

LINGAY'S REVENGE

By Valerie Crichlow

"All yuh run look she coming," Tommy Seales shouted loudly. A dozen voices screamed in reply, as the school-children darted wildly away trying to escape the wrath of the old woman. "Long and Lingayayayay....." they chorused in a final taunt, as they raced away up the sidewalk. Lingay spat furiously, shook her long, crooked walking-stick at them, and swore vengeance on their heads.

"Ah will fix all yuh good and proper," she hissed.

This was a common scene enacted along the main streets of Chacaban on afternoons. After the long hours of confinement at school, many children found sweet release in fights, stoning fruit trees and harrasing the many vagrants who crossed their paths. One such unlucky being was Lingay. Somehow the nickname suited her well. She was tall, bent and wiry, her skin dark and leathery. She always wore a grimy- looking piece of cloth wound around her head. In one hand she carried a large crocus bag, and in the other, a long, crooked walking-stick. On her feet were a pair of black shoes that could have once been white, and had definitely seen better days. However the most prominent feature of Lingay's person was her mouth, from which issued all manner of abuse and, in particular, spittle. Her ability to spit at great lengths was what often prompted the ridicule. Whenever she was taunted by the schoolchildren, she would let fly a barrage of spittle, which perhaps never reached its mark. The children found this great fun, and thus, Lingay seldom found peace on the streets of Chacaban.

Time and again, Tommy Seales and his bunch continued to torment Lingay. They would sneak up to her from behind, calling her foul names. She in turn would rant and rave and spit at them. Tommy was a seventh standard pupil, big and tough, and well versed in the art of wrong doing. He took no notice of Lingay's threats, for, after all she was only a feeble old woman. But therein lay his mistake, for despite Lingay's age and many delusions, she never forgot the culprits and their constant insults to her person. She patiently awaited her opportunity for revenge. At last, one day, it came.

Tommy Seales and a few of his classmates were in the habit of "making biche" and making excursions to a river that lay a fair distance away from the school. Here they would throw cares to the wind, and frolic in the cool water for an hour or two. Overhanging the river were a few mango trees which lent an added attraction to these afternoon jaunts. The boys spent many hours here, eating mangoes bathing and relaxing after the boredom of their morning classes. But, unknown to them, there was one person who knew of these happenings. This was Lingay. She was in the habit of washing herself and her few belongings in this river at a well secluded spot, where she could not be seen. Of course she recognized Tommy and his friends as her main tormentors. She decided on a plan of action.

"Hee hee hee," she chuckled to herself, "when ah catch dem offguard, is crapaud smoke dey pipe."

So it was that on a hot Friday afternoon, while others were reading the history of far off places,

that Tommy and four of his friends were entering their river of pleasure. Lingay watched gleefully from her hiding place. The boys, with gay abandon, tossed their school clothes aside. They jumped into the river, romping and horsing around, diving and splashing. They were so immersed in their boyish merriment, that they did not see that familiar stooping figure. She crept up stealthily, gathered up their clothes, stuffed them into her old bag, and retreated quietly.

"De headmaster mus want tuh see dis," she crowed to herself.

The entire school was in an uproar as Lingay appeared on the school premises.

"Look Lingay!"

"Ah wonder what she up to."

"Maybe she come to complain about somebody."

Scores of curious eyes peered out searching for a clue to the old woman's sudden appearance. The headmaster was indeed very interested in Lingay's find. He knew exactly to whom they belonged, and thanked her for her help.

"I'll deal with the culprits," he assured her. He prepared to pay a surprise visit to the river.

Lingay's heart was glad as she left the school that day. She retraced her steps to the river as quickly as her tired legs would carry her. She could not miss the final episode in this drama. "Haa haa, hee hee hee," she chuckled to herself, as she hobbled over to her clump of bushes to conceal herself. There they were, Tommy and his friends still horsing around in the water. Then lo and behold, she spied the headmaster standing quietly beneath a mango tree, legs apart, arms crossed behind, and a bundle of clothes at his feet. There was a dreadful look on his face, as he dangled his famous leather strap, "The Ripper" behind him. Lingay trembled with excitement. How sweet was the taste of revenge on these little rascals. Eventually Tommy and his boys emerged from the water dripping wet.

"Ay fellas," one boy shouted, "where de clothes gone?"

"Ah put dem right here man, wha going on?" returned another.

"Could you be referring to these?" a voice boomed from beneath a mango tree.

The boys grew rigid, and rooted to the spot. Eyes wide and mouths hanging open, they took in the menacing figure of Mr Barker. Lingay was ecstatic.

"Ok boys," he bellowed, "The Ripper talks first, and I ask questions later."

A look of utter misery crossed five wet faces, as the boys realized that they would be belted without their clothes on.

Mr Barker looked angry as he lined up each boy close to the mango tree, and delivered four

strokes on each naked rump. The less robust of the lot cried out in pain, and Lingay grinned with satisfaction. Yes, she had gotten her revenge, and more than she had bargained for.