

CHAPTER 2

The World According to Chuck

The three of us just stared at each other. I could feel my muscles get really tight. I wanted to whack Chuck on the head with a sand pail again, like I did seven years ago.

“I don’t have any money today,” Richard said.

I stared at Richard, hard. I tried to give him courage. I tried to send him my thoughts — *don’t give in. Don’t back down.*

“Yeah, like I really believe that.” Chuck laughed at him. “You’ve got more money than any kid in



this town. Now pay up, or get beat up.”

I could see Richard start to cave. *Be strong*, I thought to him. But Richard got this scared look on his face, like he was going to cry. Richard doesn't cry any more. But he does *look* like a victim.

So I had to stand up for him. “Richard said no,” I said for my friend. “No means no.”

“Shut up . . . Ding-a-Ling,” Chuck snapped back. “This is between Richie Rich and me. Unless you want to pay the toll for him.”

“There is no such thing as a toll sidewalk,” I said. This is true. There are toll highways and toll house cookies. But there are no toll sidewalks.

“And I said shut up,” Chuck said. He turned back to Richard and held out his hand. “Two bucks today,” he demanded.

“I . . . I don't have two bucks,” Richard told him.

There was a sneer on Chuck's face. He just stood there, holding out his hand, tapping his foot on the sidewalk.

I tried to send another thought to Richard —

Just say no. But I guess my thought didn't get to him.

"I've only got fifty cents," Richard said. His voice was shaky.

"That'll do, for a start," Chuck told him.

So Richard took off his backpack and began to look for money.

If there had been an adult around, I could have shouted for help. But there was nobody in sight. I didn't know the people who lived nearby. I couldn't see anybody. It was just us . . . and Chuck.

Two or three days each week, it was us and Chuck. Two of three days each week, Richard would pay the "toll." By now, Richard must have handed over ten bucks or more. Even worse, there was no end in sight. Chuck could wait for us for



the rest of our lives. Chuck could demand his “toll” until we all got out of high school.

Somehow this had to stop.

“Richard, don’t give him anything!” I shouted.

Richard looked up. Chuck turned his big ugly head toward me.

“Shut up, Ling.”

“I mean it, Richard,” I said. “You don’t have to pay this jerk. This is robbery. This is theft. I’m going to call the cops.”

“With what?” Chuck shot back, laughing.

He knew I didn’t have a cell phone. Richard *had* a cell phone — but then Chuck broke it. So now we had no way to call anyone.

Richard found two quarters in his backpack and gave them to Chuck. My friend had an awful look on his face. He looked like he’d been beaten up — and Chuck hadn’t even touched him. I thought, for a second, that Richard might cry. When we were little, Richard used to cry a lot, but he’s tougher now. He just cries on the inside.

“I’ll take the lunch, too,” Chuck said. He reached into the backpack and grabbed it.

“Hey,” Richard began, “you said . . .”

That’s when I lost it. I had seen this happen, again and again, and I was sick of it. I couldn’t watch my friend get bullied like this. And I didn’t feel like sharing my lunch with Richard one more time.

So I took off my backpack. Then I grabbed it by the two shoulder straps. And I whacked Chuck on his back and his neck. Then I pulled back and whacked him again — hard.

For a second, I think he was too stunned to do much. When I pulled back to hit him a third time, he turned and got his hand up. As my backpack came down on him, he reached up and pushed it away.

I lost hold of the straps and my backpack fell to the ground.

Chuck just laughed at me, then kicked my backpack so it slid across the grass. I had good stuff in there, and he just kicked it. If I was mad before, I was even madder now!

So I came at him with my fists. I got a good hit into his shoulder with my right fist, but then he grabbed both my hands. We were face to face. I was as mad as I've ever been. He was just laughing.

"So what now, Chuck? You going to hit a . . . girl?" I figured if he could use the "girl" word as an insult, I'd throw it back at him.

"Keep it up and I will."

"What a man!" I said, mocking him. "What a jerk!"

Chuck got as mad as I was. Then he gave me an answer to my question. No, Chuck would not hit a girl. But he'd sure give a girl one big push.

Chuck's push sent me flying backwards. I tried not to fall, but my feet must have slipped on the wet grass. Anyhow, I went backwards and landed on my butt.

"You jerk," I spat right at him.

Chuck laughed right at me. Then he picked up Richard's lunch and walked off to school. No, it was worse than that. He sauntered off to school. There's a big word that means "walked proudly."



How dare he steal a lunch, push me down, and
then *saunter* to school.

How dare he!

CHAPTER 3

We Need a Plan

Richard helped me to my feet and got my backpack from the lawn. I brushed away some leaves, but the rear of my jeans was wet. Talk about embarrassing!

“You were a big help,” I said. When I get mad, I can get mad at anybody close by. With Chuck gone, Richard was my only target.

“I thought you were going to beat him up,” Richard said. “You almost did.”

“Yeah, right,” I told him. “The guy weighs 50

pounds more than me. And he's way taller. And he's strong as an ox. But you thought I could beat him up," I said, giving Richard a look. "Let's get real."

"You have a point," Richard said.

"Aaagh!" I cried. Of all the things to say, *you have a point* must be the dumbest. No wonder kids picked on Richard.

