

CHAPTER 15: The Pit Bull

When Jess kicked me out of the library, my heart started pounding really fast and hard as I walked down the main hallway toward the back door of school. When I stepped outside, there were at least fifteen people, including three or four girls, waiting for me on the outdoor basketball court. Joey was front and center, of course, with his fists clenched and an angry look in his eyes. He looked just like a pit bull. Some of the guys were already yelling, “Fight, fight,” and a couple of the real jerks in school were laughing and yelling, “You better run, Tyler, the Pit Bull is gonna bite you!”

That made me so mad I wanted to fight those kids, too, but right then I had Joey to worry about. I felt the way American soldiers must feel when they’re trapped and outnumbered by the enemy. Joey came right up to me and stood there nose-to-nose. I tried to start walking straight ahead, but he stepped in front of me and grabbed my sleeve and just kept staring at me.

“Where you think you’re going, Tyler?” Joey was in his classic bully mode. His teeth were practically grinding, his eyes were bulging, the rest of his face was contorted, and he was breathing like a bull in one of those Mexican bullfights. It reminded me of the cartoons where there’s smoke coming out of the angry bull’s nostrils. I thought he was going to



SNOWMAN ON THE PITCHER'S MOUND

waste me.

“Did you throw my lunchbox in the creek?” he asked, even though he knew I did because there were witnesses.

I nodded yes. No sense lying about it at this point.

“Why’d you do that?” Joey said. “Why’d you do that? Huh? Huh?”

He poked me in the stomach semi-hard with the fingertips of his open hand, which hurt, then grabbed my upper right arm and squeezed my right wrist, right where my sore was from wiping out on my bike that morning, and he twisted a little. But he could have squeezed a whole lot harder. It barely hurt and I looked at him and at that moment I just knew my life was going to be spared. I took a deep breath and rolled my eyes.

“I don’t know why I did it, Joey,” I said. “I’m sorry, man. It wasn’t anything personal.”

I was as confused as he was. I couldn’t tell him why I did it because I didn’t know myself, and I still don’t. With that, he tackled me like he did when we played kill-the-man-with-the-football in my front yard, except I wasn’t holding a football. I grabbed his arms so he couldn’t start swinging and I held my own against him. I don’t think he expected me to be so strong, but he still could have killed me if he wanted to because he’s stronger than some grownups.

But all he did once he had me pinned down with his knees on my elbows was give me more of that stare, which would scare a real pit bull, and sort of pretend to strangle me and he shook me a little. I knew he wasn’t going to hurt me, so I just let him stare and growl until he decided to get off.

I don’t think Joey ever intended to hurt me. He just wanted to scare me, and he did scare me big time, let me tell you. After he let me up, he pushed me around a little more and said, “You’re really a punk, Tyler,” but then he kind of smiled and let out what sounded like a laugh as he shook his head and walked away. It was over, and everyone went home, me included. Some of the kids looked disappointed that there wasn’t a better fight, and I guess I can understand that. But I was still in one



piece and very happy about it.

Joey liked that lunchbox and I certainly had no right throwing it in the creek. I guess he didn't beat me up because he knows I'm one of his only real friends. He knows I'm one of the only people in school who actually likes him and is his friend not just because he's a bully. I'm one of the few kids in school who doesn't call him Pit Bull behind his back.

Joey liked Grampa Jack, too, and he also knew that my mom was sick — like I said, word travels fast at my school. Maybe that made him not want to beat me up. I don't really know why he didn't beat me up or why I threw his lunchbox in the creek. I don't know why I was going so fast down a steep, dangerous hill on my bike that morning, either, or why I wanted to kill that kid who threw that high inside fastball at me and then pushed me down playing soccer or why I'm not very good in math tests anymore or why I don't always clean my room. I wish I knew, but I don't.

The lunchbox incident is old news now around school, and Joey and I are actually better friends than ever, if you can believe that. Go figure. In fact, just the other day at lunch we were joking around about me throwing his lunchbox into the creek. When he saw that I was eating a hot lunch from the school cafeteria, he gave me that big Joey Pit Bull grin.

"Hey Tyler, I know why you don't bring your lunch from home anymore," he said, loud enough so everyone at our lunch table could hear. "Because you know it would end up in the creek."

"Yeah, right, Joey," I said. "By the way, did you hear that they made lunchbox throwing an Olympic sport?"

"Yeah, right," he said. "Are you gonna go for the gold medal? Dude, you're lucky I didn't throw both you and your lunchbox in the creek!"

