

BASEBALL BATS

This One



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Sharon Jennings



HIP-JR.

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HIP Junior
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When Mr. Chong is charged with stealing jewelry, Sam and Simon know he isn't guilty. The Bat Gang sets out to catch the real thief but soon the boys get into more trouble than they can handle.

CHAPTER ONE

Where's Mr. Chong?

Last week of school!
One more week and we're out of grade six
and out of this school forever!

I high-fived my buddy Simon.

"Ouch!" Simon yelled. "That's my pitching
hand, Sam. You want me to pitch a lousy game?"

I rolled my eyes. Simon is a pretty good pitcher,
but he acts like his hand is made of glass. Still, our
last game was this afternoon. And we were a sure
bet to win the championship.

"Sorry," I said. I meant it, too.

The two of us went up the stairs to our old classroom.

"Won't it be great not to see Mr. Chong ever again?" I said. I mean, he's okay, but he's been my teacher three times. First in grade one, then in grade three and now in grade six. With my luck, he'll show up at my new junior high next year.

Simon shrugged. "I like him. And he's a great baseball coach."

Whatever.

We went in the door of our class and Mr. Chong wasn't there. We had a substitute teacher. And not just any sub. It was Mrs. Polk, the mean old lady with the fish-eye stare! The one so ugly we called her Mrs. Puke (behind her back, of course).

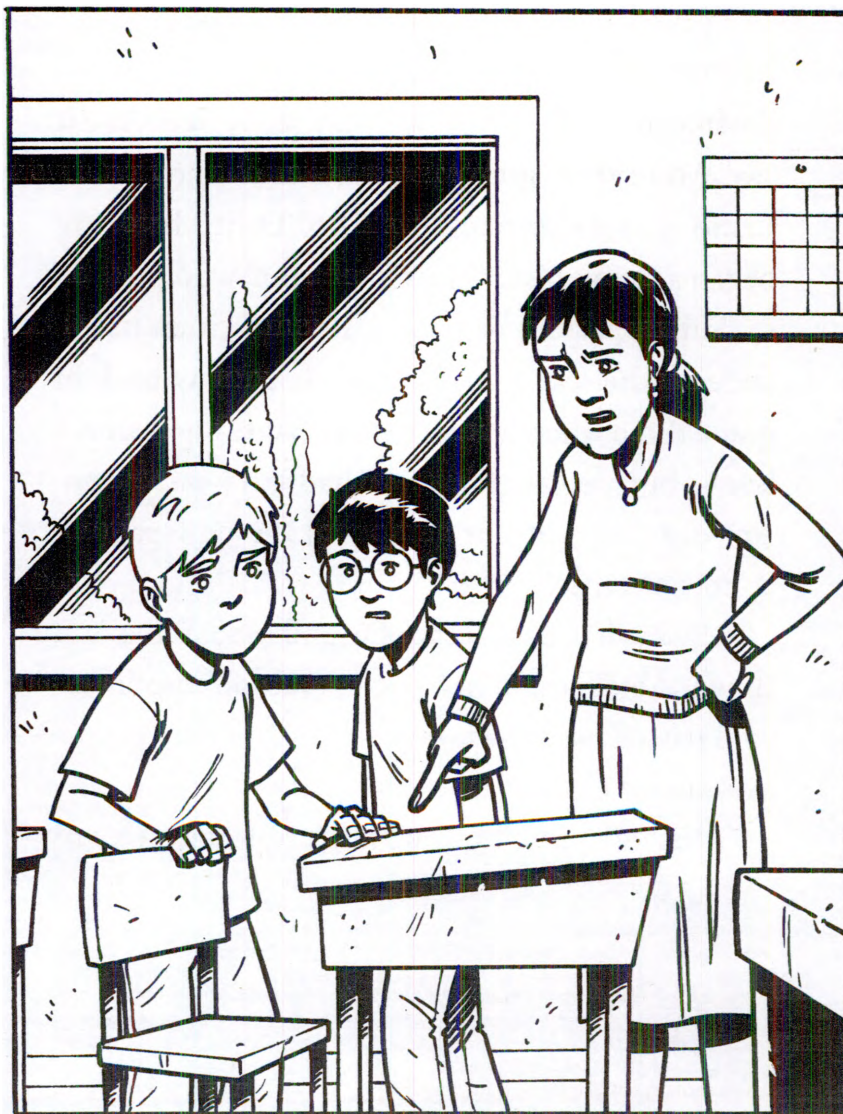
"Why are you here?" I shouted.

"Sit down and be quiet," answered Mrs. Puke.

"Yeah, okay, but where is Mr. Chong?"

"SIT DOWN AND BE QUIET!" she repeated.

"Is he sick? What about the baseball game this afternoon?" demanded Simon.



“I . . . SAID . . . SIT . . . DOWN . . . AND . . . BE . . .
QUIET!!!!”

Boy, for an old bag she can really yell. And I swear she was foaming at the mouth.

So we sat down and shut up. Then Mrs. Puke began a dumb history lesson. I mean, who cares?