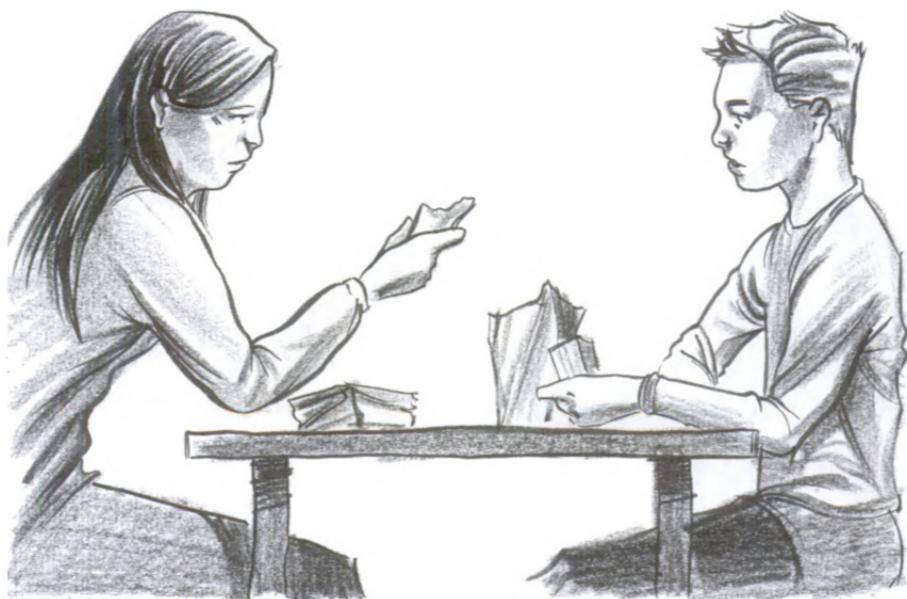
We had to run to get to school on time, so there was no more time to think. Later, when we saw Chuck at recess, he just grinned at us. He was already eating some of Richard's lunch. He seemed to enjoy eating it right in front of us.

"Aaagh!" I said to Richard.

"It must be an aaagh kind of day," he replied.

At noon, we had to share my lunch . . . again. My mom always packs too much food, so it's not as if I went hungry. I think Richard likes my lunches more than his. He sure ate his half of the lunch fast enough.

I tried to get my thoughts together, but I was still too mad. It's hard to think clearly when you're



mad. So I waited until I got home. Then I did a Google search on “bullies.” My teacher, Ms Barris, says research is a good thing. She’s talking about school, of course. But I figured I could research bullies, too.

I printed out some pages and started a file — my “Chuck” file. Then I did some thinking. I thought about the whole “Chuck” problem until my head hurt. Then I made a list of things we could do.

THE CHUCK PROBLEM! SOLUTIONS

1. Get some help — teacher, parents, etc.
2. Fight back. Beat him up, somehow.
3. Find a way to get Chuck to pick on somebody else.
4. Get somebody to drive us to school.
5. Hire a bodyguard.
6. Get a big dog.

All the websites said we should use solution number one. They said kids shouldn't deal with bullies on their own. But who would help us? My mom worked and Richard's parents both had jobs. They were all at work when Chuck bullied us.

And Chuck never did much at school. He knew that the teachers would see what he did, so he pretended to be nice. Nice! Chuck is about as nice as a pit bull. Besides, Ms Barris couldn't help us much *outside* of school. I mean, she's a teacher, not Superman.

We knew that "fight back" wouldn't work. Neither of us was much good at fighting. Nor

could I come up with a way so Chuck would pick on somebody else. How do you get some other kid to be a victim? So that left us with the ride, the bodyguard or the dog.

I showed the list to Richard the next day. He made his choice right away.

“I like number six, the dog.”

“All the websites say go with number one.”

Richard nodded his head, but didn't change his mind. “I just like dogs. My parents won't let me have one. They think a dog will get the house dirty.”

Richard's house is *never* dirty. There are whole rooms that we aren't even allowed into. I think his mom is some kind of clean freak.

“I kind of like dogs, too,” I told him.

“A big dog would protect us,” Richard said, smiling brightly. Then he stopped and looked right at me. “Why don't you ask your mom?”

“Why is it always me?”

“Because your mom is nice and my parents are kind of . . .”

“Busy?”

“Not as nice as your mom,” Richard said.

So I went to talk to my mom later that day. I didn’t say a thing about Chuck. I just said that I wanted a dog and was old enough to take care of one. My mom said a dog would cost too much. She said it wouldn’t be fair to leave a dog at home all day. “How about a cat?” was her idea.

A cat couldn’t do much against Chuck.

I gave Richard the bad news. “No to the dog. Maybe to a cat. Have you ever heard of a guard cat?”

“No,” Richard sighed.

“Me neither,” I told him. “So I think we should try a bodyguard.”

“You have somebody in mind?”

“Frank Bosco.”

“Ooh,” Richard said. “Frank the Tank.”

Frank Bosco — “Frank the Tank” — was a kid in grade eight who was as big as a truck. He played football. He lifted weights. But Frank was not a nice guy. He liked to beat up kids of various shapes

and sizes. He once tried to beat up Richard, but Richard ran off before Frank could get him.

Frank lived just a block away from us. It would be easy for him to follow us to school. Then if Chuck showed up, Frank could come protect us.

“You think Frank would do it?” Richard asked.

“If we paid him,” I said. “I figure five bucks a week should do it. That’s only a dollar a day.”

“We could split it,” Richard suggested.

I just looked at him. “Richard, let’s be clear about who has the problem here. There are no bullies bugging me.”

“You do have a point,” he said. Those were becoming his favourite words. “That would be all my lunch money for the week.”

“So? Right now, Chuck is taking all your lunch money. And if this bodyguard thing works, we won’t need Frank after a couple of weeks.”

“How did you get to be so smart?”

“Before I was born, God gave my mom a choice between beauty and brains. She chose brains,” I told him. It was an old joke, but seemed

pretty good right then. The trouble was, Richard didn't get it.

“Really?” he asked.

“Aaagh!”