

## Jamila's Good Example - Chapter 1

### *"She Needs a Dog"*

"I hope Bowser is still there. He's my favorite!" exclaimed Jamila as she hopped into the car after school.

"I know, sweets. But wouldn't it be better if Bowser found a forever home?"

It was Wednesday, the day Ms. Davies took her daughter Jamila to Oakforest Animal Rescue where they volunteered as dog walkers, cat socializers, and playground assistants. With more than two and a half million residents, Chicago was one of the largest cities in the country and there always seemed to be more homeless pets than people who could adopt them. Riverdale, the very poorest suburb of Chicago where Jamila lived, was filled with dozens of homeless dogs and cats roaming the crowded streets and side allies looking for food. Every night echoed with hisses, growls, and fierce sounds of fights as the animals battled near garbage cans for leftover scraps. But most residents had become so accustomed to the snarling that they didn't hear them anymore.

After Jamila's dad had died two years ago from a rare illness, she and her mom were forced to move to Riverdale into a lower income housing unit. Dad had always provided enough for the family, but Ms. Davies was not able to find a job that would allow them to remain in their old neighborhood. Riverdale was near the hotel where she was hired as a food manager, so when an apartment became available last year, they moved.

Jamila's whole world was shattered. She had left behind all the friends she had known for the last eight years, the school with the best playground and teachers in the county, and the piano and art lessons she had so loved.

"She needs a dog. And I know just the place to find one."

Ms. Davies had been talking with a new friend she had made at work one morning. The woman listened attentively as Ms. Davies shared with her about the loss of her husband, the move to Riverdale, and now the deep concern she had for Jamila. "My once cheerful, lively little girl is now a bundle of sadness, lonely and depressed," she said, barely able to hold back the tears.

"A dog will change her life. You know, they don't call them man's best friend for no reason," smiled the woman. "And Oakforest Animal Rescue is the best place to look. I should know. I volunteer there!"

After work that day, the two ladies visited the rescue. What a happy, yappy place it was! Ms. Davies was overwhelmed by the number of eager dogs. They all seemed to be smiling and trying their best to impress this new person so they could be the chosen one and added to her family. The volunteers were very helpful and answered all her questions about adoption, costs, care, and training. Help would always be available if she needed it.

That day marked the turning point for Jamila. A week later she and her puppy were bouncing all over the furniture and playing chase through the yard. At school, she told everyone about her new furry friend, Buddy, the name she had selected because it was exactly what she had needed – a buddy.

Ever since that glorious day one year ago, Jamila and her mom volunteered at Oakforest every week. For the next two hours Jamila was either brushing and cuddling cats or throwing frisbees and assisting trainers in the dogs' play yard. She always seemed to have a current favorite, and Bowser was her puppy pal right now. They tumbled on the grass together and played catch until Bowser fell asleep on her lap, exhausted.

As they left the rescue, a young girl, along with her mother, who was pulling a reluctant dog on a leash, plodded slowly toward the entrance.

"No, Mama...no! Please, please don't give Herbie away..." wailed the girl. "I can...share some... of my dinner..." she choked out between sniffs and sobs.

"Too many mouths to feed. I'm so sorry honey...."

For one second the girl glanced at Jamila. As their eyes met, Jamila thought, "Oh, if only I could do something to help her keep her dog." Her heart ached.

## Jamila's Good Example - Chapter 2

### *Even Bullies Deserve to Eat*

Jamila had made many friends at school when she adopted Buddy. Puppies are magnets for attention, and lots of kids wanted to meet him, which resulted in many new friendships. She had become rather popular because of him, since most kids weren't able to afford a dog, and she was always willing to let others play with him.

Popular as she was, not everyone knew her. The most popular person at Riverdale Elementary School was Terek. Not because he had more friends, but rather because he was the worst bully that the school had ever encountered. Even the teachers hoped that he would not be assigned to their classroom, knowing that all the other students would be intimidated by his presence. Having been held back twice, he was now twelve years old and much bigger and stronger than the other fifth graders. He was a constant interruption during class and usually spent a portion of his day in the office doing his schoolwork under the watch of the principal.