Simon passed me a note. It was written in Bat code — the secret code we made up way back in grade three when we started the Bat Gang. lame, I know, but we caught lots of bad guys since then. And we even got our picture in the newspaper a couple of times!

Uw uvyh it dnof tei uruhw gnihC so. T’nyc ig it
umyg teihtow moh. In hcyic — duofolyeqsod!*

I passed back my note.

Ssucur! Ucoffi!**

Mrs. Puke caught us with the note. She gave us

* We have to find out where Chong is. Can't go to game without him.
No coach — disqualified!
** Recess! Office!

the fish eye and said she was sending us to the office at recess. The joke's on her because — if you can read Bat code — we were going there anyway!

In the office we had to wait for our school secretary, the world's oldest school secretary. I mean, she must be at least 100 years old. Anyhow, I first asked her, "What happened to Mr. Chong?"

"You're supposed to be outside."

"Yeah, I know, but . . ."

"THEN GO OUTSIDE!" the secretary yelled.

What is it with adults? Why can't they just answer a question without yelling? But then I saw our principal.

"Hey, Mr. Davidson," I called. "Where's Mr. Chong?"

"Sorry, Sam. That's private."

"Is he sick?"

"What about the baseball game today?" Simon added. "We need Mr. Chong to win."

"Sorry about that, boys. But it's just a game."

Just a game? JUST . . . A . . . GAME??

"No it's not," Simon yelled out. "It's the

championship game and it's against St. Jamestown! It's the school that always beats us!" Last year we lost every game to St. Jamestown. Soccer, baseball, hockey, you name it.

Mr. Davidson started to say something and then stopped. I saw a look in his eye and knew Mr. Davidson didn't want to lose again. Not to St. Jamestown.

"Fine," he said. "I'll find someone to coach."

I started to high-five Simon but then remembered his glass hand. We ran outside instead. Funny, we never did tell the office we'd been sent there by Mrs. Puke.

"So what's up with Mr. Chong?" I asked some kid.

The kid shrugged. It turned out that nobody knew.

Then I had a brainstorm. Mr. Chong's kids are in grade one and grade four at this school. We ran to find them and get some answers.

No luck. His kids didn't come to school, either. This was getting really weird. I mean, maybe it was

no big deal. Maybe the whole family had flu. But if so — why not tell us?

So, at lunchtime, Simon said, "Let's bike over to Mr. Chong's house. He'll tell us what's going on."

Good idea. Mr. Chong didn't live far away.

So after we ate, we made sure no one was looking (me and Simon are supposed to stay at school over lunch). Then we hopped on our bikes and took off like bats out of . . . whatever. (That's a joke 'cause of our Bat Gang — get it?)

In five minutes we were in front of Mr. Chong's house.

But so were four cop cars and a bunch of reporters!

CHAPTER TWO

On the Case!

Lots of people were out front, just staring at Mr. Chong's house. Cops waved at cars to keep them going and then yelled at all the people blocking the sidewalk.

"Nothing to see! Move along! Move along!"

Of course nobody moved. That just made the cops get madder.

Then all of a sudden people pushed forward. I saw some of the reporters running up the driveway. Cops kept screaming to stay back, but no one cared.



Simon and I leaned our bikes against a fence. Then we hopped up on the seats to get a good look.

What we saw was Mr. Chong coming out of his house with three cops. And he was in handcuffs.

What?!

The officers put Mr. Chong into a police car and left. Slowly people began moving away.

"Beat it! Back to work folks. Show's over," the cops yelled.

Then Simon grabbed my arm and pointed — which made me fall off my bike. He was pointing at Officer Brannon. We knew her from way back and she liked us. "Maybe she'll tell us what's going on," Simon said.

So we pushed our way over and waved at her.

"Sam! Simon! How's it going?" she asked.

"Not good," Simon said. "You arrested our teacher and our baseball coach. What did he do?"

"Your coach? Gosh, I'm sorry. Well . . . it'll be all over the news pretty soon, so I might as well fill you in. You see, Mr. Chong is a suspect in a bunch of robberies. Four jewelry stores were robbed a couple of weeks ago. Lots of things seem to point right at him," Officer Brannon told us.

I was speechless. I mean, no one likes teachers, but Mr. Chong? A thief? No way!

"You're nuts!" Simon said to her. "You've got the wrong guy."

Officer Brannon shrugged. "Well, you two have

solved cases before. Maybe you should ask Mr. Chong to give you a job.”

She was joking. Right?

Simon and I ran back to our bikes. We got to school just before the bell. Then we found out Mr. Davidson was going to coach the afternoon game. Mr. Davidson, of all people!

Our new coach sent me and Carla to get our equipment — all new bats, balls and gloves. But I grabbed my favorite old bat, too. Why? Well, d’oh. Like all great players, I have a lucky bat!

Then our team and a lot of the other kids marched the few blocks to St. Jamestown. We sang fight songs and punched our fists in the air. We talked about finally beating St. Jamestown . . . at something. And we talked about Mr. Chong.

