

# Chapter

## 2

At breakfast, no one talked. It was like all three of us were ghosts who couldn't see each other, my mom and my dad and me. Me, I got out of the house fast and came to school. But here at school I was still a ghost. I knew this as soon as I got here because the kids were all playing and yelling at each other but no one saw me, and no one talked to me.

Then Adam Goff called Joey Blinder a fag, and that's when it all happened. Adam didn't mean anything bad. That's just the way the kids talk when someone messes up, like drops the ball or falls on his head, or whatever. But this time,

when Adam called Joey a fag, it made me really mad. I wasn't thinking about what I was doing, and I ran up and shoved my face in Adam's face and yelled at him to shut up and then I pushed him so hard that he fell back and down hard on his butt. Or on his behind, or whatever you want to call it. And it hurt him, too, because he started to cry.



See, this is what happened. I remember now what I couldn't remember then. Or didn't remember. Or didn't want to remember. Or something.

Chazz says it's a "click". My dad calls it a "breakthrough" and my mom calls it a "sudden understanding", but Chazz is closer to it when he calls it a "click". It's when you don't get something, and then you suddenly do get it, like you clicked on a light in your brain. But sometimes, it's like you just keep clicking, like you've got a little light over here, click, and then a little light over there, click, but you still can't see the whole thing yet because there's still a lot of darkness.

That's how it was clicking inside my own head. Adam called Joey a fagg and I yelled at him and pushed him down and, click, I remembered my dad yelling at Chazz, over and over, "You are not a faggot! You are not a faggot! You are not a faggot!" That was what he was yelling last night while I was on the bed with Rumble. And Chazz kept yelling back, over and over, that no, he was *not* a faggot, that he was *gay*. "No, I am *not* a faggot, I'm *gay*! That *is* the truth. I *am* *gay*. I am *not* a faggot."

And click, there was that other thing when Chazz came running up the stairs and yelling outside my door about the kids at school, and when my dad kept yelling that we're all just kids. It was something about the way the kids are always calling each other "fag" and how I'm supposed to stop the kids when they do that. Or something like that. But I can't remember because that's when Rumble was trying to get out of my arms and scratching me all up.



But none of that started clicking until Adam was bouncing on his butt on the playground and crying. Then Adam got on his feet and was wanting to fight me because it's what they call "humiliation" when you're a sixth-grader and another kid knocks you down and makes you start crying right in front of all the little kids. I saw Adam coming at me, but before he could reach me

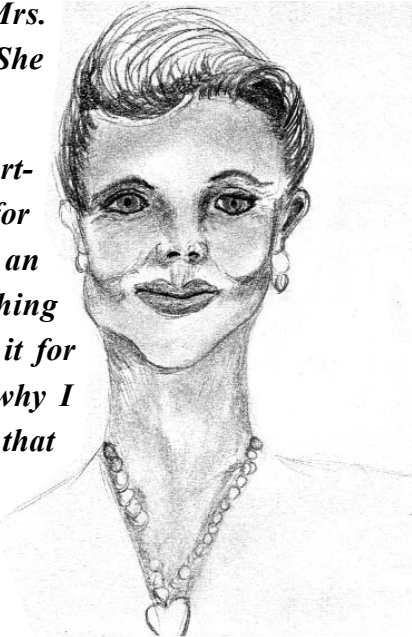
Coach West grabbed him by the shoulders. That's when our teacher Mrs. Whitehall stepped in, too, talking in that voice she uses when she's really mad at you. It's not loud, but it sure gets your attention.

"I saw that, Dillon! You come with me! Adam, you go to class, and I don't want any grief from you!"

Mrs. Whitehall calls just about everything "grief" but my mom says grief is when people die. Sometimes words can mean more than one thing.

*This is a picture I drew of Mrs. Whitehall on the first day of school. She was really nice that day.*

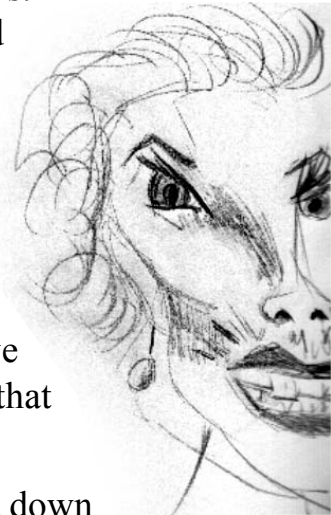
*You should know that when I first started writing this story, I was writing it for Mrs. Whitehall because it was an assignment. But then everything changed, and now I'm not writing it for Mrs. Whitehall any more. That's why I can tell the truth about everything that happened, even though maybe Mrs. Whitehall may not seem all that nice anymore. Well, you'll see what I mean, if you keep reading.*



I wanted to tell Adam that I was sorry, and that I didn't mean to push him down, but Mrs. Whitehall was "marching" me to the Principal's Office. I put "marching" in quotation marks because that's the word Mrs. Whitehall always uses when she sends a kid to the Office. "You, march!" she says, and all the kids know what she means. Only Mrs. Whitehall had never told me to march before.