Jamila wished she could go to another school, but there was little chance for that. Most Riverdale residents were single mothers, like hers, low-income, and just trying to feed their families and pay the rent. Of the 7,000 residents, 1500 of them had no job. Jamila quickly learned to be thankful that her mother had a job, and that because she was a food manager, she was able to bring home rolls and fruit every day that were left over from the hotel's breakfast table.

After today's yummy cinnamon roll breakfast, Ms. Davies prayed, as she did every morning. "And remind us, good heavenly Father, to be ready to do whatever is good, to give gentle answers, and to always be kind toward everyone. Amen."

During lunch today, Jamila and some friends were just finishing their pudding when, once again, their meal was interrupted by a fight that broke out. Terek just smacked a boy on the back of the head for no reason. They started to brawl, but broke it off when they saw the lunch monitor hurry out from the kitchen. No one admitted to the noise, and no one was brave enough to say it was Terek who started it.

The last bell rang. As Jamila crossed the school yard, she noticed a small but growing crowd was gathering near the sidewalk. "Oh, no," she thought. "Not again." Suddenly the group was forcibly split apart as a boy was hurled to the ground. The crowd moved away, leaving the boy to fend for himself against Terek, who was twice his size. He tried to stand, but Terek shoved him down while screaming, "If you ever tell on me again, you'll be spending the rest of your life in a wheelchair!"

"Leave him alone. He's already down – just let him go!" shouted some boys. Terek bent down, picked up a handful of pebbles, and pitched them at the boys, stinging a number of them before turning to leave.

Jamila, along with a few others, helped the bullied boy up. It was Dantrell, a fifth grader in a different class than Jamila.

"You okay, Dantrell?" she asked.

"I don't think I'll ever be okay until that kid is gone," is all he said. Jamila understood. A lot of kids felt that way.

“Hey, you want to come over and see my dog? He'll make you feel better!”

As they started off, Jamila spotted a blue card on the ground. It was the free lunch card that all low-income school kids carried. “Terek Somers,” she read aloud. “He must have dropped this during the brawl.”

“Serves him right,” said Dantrell. But Jamila paid no attention. Much to Dantrell's surprise, she ran after Terek.

“Hey! Terek! Wait up!”

“Whatta you want, little girly.”

“I think this belongs to you,” Jamila said, handing him the card. Terek snatched it out of her hand. He looked at her with a blank expression.

“Everyone deserves to eat,” she said kindly as she turned to leave.

Terek stood silent, staring down at the card.

### Jamila's Good Example - Chapter 3

#### *A Kind Rebuke*

Dantrell was careful to avoid Terek as much as possible, though being in the same class made it difficult. He ignored Terek's sneers and stayed close to other kids in the halls, on the playground, and especially when school let out.

Although Dantrell was initially a bit angry with Jamila for giving Terek his lunch card back, as the weeks passed, they became good pals. Since he didn't have a lot of friends, he was glad when he had the chance to hang out with Jamila. She always seemed to be surrounded by people, both older and younger.

"How did you get to have so many friends?" he asked her one day. "I know you have a dog, but even if you don't have him with you, there's always a bunch of kids around you."

Jamila starting laughing.

"What's so funny about that?" asked Dantrell.

"It's not really funny, said Jamila. "It just reminded me of something. A few years ago I asked my dad that same question. It didn't seem to matter where he went in our old neighborhood – the grocery store, the church, the hardware – everyone knew him and he had to talk to each one of them, asking how their families were or offering to help with some project. So when I asked him how he got so many friends, he said it was because of his dad. He read this bible verse to him so many times, he had it memorized:

'Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.'