We sounded good, but we played a terrible game. No one could do anything right. Simon couldn’t pitch, even with his glass hand. And I couldn’t hit, even with my lucky bat. Out in the field, no one could catch a ball. At the bases, no one could run without tripping over their feet.

Even Carla, our best base runner, couldn't make it past second.

When it was my turn at bat, I managed to swing and miss — three times. Stupid bat.

"You swing like a girl!" their pitcher yelled at me.

I ran over to the mound. "Oh yeah?" I shouted. But the ump called me off the field.

I threw the stupid baseball bat into some weeds behind the batter's box. Then I sat out the rest of the game on the bench.

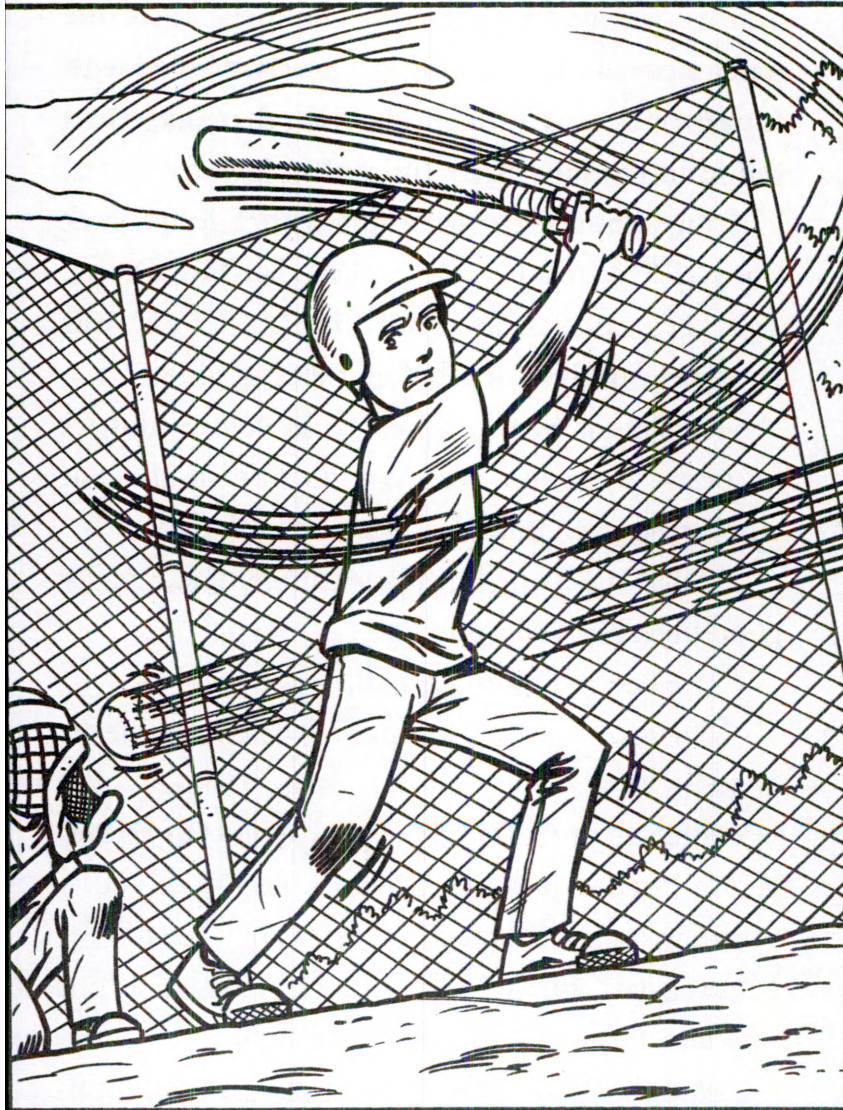
Finally it was over. Ten for St. Jamestown, zilch for us.

Of course their team made fun of us. And of course they said some nasty things about Mr. Chong. By now, everyone had heard the bad news. As we left their school, they all sang the "Na-na-na-na Good-bye" song.

Jerks.

Back at our school, the teachers had put together a party. But no one felt like partying.

That night was bad. I ate pizza over at Simon's



and we watched all the news channels. Each one had a story about Mr. Chong. He was charged with four robberies! They kept showing fuzzy clips of a tall, thin man going in and out of jewelry stores. The guy was sort of bald but with a long black ponytail . . . and he sure looked like Mr. Chong. The cops said it was proof that Mr. Chong was checking out the stores before robbing them.

That night our folks felt sorry for us and let us break the rules. We slept outside in the Bat clubhouse, even though it was a school night.

And around one in the morning, I had a really good idea. I woke Simon up.

"I've been thinking," I said.

"Uh-oh," Simon mumbled. "That's never good."

"Shut up and listen. We've solved lots of crimes right? But we just sort of stumble into them. I mean, we're not looking for cases. They just sort of come to us, right?"

"Like flies to poop," Simon replied.

"Well, I think this time should be different.

I think we should go after the guy who did this.

'Cause we know it wasn't Mr. Chong. Right?"

"Right," Simon said and fell asleep.

Wrong! Like he said — it's never a good thing
when I start thinking.