And I had never even been to The Office before except for little things. So Ms. Peabody, our principal was surprised when she saw Mrs. Whitehall push me into one of those chairs where the bad kids have to sit. Mrs. Whitehall talked to Ms. Peabody in a voice I couldn't hear, and both of them kept looking at me. Then Mrs. Whitehall left, but not before she gave me that look that she saves for kids that commit a capital offense.

Ms. Peabody came over and sat down in one of the other bad-kid chairs and she seemed like she was trying to be nice, but I don't know her

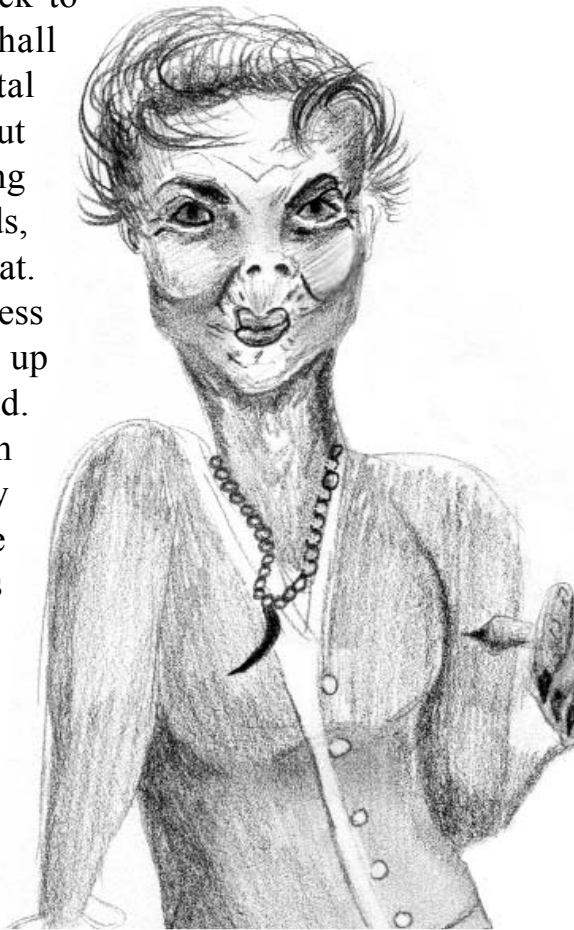


too well, and maybe she wasn't being nice at all. I couldn't tell if that was a smile or if she was opening her mouth to eat me up like Little Red Riding Hood. She wanted to know why I pushed Adam down, but I didn't see how I could tell that to Ms. Peabody because I wasn't even sure why. It had something to do with my brother living a lie and having a big fight with my dad and mom, and a lot of yelling about faggots, but how could I tell Ms. Peabody any of that? So I just answered that I didn't know, and I guess that wasn't a lie. And I told her that I was sorry. And that wasn't a lie either.

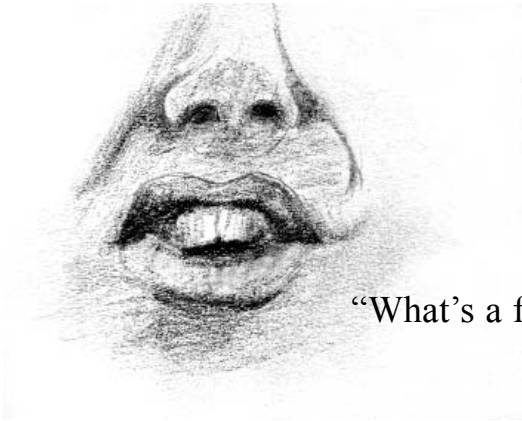
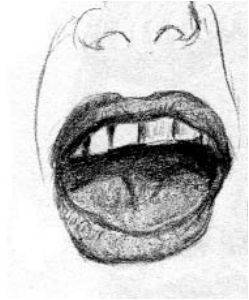
Ms. Peabody made me sit in The Office for a long time, and I was like a ghost. When those people who answer the phones in The Office would look at me, they wouldn't look right at me but all around me, and they would pinch up their noses like they could smell me, and I was something bad, but they couldn't see me. And they would whisper to each other, and I kept hearing the word "fag" "fag" "fag" in their whispers. I don't know how they could know anything about any of that, but that's what it sounded like. And I was a ghost, and those people didn't know me, and they didn't know my brother and how he is suddenly

something so bad that my dad ran him out of the house and my mom isn't talking any more, and how we're all like a ghost family now.