"And then he said something I'll never forget. 'Someone is always watching you, Jamila, and they're going to copy what you say and do. So it better be a good thing.' So I decided I wanted to be like my dad. I think that's why he was always so happy – because he really cared about others and lots of people noticed."

\* \* \*

Today was Saturday and Dantrell was walking through town on his way to the library. He was behind three teenagers who were munching on french fries. The fragrance floated backward, awakening the hunger pangs, having gone without breakfast. Up ahead, an elderly man sat on a bench in a tattered coat and hat with his faded blanket and cane. One of the teens shouted to him as they neared.

"Hey, pops! How 'bout a snack!" He tossed what was left of his fries over, but the bag landed just out of reach. The old man bent over and tried to reach it, even using his cane for extra length, but it was still too far. The teens began to snicker as they slowly strolled forward, waiting to see if the old man would fall on his face. It was a trick they had often played on the elderly homeless in Riverdale.

But Dantrell wasn't aware of any of that. When he saw the man struggling to stand up, he dashed passed the boys yelling, "I'll get it!" He sat down next to him and handed him the fries.

The oldest teenager strode forward, intending to grab the fries and scream at Dantrell for ruining his fun. But he halted.

“It was a pretty good throw,” Dantrell was telling the man, “just not quite far enough.” Then he turned to the boy and said jovially, “Looks like I was a little quicker to get here to help!”

“Riverdale could sure use more boys like you,” said the man gratefully. “I’ll not forget your kindness.” The teens nodded awkwardly, but each one of them felt the sting of rebuke along with a good dose of guilt.

Dantrell, however, happily skipped down the sidewalk to the library.

## Jamila's Good Example - Chapter 4

### *Someone Is Always Watching You*

"Slow down, Dantrell!" shouted Jamila. She finally caught up with him. "Boy! You run like a rat being chased by a herd of mountain lions!" They both laughed as they imagined the scene.

"What's the deal?"

"You know...it's HIM again."

"What happened now?"

"Everyone's excited about spring break. We're all playing a game of guessing the state capitals and our team's ahead by three points. The rule was that every student had to answer at least one time, so Ms. Janis called on you know who."

"Terek." Jamila said with a sigh.

"Yep. She asked him what the capital of our state was. The easiest state in the whole game. 'I ain't sayin' ' is all he said. She was real nice about it, but he exploded out of his seat, broke the chair, then ran out the door!"

Jamila felt bad that the whole class suffered because of Terek. But she also wondered why he was such a violent person. What does it feel like to have so much hate inside? She shuddered at the thought.

They walked along in silence for a while then Jamila asked Dantrell if he wanted to help her train Buddy to catch a frisbee.

"He's a year old and still can't do it. But I need help to teach him. You want to come?"

Of course Dantrell agreed. Any time spent with Buddy was always a good time.

"Great! We'll meet at the dog park at 4 o'clock."

The day was warm and only one lady with her two Dachshunds was there.

"Good," thought Jamila. "Less distractions for Buddy."

"Here's the plan, Dantrell. You take Buddy on a leash over there by that tree. I'll throw the frisbee and say 'CATCH, BUDDY!' As soon as it lands, pick it up and put it in his mouth, then run back to me. I'll have a treat for him when he gives it to me. Got it?"

"Yep!" And off he trotted.

What followed was a series of funny and frustrating attempts. Buddy didn't want to hold the frisbee in his mouth, so Dantrell had to hold it in for him. When he ran, he tripped and fell. Buddy escaped and Jamila had to

lure him away from his two new Dachshund friends. After he understood that he was to carry the frisbee to Jamila, he didn't want to give it to her, so she had to pry it out of his mouth. They switched places and Dantrell threw the frisbee. Finally, on the fifth throw, Buddy powerfully leaped up and caught it mid-air!

"He did it! Buddy, you're awesome!" They praised him like he was an Olympic champion.

They took a break and headed over toward the swings. As he swung, Dantrell noticed a dad and his daughter with their dog also trying to teach their black lab to catch a frisbee. But it wasn't going so well. At one point, the dad got so frustrated, he yanked the leash and the dog knocked his daughter down.

