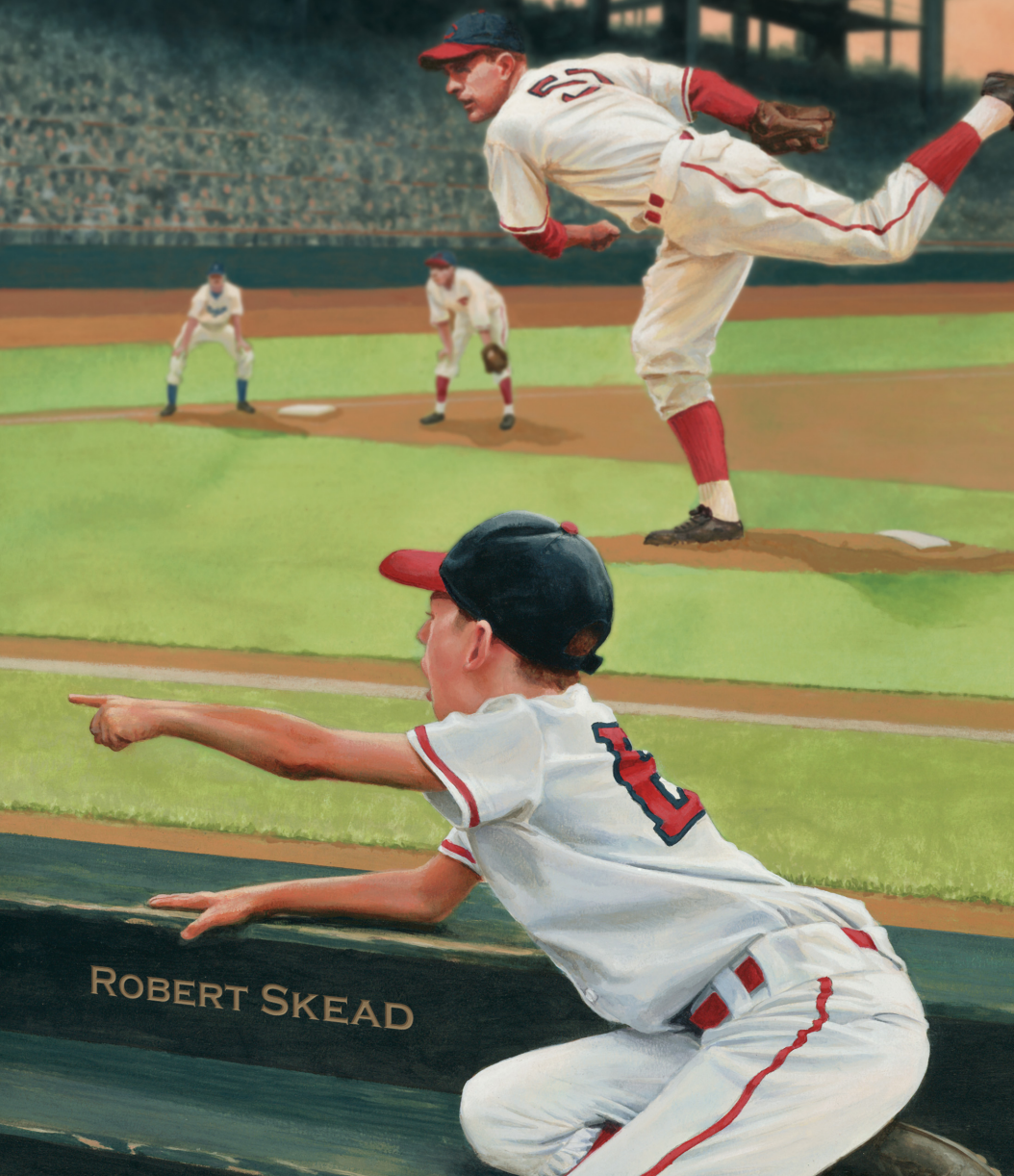


# *The Batboy* AND THE UNBREAKABLE RECORD



ROBERT SKEAD

## Advance Praise for The Batboy and the Unbreakable Record

“Robert Skead touches upon important, extremely relatable themes of teasing and bullying. Skead gives thoughtful examples of ways to handle tough situations in productive and supportive ways. It is a wonderful story of personal growth in adolescence and an action-filled and engaging way to discuss those themes with baseball lovers, children and students in the middle grades.”