When Ms. Peabody dismissed me from The Office and I went back to class, Mrs. Whitehall gave me the capital offense look again, but she didn't say anything in front of all the kids, so I was glad of that. She kept me in at recess so that I could make up the work I missed. When I was alone with her, I made up my mind to ask the question that was bothering me.







“What’s a faggot?” I asked.



Mrs. Whitehall looked at me hard and then looked away and pressed her lips together in a couple of wrinkled bunches the way she does when she wants you to know that you're just about to cross over the line and commit a capital offense, but so far you haven't quite yet, but you should watch out.



“That’s not a word we use, Dillon.”

“They use it outside.”

“Who does?”

“All the kids.”

“Promise me that you won’t use that word ever again. It’s not appropriate, and we don’t use it. We don’t even think it.”

I didn’t say anything more but I made up my mind to go at lunchtime to see Mary Moppin. Maybe Mary Moppin might help.

# Chapter

## 3

Mary Moppin is this really nice woman who works in the kids section at the public library, which is right next door to the school. Mary Moppin has a deal with Ms. Peabody that certain kids can go to the library at lunchtime if we want. She calls us "the bibliophiles" which means "booklovers in a dead language" and she says that one of us bibliophiles is going to write the great American novel if we get old enough. Mary Moppin is always loaning you her favorite books, and you're always



*This is Mary Moppin waving  
'Hello' at me.*

happy to read them, especially because Mary Moppin always wants to talk to you about them when you bring them back. She tells some of the kids, like me, that it's all right to call her Mary instead of Ms. Moppin, but my mother told me that it's rude for kids to call grownups by their first name, and so I call her Mary Moppin.

I went into the library at lunch and found Mary Moppin and said, "Hi, Mary Moppin."

"Hi, Dillon Moore," she said back and smiled the way she does.

"Do you have any good books on faggots?"

Mary Moppin looked surprised and didn't answer me right away, but then she asked me if I meant gay people, and I said yes. She thought about it a minute, and kept looking right at me. She opened her mouth and closed it a couple of times like she had a lot of words to say and was trying to find the right ones. This is something Chazz taught me about how people say things. Chazz says that when you're writing and you're quoting someone and they do this thing like a pause, because they're thinking of what to say

next, then you're supposed to use dot dot dot. Chazz says they call these dot dot dots "lipsies" and I think the reason for that is because usually when people are thinking hard like that, they squeeze up their lips a lot. Sort of like how Mrs. Whitehall did it, only not in a mean way.

And that's how Mary Moppin did now. She started to talk and said, "Not ..." and then she did a lipsy pause like it was really hard for her to say, so that the words she said were, "Not ... for your age."

"How come?"

"They don't make them."

"Why not?"

"It's complicated."

I didn't say anything, but I didn't think this was a very good answer. It looked like Mary Moppin knew what I was thinking because she told me to wait a second. Then she went into one of the back rooms, and pretty soon she came back with two books for kids. One was called *Heather Has Two Mommies* and the other was called *Daddy's Roommate*. "You have to read them

here,” she said. “You can’t check them out.”

“Why?”

“Because they’re special books.”

“What makes them special?”

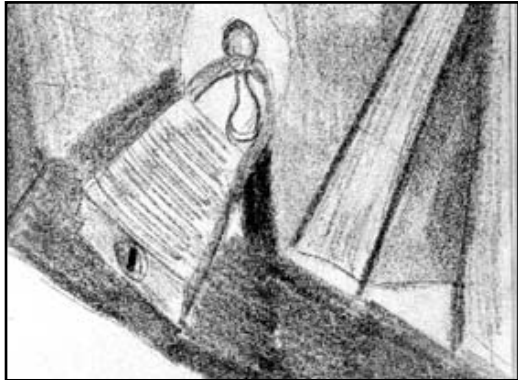
“Well, every time we put these two books on the shelf, they get stolen. Then we have to buy new copies.”

This surprised me. I said, “People steal books out of the library?”

“Sometimes.”

“Because they want them so much?”

“No, because they *don’t* want them, but they don’t want other people to see them, so they steal them. That’s why we keep these two books locked up.”



I took the books to a table and read them. They were short and easy, and I was able to finish them before lunch recess was over. When I gave them back to Mary Moppin, she wanted to know if the books helped. I told her not really.