He called the dog over to a bench where they all sat, waiting for the girl to recover. After a bit, she headed over to the swings. Buddy immediately greeted her with his tail spinning like a propeller. After a few friendly pats, she sat on the third swing.

"I saw you teaching your dog. How did you ever get him to catch that frisbee? My dog just doesn't get it."

"Treats!" smiled Jamila.

"Oh! That's a good idea!" replied the girl.

"I have some left. Want them?"

The three of them, along with Buddy, trotted back to the bench where Jamila explained to the dad how she had used the treats to help Buddy understand.

"Hmmm. I never thought of that," the dad replied.

Dantrell handed him what was left of the treats and the three set to work again. After another dozen tries, the dog leaped into the air and caught the frisbee in the same way Buddy had.

"WOW!" shouted the dad. "It worked! Thanks so much!"

Jamila smiled and recalled her dad's words once again, "Someone is always watching you."

## Jamila's Good Example - Chapter 5

### *The Accident*

Jamila and Dantrell spent a lot of time together over spring break. Dantrell's mom, Ms. Carson, worked an afternoon shift at a factory, and Jamila's mom worked a day shift, so they weren't left alone like so many other kids. Mostly they played with Buddy, participated in some library programs, and watched T.V. if the weather was bad. And today was one of those bad days; gloomy and rainy.

"I'm taking Buddy out for a walk. He needs to go. Want to come?" asked Jamila.

"I guess. This is getting boring," said Dantrell as he grabbed his jacket.

There were puddles on every block. Buddy loved water, so he tried his best to roll in every single one. Jamila soon gave up trying to keep him out, and they both laughed at his antics, especially when he was on his back, kicking his legs.

"He looks like a boxing turtle all covered in sweat!" giggled Jamila.

"Look out!" Dantrell shrieked and shoved Jamila back onto the sidewalk just as a car came screeching around the corner. The road was slick and the driver had lost control for a second. As he straightened his car out, a dog came crashing through some overgrown bushes between two dilapidated, abandoned houses and charged into the street. The driver slammed on the brakes, but not in time to avoid the dog. Just then, a desperate call came from the same direction, and a big kid came dashing after the dog.

"DUKE! DUUUUKE! STOP!"

But it was too late. The car smacked him and he was flung to the middle of the road where he wailed in pain. The car took off, unaware of what just happened.

"No, Duke! You ain't gonna die! You can't. I need you....I'll find..." The boy sobbed as he pulled his dog to the side.

The door of the run-down house swung open. A harsh voice screamed out from what apparently was not a vacant house after all.

"Git yerself in here and leave that mangy mutt alone! I tells you a hundred times we ain't no money for that scamp, and now we ain't need to worry 'bout it no more!"

She had a toddler in her arms as she stomped over to the boy, grabbed him by the shirt, and started dragging him toward the door.

"You got no business havin' a mutt, Terek. How many times them police come here lookin' fer you cuz you been stealin' food? I gots rent to pay an no car, an you just doin' nothin' but gettin' us in deeper trouble...."

The door slammed shut, but Jamila and Dantrell could still hear the shouting. Chills ran down their spines and Buddy trembled, fur standing upright on his back.

Without a word, the two friends walked cautiously over to Duke. He was still. Jamila put a hand on his chest and felt his heartbeat.

“He's still alive. Let's see if we can get him to my apartment. Mom will know what to do.”

It was no easy job transporting Duke. Though he was very skinny, he was a big dog, taller than Buddy. In the end, they slid him onto Dantrell's jacket and slowly carried him to Jamila's.

“Oh, lordy, lordy,” was all Ms. Davies could say when she saw the condition Duke was in. Dantrell's mom came over before work, and the two ladies set to work doing what they could to make Duke comfortable.

“Looks like two broken legs,” said Ms. Carson. “Don't see anything else.”