~ Annie Mapes, LSW, Anti-Bullying Specialist

“Some of baseball’s greatest moments are so long in the past they can almost be forgotten. The Bat Boy and the Unbreakable Record tells us the story from a freshly unique perspective of one of those greatest moments in our national pastime. It is heart-warming to see a story like this can be written for us today.”

~ CF Payne, Illustrator and Cincinnati Reds fan

“A unique and inspiring re-telling of the legend of Johnny Vander Meer, Rob Skead brings Vander Meer’s record-setting performance to life through the eyes of a young fan who overcomes numerous challenges to achieve a personal dream. The Bat Boy and the Unbreakable Record is a worthy addition to the baseball libraries of fans of all ages.”

~ Chris Eckes, Chief Curator, Cincinnati Reds Hall of Fame and Museum

“The young protagonist of this wonderful historical novella lives out a dream, absorbs nuanced lessons about honesty and empathy, bullying and forgiveness, and is an up-close witness to real and unmatched drama on the ballfield – all in a couple of weeks. Robert Skead conveys compelling and credible detail in characters, dialogue and events while concisely capturing an accomplishment that baseball fans of all ages rightfully marvel over nine decades later.”

~ William Weinbaum, ESPN journalist

“Rob Skead conjures a delightful story, combining an historic moment in baseball with life lessons about bullying. Richie’s dream about becoming a batboy for the Reds faces many challenges, but with the help of his parents, his school principal, and the great Johnny Vander Meer, Richie finds himself with a front row seat for one of baseball’s legendary feats, Vander Meer’s consecutive no-hitters.”

~ Greg Rhodes, Cincinnati Reds Team Historian

# *The Batboy* AND THE **UNBREAKABLE RECORD**

A Batboy Story:  
Johnny Vander Meer's Back-to-Back  
No-Hitters

Written by:

Robert Skead

Illustrated by:

Stephen Colyer



ISBN: 9781951122706 (paperback) / 9781951122713 (ebook)

LCCN: 2023941390

Copyright © 2023 by Robert Skead

Cover illustration © 2023 by Dirk Rozich, [www.dirkrozich.com](http://www.dirkrozich.com).

Interior illustrations © 2023 by Stephen Colyer

Illustration under Johnny Vander Meer quotation of Vander Meer pitch sequence by Eric Kittelberger, [www.TriplePlayDesign.com](http://www.TriplePlayDesign.com)

Printed in the United States of America.

Names, characters, and incidents depicted in this book are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and beyond the intent of the author or the publisher.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage or retrieval system without written permission of the publisher, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review.

Kinkajou Press

9 Mockingbird Hill Rd

Tijeras, New Mexico 87059

[info@kinkajoupress.com](mailto:info@kinkajoupress.com)

[www.kinkajoupress.com](http://www.kinkajoupress.com)

Content Notice: This book has scenes of bullying that may be traumatic to some readers.

“Kids are always chasing rainbows, but baseball  
is a world where you can catch them.”  
**Johnny Vander Meer**



# Table of Contents

Chapter One: The Bad Break.....	1
Chapter Two: Never Back Down.....	13
Chapter Three: Winning Wasn't Enough .....	21
Chapter Four: The Principal's Principle .....	27
Chapter Five: Knucklehead.....	33
Chapter Six: Big Bertha.....	43
Chapter Seven: Family Meeting .....	51
Chapter Eight: Brad's Challenge .....	55
Chapter Nine: Brad's Personal Batboy.....	59
Chapter Ten: Unhittable Johnny .....	77
Chapter Eleven: The Big Invite.....	89
Chapter Twelve: The Vander Meer-acle .....	103
Chapter Thirteen: Friends & Foes.....	119
Chapter Fourteen: Who Moved My Bat? .....	125
Fun Facts about Johnny Vander Meer .....	131
The Story Behind the Story.....	135
Discussion Questions .....	137
What You Can Do About Bullying.....	139
Fact vs. Fiction in the Story.....	141
Acknowledgements.....	143
See Vandy In Action.....	147
About the Author .....	149



