

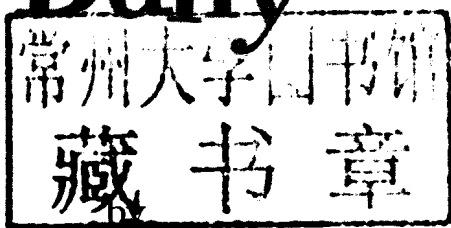
How to Handle a Bully

Nancy
Wilcox
Richards



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Nancy Wilcox Richards

illustrations by
David Sourwine

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**Also by
Nancy Wilcox Richards:**

- **How to Tame a Bully**
- **How to Outplay a Bully**

*For Mom, who shared her own stories about
being bullied, and for Dad, who worked a
second job to buy me my very first two-wheeler.*

— N.W.R.

Chapter 1

My name is Marilla — but everyone calls me Rilla for short. Right now I'm in Grade Three. But in two more months it'll be summer vacation. Then it's on to Grade Four. I'm kind of excited and a little bit nervous about Grade Four.



The good things about Grade Three include Ms MacArthur — she's everybody's favourite teacher — plus there's no homework on the weekends. And I really like being with my friends Tony, Lauren and Nicholas. The bad things about Grade Three include super hard math and playground cleanup duty. It is totally gross picking up slimy garbage.

Grade Four will be hard. I know there will be a lot more homework. And what if none of my friends are in the same class? But the worst thing is Mr. Dean. The kids call him Mr. Mean because when he yells, the whole school can hear him. He gives tons of detentions. I sure hope I'm not in his class.

Right now, Ms MacArthur is getting ready to have our usual Morning Meeting. She tells us important stuff — like if we have music or gym. Sometimes she tells us about a new school rule. Lots of mornings she starts off with a riddle. That's my favourite part.

“Good morning, everyone!” Ms MacArthur smiled. Then she paused and looked toward the side of the room. “I’ll wait just another moment until Bethany joins us for the meeting.” Twenty-two pairs of eyes turned to watch Bethany stuff something in her desk and then scurry over to sit on the mat. “Now,” continued Ms MacArthur, “the biggest news of the day is this.” She waved a sheet

of paper. "A fitness challenge will take place next month at the community park."

"Cool!" yelled Nicholas.

"What do we have to do?" asked Lauren.

Ms MacArthur held up her hand for quiet. "Let me read this to you." She unfolded the paper. "Come to Bayfield Community Park and join us for some fun and challenging activities at the First Annual Bayfield Fitness Challenge. Test your strength by doing chin-ups. Race through the tire run. Try your luck on the bicycle obstacle course. And much, much more! Earn points and you could win a brand new X-Treme bike, complete with a water bottle and matching helmet."

"Sweet!" said Tony.

Ms MacArthur pinned the poster on the bulletin board. "You can check out all the details here," she said. "Now, I have just a few reminders for you boys and girls. First, it's a gym day, and second, Vanessa Cardui will be joining our class tomorrow. I think you'll all really enjoy having Vanessa in our class."



“Who’s she?” asked Lauren. “Can she sit by me?”

MsMacArthur laughed. “Patience, patience. You’ll meet Vanessa Cardui tomorrow. But before we head back to our groups to finish yesterday’s art project, I have a little riddle to start our day. Ready?”

Most of us nodded our heads. This was my favourite part of the Morning Meeting.

“What do you call a funny book about eggs?”

I glanced around. Everyone was thinking really hard. Eyes scrunched. Heads tilted.

“What do you call a funny book about eggs?” I repeated. “I know! I know!” I shouted.

Ms MacArthur smiled at me. “Rilla, what do you call a funny book about eggs?”

“A *yolk* book!” and I laughed.

There were a few groans in the room.

“Good one,” said Claire. She usually guesses the riddles before anyone else. “I’ll have to try that one on my dad tonight.”

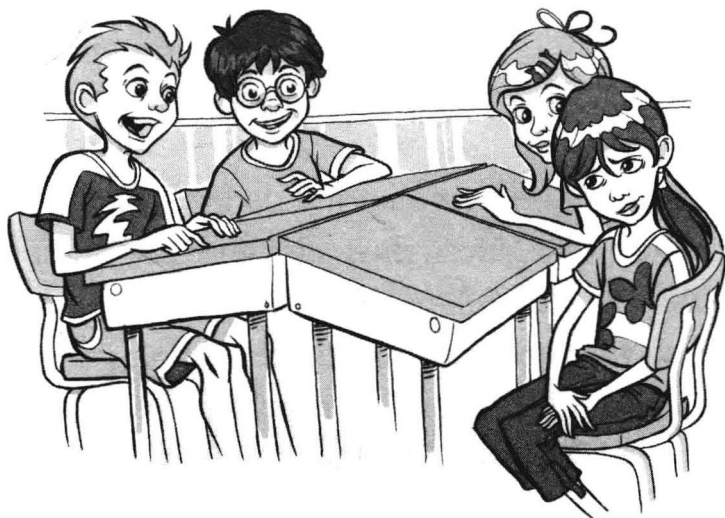
Then Ms MacArthur clapped her hands. “Okay, kids. Back to your groups. We need to finish that art project today.”