They called Oakforest Rescue and explained the situation. A volunteer came by, a vet assistant, and confirmed the legs were broken. She took the time to splint the two legs.

“That's about all I can do. Let's hope and pray no infection sets in. We don't have medicines available for these kinds of things.”

So pray they did – all four of them, day and night. But not only for Duke; for Terek as well.

## Jamila's Good Example - Chapter 6

### *Change Comes to Riverdale*

The next few weeks were difficult. Terek alternated between silence and outbursts of anger. This time, however, Dantrell didn't react like before. He understood, at least in part, why Terek behaved the way he did. No one knew about Duke except he and Jamila.

Duke was recovering well. Another two weeks, and the splints could come off. But what then? Terek's mom couldn't take care of him. That would mean he would go to the rescue just like so many other dogs in Riverdale when the families couldn't feed them anymore.

The two families prayed. "Good Heavenly Father, we need Your help. Terek needs Your help. But we just don't know what to do. These kids need their pets, but they can't afford the care. There must be a way. Show us. Amen."

Days passed. Dantrell's class was told that Terek had been suspended for a time. No details were given.

"I think we should tell my teacher about Duke's accident and what we know," Dantrell told Jamila.

Ms. Janis felt sick at heart when she heard the news. "There's such a need for keeping pets and kids together. Sometimes they're the only friends kids have here in Riverdale."

"And Terek sure does need a friend right now," said Dantrell.

"Hey!" Dantrell brightened up. "What if we made it a class project to collect enough dog food for a month and then took Duke and the food over to the Somers?"

Both Jamila and Ms. Janis were all for it.

"But let's not just make it a class project," said Jamila. "Why not make it a Riverdale project? We could start a dog food collection. People could bring any extra food or a little money. Everyone could ask their parents to spread the word at their workplaces. Maybe we could get enough interest to actually help keep all pets and kids together!"

The next day, Ms. Janis announced the plan to the class. The students immediately took hold of the idea since many of them had already been through the experience of giving away their dogs.

Dantrell and Jamila, along with their classmates, hung signs throughout their neighborhoods announcing the collection of pet food for the new Riverdale Pet Pantry.

Meanwhile, the Carsons and Davies made plans to visit the Somers' home and reunite Duke with Terek. Though Duke still limped, the splints were off and he had gained weight and strength from all the loving care he had received.

Dantrell and Jamila led the way to Terek's with Duke frolicking alongside. Their mothers followed with a wagon loaded with enough dog food for over a month as well as canned goods for the family.

They rang the doorbell. It was Terek who answered.

"Whatta YOU want..." he began. But Duke interrupted with his big paws which landed on Terek's chest, almost knocking him over.

"DUKE!" he shouted. "I thought you was dead!" Tears flowed as the two hugged, Duke slobbering all over Terek's salty cheeks.

"What be all the racket?" railed the harsh voice of Ms. Somers - UNTIL she saw the gathering. "Ohhh my! Well, I, I..." And then the whole lot of them were in tears together.

As word spread throughout Riverdale, the Pet Pantry began to fill. A reporter from Riverdale News came to interview Jamila and Dantrell at school. The article generated a tremendous response and soon the Pet Pantry had to be relocated from the school to Oakforest Animal Rescue. It was then that Terek volunteered to keep the pantry in order. Being so strong, he was extremely useful in stacking all the donations and was very much appreciated by the staff. He dreamed of one day starting his own rescue and food pantry.

Late one Wednesday afternoon as Jamila and her mother were getting ready to leave Oakforest after two hours of volunteering, Jamila heard a familiar voice.

"Look! He's still here, Mom! It's Herbie!"

Jamila had never felt such a deep sense of satisfaction as she did that moment when she watched Herbie bounce into the arms of his young owner. They belonged together. And now they could stay together.

Jamila whispered to her dad, just in case he could hear, "I may be young, but I think I set a good example, just like you did for me."