## Chapter One

### The Bad Break

Cincinnati, Ohio 1938

**WITH A BOUNCE IN** his step and a whistle coming off his lips, Richie Goodwin stopped in his tracks as he entered his kitchen. Tears glistened on his mother's face. She quickly wiped her eyes and cheeks with a handkerchief as she turned her body away from him. Richie's heart sank with the sound of the music that faded off his lips.

"Richie, I have bad news," said his mom as she sat at the kitchen table. Her hands moved the crystal salt and pepper shakers back to their proper place on the table near a napkin holder. "Your father broke his leg today at the factory."



Richie stood frozen. “Oh no. Is he all right?”

“He’ll be okay, but he... can’t go to work.” She took a breath and tugged down on her white blouse. “Money’s already tight. The library can’t give me any extra hours. I asked. I’m going to have to get a part-time job on weekends to help. I think I can get something at the rubber stamp company down the block.”

Richie’s eyes grew wider. “Will that be enough? Will we be able to pay the rent?”

His mom cleared her throat then took a sip from her glass of water. “Honestly, no. It won’t be enough. We spent what we had saved when the car broke down last month.” Richie’s mom’s head slowly raised and his eyes met hers. “We’re going to need you to get a job, honey.”

Richie’s eyebrows went up. “A job? But Mom, it’s almost summer. This was going to be the best summer ever!” Richie started to think about all the fun he planned to have playing ball and hanging out.

“I’m sorry. It’s our only option. Without your father’s full income, we need help with money for food, electric bills, gas, the rent. School ends in three days. The timing is right. I’m sorry it’ll change your summer plans.”

“But Mom... what about Boy Scout camp? And I was going to hang out with the guys at the park. You know, not do school work or any kind of work. That’s why it’s summer.”

“There will be no camp now. I’m sorry.”

“But—”

“It’ll just be for a few months. Until your dad gets back on both feet again.”

“Geez,” Richie exclaimed as he tussled his mass of black hair. “Don’t you have to be older than twelve to work?”

Richie’s mom gave a correcting smile. “Lots of kids your age work. Don’t worry. I’ll help you find something. Look, right here in the paper. Here’s a job that might be good.” She handed Richie the local *Cincinnati Post* newspaper.

He reluctantly took hold of it and slowly glanced down to read the job ad. His mom had already circled it in red ink.

**WANTED**

Strong young man who is not  
afraid of hard work.

Must be comfortable working  
with wood and taking  
direction from adults.

Uniform provided.

Interested candidates  
call Mr. Weatherby

DIAL: CANAL 6-8564

“You helped your grandpa fix his barn door. He showed you how to saw and hammer. Maybe the job’s in a wood shop,” noted his mom.

Richie pondered her comment for a moment and then said, “That sounds hard, like for some-

one older than me.” He thumped the paper on the kitchen counter. “Do I have to go, Mom?” Richie’s eyes pleaded for her to have a little mercy.

“I already called the number. They can see you tomorrow for an interview.” Richie’s mom reached for her son to bring him in closer for a hug. “Your father started working when he was twelve. It’ll be all right. I’m sure there are other boys your age working this summer too. Times are hard for lots of families.”

She squeezed him tight, and Richie bent his head to kiss her forehead. He loved the smell of her strawberry-blonde hair.



Later that night, Richie lay on his bed, softly tossing a baseball up and catching it with his right hand just before it reached his face. He carefully watched the laces as the ball spun, training his eyes, which he thought would help him become a better hitter. Scenes of leaving his apartment for work, pushing a wheelbarrow, sawing, getting people tools, and coughing from lots of sawdust in the air played out in his imagination. He envisioned being handed cash for his labor and handing that money to his mom and dad. His dad had always worked hard to provide for everything their family needed. Accidents happen to good people and bad. If he needed to work, he’d do his best as his father always taught him.