“Hey, Rilla,” Tony whispered to me from his seat, “are you going to enter the fitness challenge? *I* definitely am. I’m in pretty good shape from hockey.” He flexed a muscle and then laughed.

“Me, too!” answered Lauren. “The park is right across the street from my house. I go there every day. I can practise on the playground equipment whenever I want.”

I looked down at my sneakers and scuffed my toe across the floor. “Not sure,” I mumbled.

“You should,” coaxed Nicholas. “No one can beat you when we do chin-ups in gym. And I’ve watched you on the monkey bars. You’re really fast.”



I could feel everyone looking at me. Waiting for an answer. My face was warm. “Um . . .” I paused, and whispered, “I don’t know how to ride a two-wheeler. I still use training wheels.”

“Oh,” said Nicholas, and he sounded just about as sad as I did.

Chapter 2

The next morning Ms MacArthur said, “Class, today you’ll meet Vanessa Cardui.”

I looked around. So did everyone else. I didn’t see the new girl anywhere.

“I wonder when she’ll get here?” whispered Lauren.

I shrugged my shoulders. I kind of hoped she could sit at my table. I waved my hand in the air. “Ms MacArthur! Ms MacArthur! Can Vanessa sit with me?”

Ms MacArthur laughed. “Actually, Rilla, Vanessa will sit with all of you.”

Now that did *not* make sense. There was no way she could sit at six different tables. But before I could ask any questions, there was a knock at the door. Maybe it was her.

“Ah.” Ms MacArthur beamed. “Vanessa Cardui is finally here.”

I looked for the new girl. But all I saw was the secretary. She handed the teacher a large box. Where was Vanessa?

“Can you see her?” Nicholas asked me.

“Nope.”

“Hey, Tony!” whispered Nicholas. “Can you see the new girl?”

Tony shook his head.



Then Ms MacArthur held up the box. “Here is Vanessa.”

I looked at Nicholas. He shrugged his shoulders. This was weird. There was no way a kid could be in a box.

“Now,” began Ms MacArthur, “I can see you’re all puzzled. I guess this is a bit like another one of my riddles.” She paused to make sure she had everyone’s attention. “*Vanessa cardui* isn’t actually a person. ‘She,’ or I guess I should say ‘it,’ is in the box. Anybody want to guess what *Vanessa cardui* might be?”

Huh? Vanessa wasn’t a new girl? I thought about what it could be. Before I could guess, Bethany called out from the back of the room.

“Is it a gerbil?”

Ms MacArthur shook her head.

“Is it a rabbit?” guessed Tony.

Again, Ms MacArthur shook her head.

“I know!” yelled Lauren. “Vanessa is a hedgehog!”

Everyone laughed, including the teacher.

“Here’s a riddle to help solve the mystery.

Ready?" Ms MacArthur wrote on the board:

I have more than four legs.

My baby does not look like me.

I taste with my feet.

What am I?

I was pretty sure that the first clue meant it had to be an insect. But what animal tastes with its feet?

Hands went up around the room.

"Is it a grasshopper?" guessed Aaron.

Ms MacArthur shook her head.

"Is it a spider?" guessed James.

Ms MacArthur shook her head.

"Is it an octopus?" guessed Claire.

Again Ms MacArthur shook her head. "Here it is," she said, and she pulled a jar out of the box. It looked like it was filled with leaves. "These thistle leaves are covered with tiny eggs," she explained. "Over the next few days they will hatch into . . ."

“Caterpillars!” I shouted.

Ms MacArthur smiled at me. “That’s right, Rilla. And then eventually the caterpillars will become butterflies — Painted Lady butterflies, to be exact. Or as scientists like to call them, *Vanessa cardui*.”

So now we knew. *Vanessa cardui* wasn’t a new girl. It was our latest science project.

Chapter 3



The eggs were really tiny. They were only as big as the head of a pin. By the end of the day, some of the eggs had already hatched. Now, I usually think of caterpillars as cute and furry. But these things were ugly. They reminded me of grey worms with just a few hairs. Kind of gross. Ms MacArthur gave us