles Drew Elementary School. The bus hit a huge bump in the road, and the lunch Mom packed for me fell out of my lap. The bus swerved, and my apple rolled through the aisle. My sandwich fell to the floor, and my juice bottle slipped and spilled all over the seat.

"Oh, no," I said.

Reggie, Richie, and Gus tried to help me grab everything, but my lunch was ruined.

"I'm having a bad day," I said. "First my alarm clock didn't buzz. Then my shower felt like tiny ice cubes. Then toothpaste globs dripped, dripped, dripped all over my favorite pink shirt. Then my hair went left when I brushed it right. Then I had to eat unsoggy cereal for breakfast, and there was no grape juice. Then I spilled my orange juice. Then Chew grabbed my glasses and ran under my bed. Then all my papers blew away, and I got soaking wet. Then I missed the early bus. Then I pushed Carlos Green into a mud puddle. Now my lunch is ruined."

Mr. Rhodes parked Bus Number 4 in front of the school. I got off feeling defeated, and I still had to go to the principal's office.