Richie tossed the ball above his face one more

time for good luck. He yawned as it came down, disrupting his timing, and the ball collided with his finger and smashed his nose. He held back a yell and winced. *That smarts!* he hollered inside his head. It had better not be a sign of things to come.



After school the next day, Richie put on his nicest white collared shirt. With his hair combed neatly, he checked his look in the mirror and flashed an I-like-what-I-see smile at himself. *I'd hire me*, he told himself. *I look so good I'd pay me a million dollars.*

Richie trudged into the living room. His father sat in his favorite brown chair reading *The Saturday Evening Post* magazine. His left leg, frozen in a cast, was propped up on a stool with a pillow under his foot. Richie cast a glance at his father, who folded the magazine when he heard Richie enter the room.

"Hey, you look snazzy," his father said as he shook his head and motioned for Richie to come closer.

Richie walked up to his dad. His father's hands reached for the back of his collar and straightened its edge. His eyes met Richie's as a soft sigh burst from his lips, followed by a nod.

"I appreciate you doing this. It's my job to be the bread winner. Not yours."

"It's okay Dad," Richie assured. "Maybe I'll

make so much money I'll quit school and you can retire," he added with a chuckle.

"You'll do no such thing," his dad replied. "Quitting school that is. I'm hoping you'll be the first one in the family to go to college. Then you won't be like me."

"Dad, I want to be just like you... except not as much of a klutz."

Richie's dad smiled. "Good luck today. I know you'll do T-riffic."

"You mean terrific," Richie corrected.

"Same difference," his dad replied.

Richie's mom walked up behind her husband and kissed his cheek.

"Remember, honey, it's his interview, not yours," his dad reminded his wife.

"I know," she replied with a laugh. She strolled over to Richie. "Let's go, dear. You look very nice."

As Richie headed for the door, his father's voice trailed from behind.

"Oh... and Richie..."

"Yeah Dad?" Richie stopped and glanced back at his father.

"Break a leg."

Richie shook his head as his hand turned the doorknob and he pulled the door open. He turned back. "Hey Dad, I think the fridge has a broken leg too."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it's not running." Richie laughed. A loud groan from his father followed him as he

bolted out the door.



Richie's mom walked him to his job interview, which was only 15 minutes from their apartment building. A small smile appeared on Richie's face when he noticed Crosley Field, home of the Cincinnati Reds, across the street from where the meeting was taking place. Maybe he'd be able to hear the crowd cheer for the Reds while he was working. If he got the job. Or maybe after work he could peek through the fences and see some of the action of his favorite team.

Richie gazed at the white walls of the stadium. It didn't look like much on the outside, but inside he knew there was green grass and a perfectly manicured infield. It was baseball heaven compared to the rock-ridden sandlot he and his friends played on. Richie felt a tug on his shirt as his mom gently pulled him out of his trance.

Following a half step behind his mom, Richie entered the warehouse building. In a flash, he searched for clues about the job—saws, drills, or other woodworking tools. Instead, all he saw were cargo crates. In the corner sat a desk and two chairs. Behind the desk sat a man with leathery skin and large ears.

Heart pounding, Richie bit at his lip. *Hope he's not going to be my boss*, Richie thought.

Mrs. Goodwin introduced herself and Richie.

"Hi. I'm Dick Weatherby," said the man in a

gravelly voice. His skin looked like he had been out in the sun for his entire life. “Thanks for coming. Please have a seat.”

Richie sat in an old wood and metal folding chair beside his mom.

“Let’s start with the standard questions,” Mr. Weatherby stated. He focused on Richie. “Age?”

“Twelve,” answered Mrs. Goodwin.

Richie watched Mr. Weatherby turn to his mother. “Please let the boy answer, if you don’t mind,” Weatherby requested with an edgy tone.

“Sure. Sorry.” Richie’s mom glanced away awkwardly, then she studied the ground.

“Grade?”

There was a pause as Richie waited to see if his mom would answer. Their eyes met and Richie replied, “Sixth” with a burst of laughter.

