

# CHAPTER 1

## CHILD! CHILD! CHILD!

Yup, I'm reading it, you're reading it—we're all reading it right! My name is Child, a weird name for a boy who's just turned nine.





“Child. CHILD! Yeah, *you!* And you better listen up!”

That’s Eddie Whitney, our fourth-grade class bully. He’s hollering for me on the school playground. Eddie’s already ten with biceps the size of baseballs, and he even shaves—real sideburns! I admit, I’m afraid of Eddie Whitney.

“You’re gonna meet me and the gang right after school’s out, got it, Child? Behind the dumpsters. And don’t make us come looking for you. You’ll be sorry.” Eddie likes issuing orders.

Anyhoo, you’ve probably figured it out—the last thing I’d ever want to do is meet up with Eddie and his gang of bullies: Billy Parks (the long-throw Little League champion), Robert Kaplan (“the Weasel”) and Willie Bryant (“the Roll”). They’ve been bullying me ever since first grade.

Here’s my plan: As soon as the final bell rings, I’m gonna skip the meeting and hightail it to Kids Park where my grandmother takes care of the three large animals who live there. I’m always safe at Kids Park. If I can just get there today with my two front teeth still in my head!

But so much for plans. I’m not halfway to Kids Park when I hear Eddie and his gang shouting from behind me, “Child! Child! Child!”

*How’d they find me?* I think to myself. I can’t believe

anyone else knew my secret shortcut through the school basement and up the old alley behind the bakery.

“I didn’t do it, Eddie!” I shout back. “Whatever it is, it’s not me!” and I keep racing toward Kids Park, but the lot of them have bikes. I don’t have a chance!

“Not what we heard!” Billy yells. “NOT WHAT WE HEARD!” His words ring louder and louder as he and the gang catch up, make a quick turn, and dead stop in front of me.

“Fess up, Rat!” Eddie commands. “You ratted on us to Principal Godfreed. Told ‘im we stuffed dog poop in his desk, and now, you’re gonna pay!”

“Yeah—pay!” the Roll echoes Eddie’s rant, then yanks a huge donut out of his pocket and downs it whole!

Yup, I’m toast.



BILLY PARKS

EDDIE

THE ROLL

THE WEASEL