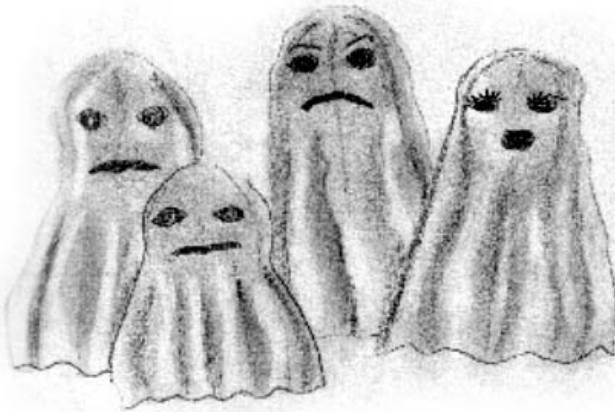
Then she asked if she could make a suggestion, and I said sure. One of the things I like about Mary Moppin is she's always making suggestions. Usually it's about a book that you'll like to read, but this time she said, "If you talk to people about this, you should probably use the word 'gay' instead of 'faggot' because gay people don't like that word."

That's when a couple of clicks started clicking. That must be why Chazz got so mad about faggots and how no one should be using that word, and my dad was using the word. I guess that had something to do with why my dad was so mad, too. But still, it didn't make good sense to me. Mary Moppin was just looking at me like she wanted to help me but didn't know how. And I guess I didn't feel so much like a ghost, while I was still there with her. But then when I left and headed back to class, I started thinking about how

not only was I the brother of something so bad that no one would talk about it, but also how books about it had to be locked up, even by nice people like Mary Moppin. And when I got back to class, I was feeling more like a ghost than ever.

First thing Mrs. Whitehall did was to tell us to take out paper and write a story. She said she wanted a story about family. She said if we didn't finish it by the end of school, we should consider it homework.

I decided to write my story about a family of ghosts.



*And here's where and why I first started writing this story. But like I said, everything changes.*

*So keep reading.*



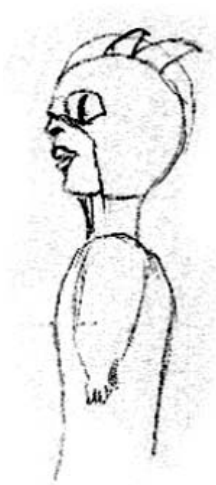
# Chapter

## 4

So when the bell rings and school lets out, I take my story and the pictures that I've drawn for my story, and I place them very carefully into my portfolio. Chazz gave me my portfolio for my last birthday and told me that "portfolio" means "carry big papers". He said that now that I am going to become a real artist, I have to have a real portfolio to always carry my drawings around and never let them get folded or wrinkled or dirty. Chazz knows that I do a lot of drawing.

In fact, I make my own comic books and I've got my own superhero and all. Chazz gave him his name, PantherBoy. I was going to call him RumbleBoy, but Chazz told me that PantherBoy is

way cooler. PantherBoy is always doing a lot of cool things, like stalking the jungles of New York, New York, and bringing criminals to justice. And Chazz says that he is going to teach me how to put my drawings into his computer where we can do reversals so that PantherBoy is all white and the background is all black, or other colors. Too cool. And we can wrap text, so the words go all around him in weird patterns, if we want. And we can do lots of other really cool computer things to PantherBoy's physiognomy.



*This is how I drew  
PantherBoy at first.*



*But then I figured out  
how to draw him better  
and better.*

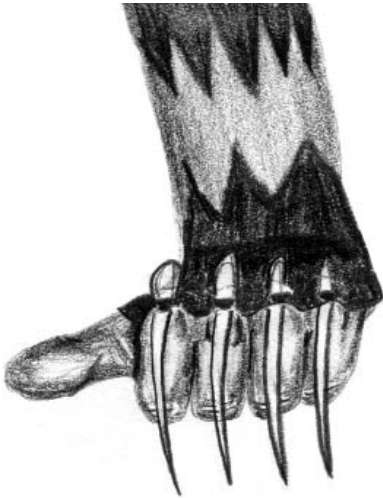




There are these people called “publishers” and they’re the ones who make the books that Mary Moppin has in the library. What you do is make your book, and then you send it to the publishers, and if they like your book, they make a lot of copies of it, and you secure your fame and fortune and capture your wider public. That’s what Chazz and I are



going to do with PantherBoy, but Chazz says, “First things first.” And that’s why I’m writing this story first, and drawing these drawings.