“Something funny about this?” Mr. Weatherby questioned.

Richie’s heart skipped a beat. “Um... No. I just... ah... know it’s hard for my mom not to answer. And I’m a little nervous.”

“Do I need to send you out of the room?” Mr. Weatherby asked Richie’s mom. She shook her head and made the motion of zipping her lips up. He turned back to Richie. “Favorite subject?”

“Gym,” he blurted, knowing if he didn’t answer quickly that his mom would jump in and get sent out of the room. But now he regretted not giving it a bit more thought, because gym was a pretty silly answer.

“That was my favorite subject too when I was your age,” Weatherby replied. He cleared his throat and asked, “Why do you need the job?”

Richie felt the weight of Weatherby’s eyes on him. There was a long pause, followed by—

“My dad... Well, he, ahh... broke his leg and can’t go to work now. So, I have to. At first it bothered me, having to work and all, but as I thought about it last night, it doesn’t bother me so much anymore. I’ve seen how hard my dad works all my life. I know work is important. I work hard at school and in sports, and I’ll work hard for you too, sir. I want to help and make my dad... and mom proud.”

As Richie spoke, Mr. Weatherby nodded at him, which made Richie feel like Weatherby liked him. Working for Mr. Weatherby might be okay after all. He imagined what kind of woodworking he would do.

Mr. Weatherby jotted a note to himself as Richie finished talking.

“So, what kind of woodworking would my son be doing... if he got the job?” asked Mrs. Goodwin. “Would it be safe?”

Mr. Weatherby laughed.

Richie noticed the surprised look on his mom’s face. He knew she was flabbergasted that her question generated a laugh.

Then Mr. Weatherby pulled a Louisville Slugger baseball bat out from under his desk.

“This would be the kind of woodworking he’d



be doing,” he said.

“I’d be making bats?” Richie asked.

“Nope,” answered Mr. Weatherby. “You’d be the batboy for the Cincinnati Reds. You’d work right across the street with me. I’m the equipment manager, and I’d be your boss. Well, one of them.”

Richie’s mouth fell open.

“I’m sorry for the tricky way I worded the advertisement, but if I put an ad for our batboy in the paper, we’d get flooded with applicants. And we only want boys who really want to work. One of our other batboys has complications from appendicitis and had to quit, so we need to find just the right boy. It won’t be a picnic. It’s a tough job. You’ll obviously be working with lots of wood—the bats—and adults—the players. This is the uniform.”

Mr. Weatherby held up a Reds uniform. The white jersey had a big red letter C on the left breast with the word REDS inside it. Richie couldn’t believe what he was seeing.

“You’ll be paid 25 cents per hour. Not bad pay if you ask me. So, son, would you like the job? I think you have what it takes. Maybe this is meant to be.”

“Do the Reds wear red socks? Of course, I want it!” Richie announced, searching his mom’s face for approval. Richie knew it was an offer neither of them could refuse.

“Welcome to the Cincinnati Reds.” Mr. Weatherby stuck out his hand, and Richie

thrust out his own hand and shook on it before Weatherby could change his mind.

Mr. Weatherby rose from his chair and came around to the front of the desk. He patted Richie on the shoulder. "Show up across the street tomorrow after school, and we'll get everything in order," Mr. Weatherby declared. "I'll give the guard at the gate your name. I'll meet you at the players' entrance and we'll officially welcome you to the team. I'm glad you're on board."

"You and me both," Richie replied. "Thank you. This is aces!"

"We can't thank you enough," added Mrs. Goodwin. "This means so much to our family. My husband will be thrilled."

As Richie walked out of the warehouse, he felt bigger than a movie star. He gazed at the Crosley Field sign and Reds logo on the stadium across the street.

"Mom, *I'm* the batboy for the Cincinnati Reds. Can you believe it? I'm *so* glad you saw that ad, and I listened to you."

"You and me both," she agreed with a chuckle. "See. You should always listen to your momma. Maybe it's not a bad thing your father broke his leg after all."

Richie felt like his feet never even touched the sidewalk all the way home.



## Chapter Two

### Never Back Down

**THE NEXT MORNING, RICHIE** practically ran to school. As his feet hit George Washington Elementary School's parking lot, he headed briskly toward the playground where everyone in his grade would be waiting for the bell to ring and the school doors to open. Richie felt like he was going to burst out of his skin. He couldn't wait for everyone to find out that he just got a job as the batboy for the *Reds*.

He walked right up to Michael, Scott, Darren, and Brad, did an excited jig, and blurted, "Guess what?"

Brad Baxter, a short and stocky boy with long brown hair, glanced at Richie, gave him a dirty

look, and quickly turned his attention back to the group.

“Um... You’re not going to believe what happened to me,” Richie bragged frantically.

“Let me guess,” Brad, the leader, said. “Your Betty Boop doll came in the mail.”

The group of boys around Brad all guffawed at his jab.

“I’m going to be the batboy for the Reds,” Richie said.

Mouths dropped open, then Brad’s “sheep” fixed their eyes on him to see how they should react.

“You got a screw loose, melon head,” Brad replied. “Ha ha ha ha!” Brad doubled over like he couldn’t contain himself. “Right. And I’m going to be the new dance instructor for the Rockettes!” He turned to his overly amused friends. “Hey, fellas! Did you hear that? Goodwin’s gonna meet the Reds! He’s gonna hand them their bats!”

“Can you even lift a bat, Goodwin?” Michael added.

“Goodwin?” Brad said. “Don’t you mean Good-loser?” The play on words infected the playground with raucous chortling. “Hey, how do you like that? I just created a new nickname for Goodwin. Good-loser. I love it!”

Brad made sure all his pals were laughing. They were, so he continued. “Good-loser just delivered the biggest whopper I ever heard. He thinks he’s gonna be a batboy! Ha! Bat-baby is

more like it.”

Richie composed himself and stood as still as possible. “I am... going to be the batboy for the Reds.”

He cast a swift glance at Scott. Scott was one of the best athletes in the sixth grade. He scratched his brown hair, then looked away. Richie could tell he was trying to stay neutral.

“He is too the batboy.” It was Jane Healey. She wore a pretty white dress and black shoes as she crashed through the small crowd of boys. Jane had blonde hair and stood taller than most of the boys in their grade. Richie had known Jane since they were four years old. She lived in the same apartment building, and they’d been in the same class together since kindergarten.

“How do you know?” asked Brad.

“Because Richie doesn’t lie,” Jane declared seriously. “He’s never lied to me... ever.”

“Did he tell you we were his friends? Because if he did, he lied to you. We don’t believe anything he says. Do we, fellas?” Brad quickly made eye contact with the boys around them.

Richie hoped someone would disagree with Brad.

“No, we don’t believe him for one minute,” said Darren, as if speaking for the group. The tallest boy in the class, Darren had blonde hair with bangs that were cut in sharp lines around his face.

“If you guys go to a game, you’ll see me,” said Richie. “I’ll be the one wearing the Reds uniform.”

I'll be standing on the field where you only wish you could be."

"He's gonna be the best batboy the Reds ever had," said Jane. "No one knows more about the Reds than Richie."

"Bring us an autographed ball," said Brad. "Maybe then we'll believe ya. Right, fellas?"

His pals laughed. "Yeah, right!"

"Okay, fine. No problem," replied Richie. *Geez, I sure do hope it's not a problem,* thought Richie.

"Good. And I get the ball," demanded Brad, thumbing himself in the chest.

Richie never expected anyone would *not* believe him. He turned and walked away. Jane followed.

"There goes Good-loser. Surprised the little liar doesn't run away," taunted Brad. "At least Jane the Lamé believes him. That's one reason she's lame. She's so stupid."

Richie stopped dead in his tracks. He had put up with Brad's mean comments and shoving for years. Every time, he so wanted to say all the smart-alecky comments that went through his head.

He turned and grimaced at Brad like he'd just sucked on a lemon. "Jane is not lame. She's great. A great friend too." Richie halted his compliments. She was just a friend. He didn't want anyone to think any more than that.