*This is how PantherBoy sticks out his claws.*

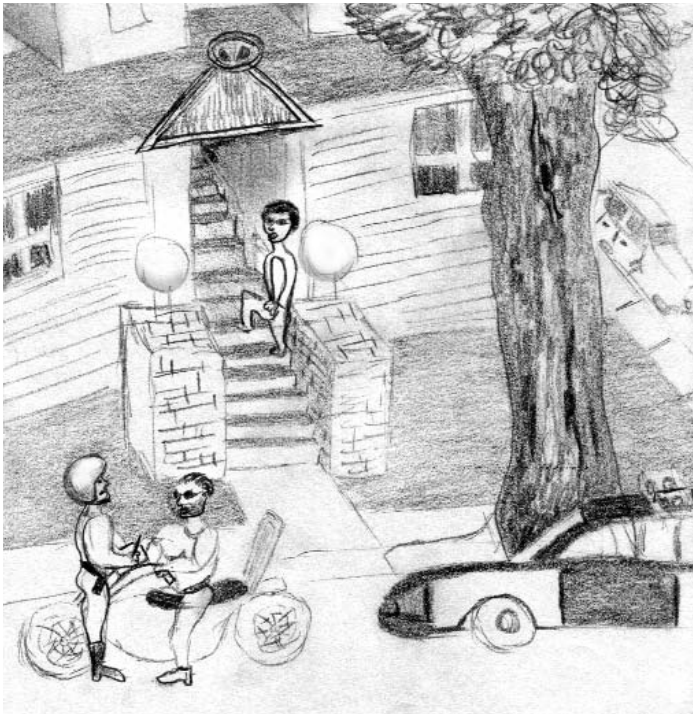
And that's why, when school lets out, I place the pages so carefully into the portfolio. And when I get out to the field for after-school practice, I lean my portfolio up against my backpack in the shade of that tree out there, so that all my PantherBoys and the new drawings of the ghost family are safe. Then I take my baseball glove out of my backpack and get set to run out on the field. But just then I see the downtown bus coming up to the corner and, click, I make this split-second decision to cut practice. The next second I've got my portfolio and backpack and I'm running for the bus and yelling to Coach West that I can't make practice today because I've got to go see my brother because my brother's got an emergency.

I guess that's not a lie.

I know how to ride the buses to Chazz's apartment. I've done it before. My mother took me the first time, but then she let me go once on my own and said it would be good experience, and she gave me notes for the bus drivers. It's just two buses you have to remember. I've got the money because I took extra money out of my stash this morning before I left for school. So, see? That's the click. Because why did I take the extra money

this morning unless I knew all along that I was going to cut practice after school and take the bus downtown to see Chazz? I guess I did know. I guess I knew then, and I guess I know now. That's the click.

I get off the bus at Chazz's stop and come up the street and see this policeman giving a ticket to a guy on a motorcycle in front of Chazz's apartment. The policeman looks up at me weird, like maybe I'm breaking some law by walking up the street. Maybe kids walking on the street are somehow bad and then the police can give the kid a ticket. I start up the steps to Chazz's apartment, but I keep one eye on the policeman.



The front door is open with only the screen door latched, and I can hear voices inside. The front room is empty and I can see through the kitchen doorway that someone's got their feet up on the kitchen table, which is this really old table that's about to fall down. Chazz bought that table at the same garage sale where he bought my baseball glove for me. Chazz says it's hard to find a good left-hander's glove that's already broken in, and the new ones are too stiff. He said he would give me his old glove, but it's a right-hander's glove, and that wouldn't work for me.



Through the kitchen doorway I can see this baseball being tossed back and forth across the table and so I yell through the screen that there's no throwing baseballs in the house and to get their feet off the table.



The voices inside stop. The feet come off the table and then Chazz comes into the kitchen doorway, and then this other guy comes and stands behind him and Chazz says to him, “Hey, it’s my brother, Dillon.” Chazz comes to the front door and unlatches it and says, “Hey, Dill.”



But I don't know what to say next, and suddenly I can't help it but I start crying like a baby. It's stupid to cry like a baby, especially in front of your big brother and this other guy that you don't even know. And I can't even tell you why I'm doing it, and that makes it worse, and that makes me cry harder, and I hate it. Chazz grabs me and pulls me inside and up hard against his chest and then he pushes me toward the kitchen and rubs my head all over hard and tells me that he's got a Coke with my name on it. I know that he doesn't mean that it really has my name on it. That's just the kind of thing that Chazz is always saying because he's, like, playing with you. The next thing I'm sure of Chazz is putting this Coke in my hand and telling me that this other guy is named Kenny, and Kenny's standing there looking at me, all grinning, but not in a mean way.

Then Kenny says why don't I come out back where it's not so hot and he'll show me the fountain that he made, and Chazz pushes me



out the back screen door. Kenny turns on this fountain which is nothing but a garden sprinkler running down this pile of rocks, but it's kind of cool, and Kenny's kind of cool the way he shows me how he made it. It splashes nice, and it's nice to be in the shade of the big trees, and at Chazz's apartment, and having a Coke with my name on it, with Chazz, and this guy, Kenny. And pretty soon I'm not feeling so stupid anymore.

Then Chazz says to me, "Sup, Dill?"

"Sup with you?" I say back.  
"Sup with last night?"

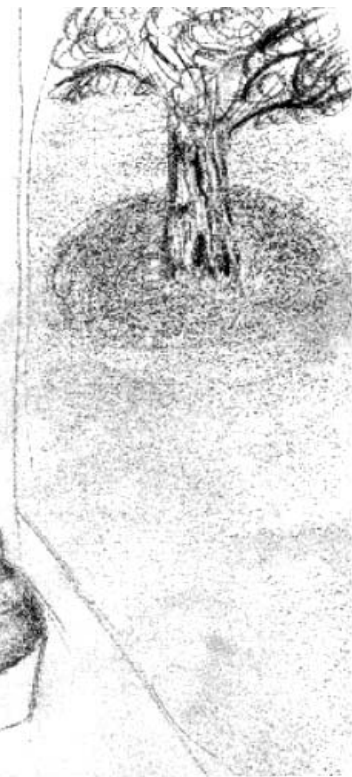
"Well, did you understand what I was trying to tell all of you?"

"Yeah."

"That I'm gay?"

"Yeah. Sup with that?"

"And Kenny's my partner. You understand that?"



I don't say anything to that. I don't think I really get it. I don't think I really want to. But I say, "Mom and Dad are weird. I think they're dropping you out of the family."

Chazz wants to know what my mom and dad told me about him after he left, and I tell him that they didn't talk to me at all. Then I ask Chazz if he's coming for dinner next Sunday night and I say, "You're not, are you?"

"I don't know. I'll have to see if they invite me. Us," he says, and he nods his head to Kenny. Then he tells Kenny that he wanted to get my mom and dad to have both of them over together, but they wouldn't even let him tell them about Kenny.

Kenny says, "It's going to take some time. It did with my folks."

"I don't think so," I say to Kenny. "You didn't see my dad last night with his veins popping and all. My dad said that Chazz has to get it out of his head or he can't ever come back. And Chazz, I think that's what you better do, too."

I look at Chazz, and he's just standing there looking back at me. He looks at me a long time,

and I start to feel real funny. But then Kenny says something to me. “Hey, Dillon, look over here.” I look to see, and he’s got my baseball glove and he’s trying to put it on his left hand. This makes me laugh because first of all, it’s way too small for his hand, but mainly because it’s a left-hander’s glove and it’s supposed to go on his right hand. I’m thinking that maybe Kenny is not too smart, and maybe Chazz didn’t choose a very good partner. “Oh,” Kenny says, “wrong hand,” and he looks at Chazz and laughs, and then he looks at me kind of out of the corner of his eye. That’s what my Grammy Rose calls the “fish-eye”.

“So you’re a southpaw, huh, Dillon?”

“Southpaw” is not a bad word. It’s just a funny way to say left-handed. I say, “Yeah.”

“But Chazz says you’re the pitcher. That must be hard to pitch with your left hand?”

This makes me laugh, too. “Not when you’re left-handed.”

“How long have you been left-handed?”

This makes me laugh again because I can see now that Kenny isn’t even as smart as I even

thought he was. “Dim-bulb” is what Chazz always calls a guy like Kenny, and that’s why I’m wondering even more why Chazz chose this dim-bulb for a partner. And as I’m laughing I look over at Chazz, but Chazz isn’t laughing. He’s just watching me still.

“I was *born* left-handed,” I say. “Or at least, I guess so. I was too young to remember.”

“Oh, yeah?” Kenny says. “I was born *right*-handed. How about you, Chazz?”

“Right-handed.”

“Yeah,” Kenny says. “Almost everybody is born right-handed, but how come you’re different, Dillon?”

“I don’t know. It’s just the way I am.”

“Chazz showed me a couple of your PantherBoy books, too. Pretty good. You drew all of those pictures with your left hand?”

“Sure.”

“So, what would you say if I tell you that you can’t do that anymore, draw with your left hand? What if I say you have to draw PantherBoy

with your right hand instead?”

“Well, but I can’t.”

“Sure you can.”

“But he wouldn’t be any good. He would look stupid.”



*This is how PantherBoy looks when I try to draw him with my right hand. See? He looks stupid.*

“No,” Kenny says. “I’ve made up my mind. From now on you’ve got to draw with your right hand, pitch with your right hand, write with your right hand.”

“Why?!?”

“Because I say so.”

“But that’s not fair!” Now I’m getting really mad. “And you can’t make me. It’s none of your business anyway.”