"If you had a girlfriend, she'd look like Ty Cobb," said Richie, his eyes glaring at Brad. He

couldn't believe the words came out of his mouth, but something inside kept him going.

"Yeah? Well... well... you run like you have a load in your pants," Brad declared.

"I can beat you in a race even if I had twenty-pound weights tied to each leg."

"Yeah!" echoed Jane.

Brad raised his eyebrows. "Excellent. The race is on."

Within moments, the boys had mapped out the course of the race for bragging rights.

Jane pulled Richie by his shirt in closer to her. Richie's gaze met her friendly and hopeful eyes. "He's been mean and teasing me since second grade," Jane declared. "Do me a favor. Beat him."

"Okay," Richie vowed confidently. He'd do this for her. He appreciated her support, but she was so close to him, he could smell her hair—coconut or something. For whatever reason, that gave him the willies, and he gently backed away.

Richie would never back down from a challenge. No matter what it was. And he *hated* to lose. He hated losing more than eating cauliflower and doing chores, or wearing nice clothes. Whether it was a game of tag, checkers, kick the can, stick-ball, basketball, or any challenge or dare, Richie refused to back down—and he always played to win. And everyone knew it. That's why every eye in the sixth grade at George Washington School was now on Richie and Brad.

Richie braced himself for his run of the year

and positioned himself to Brad's right. Being on the right, he figured, would give him an advantage in running around the big oak tree and its raised roots that he'd soon be darting over.

Richie's heart pulsed hard. He glanced around at all his classmates staring back at him. His eyes landed on Brad. The side angle of Brad's face revealed his nose was larger than average. *I wonder if anteaters are jealous of Brad's nose.*

"I'll start this race, so it's fair," Jane declared.

There was a pause as Richie knelt into starting position.

"Ready? On your mark... Get set... GO!" shouted Jane.

The two boys exploded from the starting line. Brad got a quick jump and took the lead. Richie pictured the course in his mind while matching Brad's pace, just a few steps behind. Fifty feet to the big oak, then cut left down the grass outlining the back of the school's ball fields, another left past the outdoor basketball hoop, and another left down the path behind the school to the finish line.

Richie's legs and arms pumped hard and he started to tire. He had hoped he wouldn't feel that way until later in the race, but the two runners were neck and neck. Richie's khaki pants felt tight on his legs and his light blue shirt grew sweaty. He reached deep inside for strength.

The oak tree roots were almost in front of them. *Should I say something to distract Brad?* Richie asked himself. *No. That wouldn't be fair.*



When Brad got to the roots, he flew over them like one of Santa's reindeer. *Geez. He's like a husky little deer*, thought Richie.

Beating Brad wasn't going to be as easy as he'd thought—Richie started to worry.

Once around the tree, Brad sprinted forward without saying a single word. Brad's lead grew to five feet.

"You can do it!" It was Jane.

Her words caused Richie to kick it up a gear. He was only inches behind Brad now. He hated the sight of Brad's back in front of him. *I have to get the lead, not only to win, but so I don't have to look at his big ol' backside.*

The two boys were dead even as they blurred past the basketball court. There was just one more turn to the finish line.

A cramp pierced Richie's right side. He felt himself slow for a split second, but he forced the pain aside and ran as if his life depended on it. He drove his legs forward and with a few strides took the lead. He locked his eyes on the finish line.

A crowd had gathered to see the outcome—and to see if either boy might cry if he lost. Some, including Jane, cheered, "Go Richie! Go!" Most of the others cheered for Brad.

*Why hasn't Brad said anything?* Richie wondered. *He usually has something mean to say. Maybe he's out of breath.* But at that very moment, Richie felt Brad's breath behind him. And then, there it was—Brad's butt in front of him again.

Brad scoffed at his opponent just loud enough for Richie to hear him as they ran like racehorses toward their classmates and the finish line.

*I... must... win!* The words echoed inside Richie's mind, punctuated by each pulse of his legs, fists, heart, and will. Suddenly, he was side by side with Brad.

Both boys knew victory would come down to inches.

"And the winner is..." shouted Jane.

Everyone's mouth dropped open.