“What if I told you that unless you change to your right hand, you can’t ever come to see Chazz again? I won’t let you because I don’t like left-handed people.”

This is so mean that I look to Chazz, but Chazz is still just looking at me. He’s just looking at me and letting this guy Kenny say all these mean things to me. But then finally Chazz says to me, “Don’t you see what Kenny’s getting at, Dill? That’s what Mom and Dad are trying to do to me. They’re trying to tell me that I can’t see them again, or you again, unless I change to something that I’m not.”

And now something else clicks.



# Chapter

## 5

Suddenly I remember something Grammy Rose told us, me and Chazz, one day when we were over at Grammy Rose's house helping her in her garden. I saw that she was doing everything with her left hand, same as me, and I said to her, "So, Grammy, you're left-handed, too?"

I didn't mean it like an insult or anything, because how can you insult somebody just because they're left-handed? Especially when you yourself are left-handed? But Grammy Rose sat back on her heels where she was setting these little plants into the soil, and she looked at me like it was something very serious. Then she told me this story about how when she was a kid her teacher

used to tie up her left hand in a fist, so she couldn't use her left hand for writing.

"No, Grammy!" I said. I really didn't believe her, that a teacher could be so mean to a kid.

"Oh, yes!" Grammy Rose said.



"And Miss Trudie didn't stop there, oh no, but she called my mama to the schoolhouse, your Great Grammy Grace, and Miss Trudie told my mama that she had to join in 'correcting' me, too. Just as soon as I got home from school every day, Mama was supposed to bind up my entire left arm behind my back,

bound to my waist with a cloth. Otherwise, Miss Trudie told my mama, I would continue in my ‘sinister’ ways.”

I didn’t know this until then, but left-handed people used to be called “sinister”. That means evil. Miss Trudie calling Grammy Rose “sinister” makes me so mad that I could hop up and down on her pumpkin head. And Grammy Rose says that that word “sinister” comes from Latin which is a dead language, and the Italian word for “left” is still “sinistro” even today. And the Italians are, like, almost the same as the Latins, only the Italians are still alive, and the Latins are all dead. Or something. It’s real complicated, but it means a lot to people who speak English, which is my own language. And Chazz, who studied French at Hanover High—and I’m going to study French, too, when, or if, I ever get to Hanover High—told Grammy Rose and me that the French word for “left” is “gauche”, which has an English meaning, too. In English, “gauche” means “clumsy”. Clumsy and evil. That’s what I’m supposed to be? And for all these wrong reasons, Miss Trudie tried to get my Great Grammy Grace to tie up my Grammy Rose, who was just a kid? If that doesn’t

make you want to hop up and down, then I don't know what.

I said, "But Great Grammy didn't do that to you, did she?"

"You bet she tried!" Grammy Rose said. "But it lasted only about two days. Mama wanted me to do everything around the house, all the sweeping and mopping, all the dishes, all the wood-chopping, all the ..." Grammy Rose is always interrupting herself, and then going right on but with different words. "Well, there wasn't anything she *didn't* want me to do, and how much of that can you do with one arm tied behind you, particularly when you didn't want to do it in the first place? And she couldn't very well spank me for *not* doing it right when she was the one who made me one-armed. So at home, no, that didn't last long."

"And did Miss Trudie give up, too?"

"You bet she didn't! That woman was one virago, and if you don't know what that means, then go look it up." Grammy Rose is always telling you to go look it up, and she's even got this

dictionary and this encyclopedia that she keeps handy for you. Chazz keeps telling her that he's going to teach her how to use the internet, and she keeps saying that she's going to learn, but that never happens. I looked it up later. Virago means termagant. Go look it up.

Anyway, for that whole year that she was her teacher, Miss Trudie kept Grammy Rose's left hand tied up and Grammy Rose was forced to learn to use her right hand for writing. And that's why Grammy Rose has terrible penmanship to this day. When Grammy Rose sends you a card, like for your birthday, you can hardly figure out a word of it. She laughs and says that it doesn't matter because nothing she writes is worth anything anyway, but I always think that everything Grammy Rose says or writes is special. I think Grammy Rose is the smartest person I know, even smarter than Ms. Peabody or Mrs. Whitehall, or any of the other teachers at the school. Maybe even smarter than Mary Moppin.

When Grammy Rose saw how mad I was at Miss Trudie—who was dead long ago and so I couldn't hop up and down on her head anyway

unless I went over to the graveyard—Grammy just laughed it off. She said, “Oh, don’t you worry about that, Dilly. That’s ancient history. That’s going almost as far back as the Trojan War. Miss Trudie didn’t know any better. She thought she was doing the right thing. So did Mama for that matter, and she thought she had failed me, and that I was forever doomed to threading a needle with my left hand, using my left eye. Her sinister baby girl was consigned to hell.”

“She didn’t believe that, Grammy,” I said, but I wasn’t so sure. Grammy Rose can sometimes tell whoppers, but usually she gives you the fish-eye when she does. That’s so you’ll know that it’s a funny lie, and not a bad lie.

“Well, maybe that’s going too far. But who’s to tell now? But don’t you worry, Dilly, no one is going to try to make *you* right-handed. We’re past *that* nonsense.”

And so that’s what clicks in my head when Chazz says that to me about how Dad and Mom want him to change or they will never see him again. See, Kenny didn’t really mean it with all that stuff about making me use my right hand for

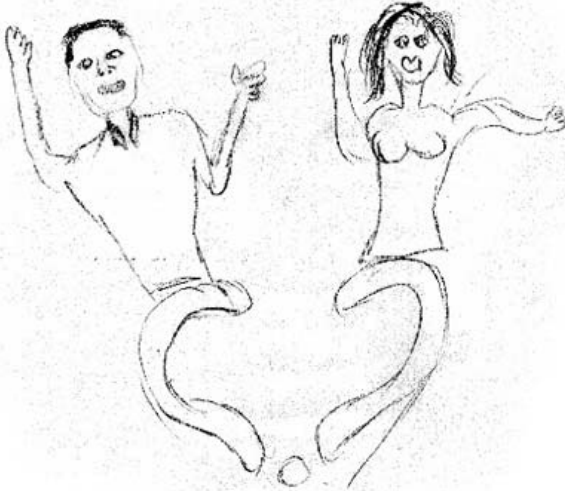
drawing PantherBoy, and for pitching. Kenny was just trying to show me that that's wrong. And so now I say to Chazz and Kenny, "That's none of Dad's business, and none of Mom's business either. It's none of their business to try to change you like that. That's like what Miss Trudie did to Grammy Rose, just because she was different."

Chazz looks at me a second and then I can see the click in his own eyes. "You're right, Dill! I didn't think about Grammy Rose, but you're right. I'm like Grammy Rose. I'm like you. I'm just different in a different way."

I'm thinking about that. Chazz is different, and in a different way. So what's the big deal? I look at Kenny, and his eyebrows are in like these question marks, and he's grinning at me again and says to me, "So, am I still your friend?"

"Sure, but I'm not going to start drawing PantherBoy with my right hand just on your say-so." Kenny laughs, and I'm starting to think maybe he *is* smarter than I thought after all. But I'm still thinking about Mom and Dad, too. Mom and Dad still have it in their heads that Chazz has got to change. And so Chazz and I have got to change *them*.

I say, “So Chazz, what are we going to do about Mom and Dad?”



“Tell them to talk to Grammy Rose,” Kenny says and laughs again. “She sounds like she’d understand.”

“You know what?” Chazz says, but he’s not laughing. “Grammy Rose *would* understand.”

“It’s not funny, Kenny. I’ve got to go home to Mom and Dad, and they’re dropping Chazz out of the family, and what am I going to say to them?”



No one says anything. It's like I didn't even ask the question. I look at Chazz. He's looking at Kenny. I look at Kenny. He's looking at Chazz. I'm feeling like a ghost again. "I feel like a ghost," I say.

They both look at me. And then in a second Kenny says, "I've felt like that, Dillon. It's when people don't see you, right?"

"Yeah, and the silence, and how no one talks. Chazz is my brother, and he said he was living a lie, and all this time I didn't know him. So he was like a ghost to me, and I was like a ghost to him."

"You know me," Chazz says.

"Now I do."

"That's the whole point, Dill. That's it, right there. That's why I wanted to talk to you last night, and to Mom and Dad. Now you know me. And now we don't have to have silence anymore, you and me."

"Okay, then, but what are we going to do about Mom and Dad? They're still sitting there in all that silence. And I've got to go home to it."

Chazz thinks about it, then says, “Well, Dill, I guess that’s not anything *you* have to do anything about. I guess that’s up to me.”

I think about that. Then I say again, “But I’ve got to go home.”

“Yeah, you do,” Chazz says, “but you don’t need to fight my fights for me, Dill. Right?”

I say, “Call Grammy Rose.” Chazz looks at me like I’m crazy. You know that look? Big kids and parents and teachers give it to you all the same. It’s like you’re just a kid and don’t know anything. I say, “Call Grammy Rose. Kenny says she’ll understand. She’ll know what to do.”

Chazz looks at Kenny, and Kenny’s all watching me with those eyebrows in question marks again. So Chazz walks over to the phone.

“Grammy? It’s Chazz. What are you doing tonight?”

I’m thinking something’s about to click.