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# SIMON B. RHYMIN'



**DWAYNE REED**

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LITTLE, BROWN YOUNG READERS



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LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY  
New York Boston

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Little, Brown and Company  
Hachette Book Group  
1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10104  
Visit us at [LBYR.com](http://LBYR.com)

First Edition: March 2021

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data TK

ISBNs: 978-0-316-53897-8 (hardcover),  
978-0-316-53894-7 (ebook)

Printed in the United States of America

LSC-C

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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US TO ALL OF THOSE LIBRARIES AND  
BOOKSTORES. THIS IS FOR YOU.**

**LOVE, MOOKIE**

LITTLE, BROWN YOUNG READERS



LE, BROWN YOUNG READERS



**SUNDAY**



# CHAPTER 1

**IT'S SIMON BARNES HERE. BUT EVERY--**body calls me the Notorious D.O.G., because I might be little but I've got a loud bark. Okay, not true. No one calls me the Notorious D.O.G. *yet*. But they might one day when I'm a famous Chicago rapper like Kanye West or Chance the Rapper. Everybody from the Chi knows about them. For now, I'm stuck with the nickname Rhymin' Simon, which my brother DeShawn gave me when I was five because I learned to rhyme and went kind of crazy with it. Not too long after, I did my first remix to the itsy bitsy spider song and my rhymes were extra basic.

THE ITSY BITSY SPIDER WAS LITTLE LIKE ME,  
BUT HE COULD MAKE A WEB AS BIG AS  
A TREE,  
CLIMB TO THE TOP AND BE SO FREE,  
CUZ THE ITSY BITSY SPIDER WAS LITTLE  
LIKE ME!

Those rhymes were cool back then, but, uh, I'm ready for something a little more tough, especially now that I'm eleven. The Notorious D.O.G. is something I'm trying out. It feels more like the *older* me.

I spent the whole weekend getting ready for fifth grade at Booker T. Washington Elementary School, where, this year, my class will be the oldest in the whole school. The first day is tomorrow, and I don't really feel ready for all this. On TV commercials, they show kids cheesin' real hard, happy to buy school supplies and new pairs of jeans. But don't they know that school means sitting still for hours and hours while the teacher is just talking at you about boring stuff, saying goodbye to playing Fortnite, and having to give up watching weird

videos on YouTube? Goodbye to heating up pizza rolls whenever I feel like it and getting blue snow cones with DeShawn from the neighborhood ice cream truck, when he feels like splitting his time between me and his high school homies.

My mom is trying to give me a pep talk while we shop for some new clothes at Target. I usually wear hand-me-downs from my three older brothers, but my dad says *Every rising middle schooler deserves some fresh threads for school*. So, while I'm in a tiny red changing room putting on pairs of cargo pants among my big ol' pile of graphic tees and joggers, Mom tries to boost me up with her mom-knows-best motivational speech.

"C'mon, Simon. This year is gonna be *everything*. All your brothers had a ball in fifth grade. For real. Remember when Markus won that Invention Convention? He was so excited! Plus, you're gonna be the oldest kids in the school. Everybody will be looking up to you now!" Mom's voice sails over the tall fitting room door while other parents help their kids pull together outfits they won't have to fight about.

“Yeah, but I’ll still be the shortest, Ma,” I grumble, noticing that the pants she picked out for me have about four extra inches of fabric bunched up at the bottom.

“Short is a mind-set, Simon. To me, you’re a million feet tall.”

TALL?



NAH.

ME, I’M JUST SMALL.



COULD SHORT LITTLE SIMON

EVER SHINE LIKE A DIAMOND?

MY MOM THINKS SO,

BUT ME, I THINK NO.

HOPEFULLY, I CAN GROW,


HOPEFULLY, I CAN GROW.





“Stop letting those fools test you,” she says, doing her best to put extra bass in her voice. I can’t help but laugh to myself.




I look in the mirror and think my favorite vintage Chicago Bulls T-shirt doesn't look half bad with the rolled-up cargos and new Nike Air Maxes we bought yesterday. Not all the way Notorious, but hey, it's a start. I know they'll see me in this.

I LOOK INTO THE MIRROR, AND ALL I SEE   
IS FEAR,  
CUZ THE FIRST DAY OF FIFTH GRADE IS HERE.  
I FEEL ALL FLY BUT I'M STILL A SMALL FRY.  
I MIGHT BE THE SHORTEST KID IN THE WHOLE CHI.

 NERVOUS, BUT EXCITED, TO SEE OLD FRIENDS,  
TO LAUGH, AND PLAY, AND LEARN AGAIN.  
GOT MY SUPPLIES AND I'M READY TO GO,   
CUZ TOMORROW, IT'S ON, AND THAT'S FA SHO'.

MAYBE I'LL GROW, OR JUST STAY THE SAME,  
DOESN'T MATTER, THIS YEAR, THEY GON' SAY  
MY NAME.

PEOPLE GONNA KNOW ABOUT WEE OLD ME,  
NOT SIMON, BUT NOTORIOUS D.O.G.!

WOOF! WOOF! 

On our way home from Target, we run into my best friend Maria Rivera and her grandma, Ms. Estelle, in the parking lot. I don't think Estelle is her last name, but that's what everybody be callin' her. Maria yells my name too loud, surprising me, just as Mom and I finish throwing all my bags into the trunk. I jump, but only a little, cuz *Notorious D.O.G.* ain't never scared! I've been friends with Maria since the first grade. Sometimes we call her Ri-Ri because Rihanna is her favorite celebrity. My brothers call her Big Ol' Mouth because we always know what she's thinking about and nobody ever has more questions than her. But I like that she always knows what's going on, even when I don't.

MARIA, MARIA,  
THAT'S MY AMIGA,  
EVERY SINGLE TIME,  
SHE'LL SAY WHAT'S ON HER MIND,  
CONFIDENT AND KIND,  
A GREAT FRIEND OF MINE,  
MARIA, MARIA!

“Oh em GEEEE, SIMON! You ready for tomorrow? I heard our new teacher is really hard. Not strict like Mrs. Wright, but hard, like gives *real* work and actually makes us do it! Camille said she had a big project to do in the very first week of school last year,” Maria says, pushing up her pink-rimmed glasses, squirming and waving her hands around in the air. I know it’s a new pair cuz I’ve never seen these ones before, but they’re too big just like all her other ones. None of her glasses ever fit enough to stay on her face. She’s talking about school the same way she talks about everything else she’s too hype about—as if she was telling me about some new sneakers or something. I wish that’s what she really was telling me about. Camille is Maria’s older sister, who’s in middle school now and the source of a lot of Maria’s info. I’m still not convinced that means we should believe her.

“Maria, ay Dios mío! Don’t bother Simon with your silly gossip, now,” Ms. Estelle says, dragging Maria toward the Target entrance. Maria has lived down the street from us since before I knew her, so we’re always running into each other when she’s

out with her grandma shopping. “Just look at him. He looks like he’s seen a fantasma from new school years past,” she jokes, laughing at my blank face.

“Simon don’t look like he’s seen a ghost, ‘Buela! That’s just his face sometimes. He’s probably just constipated,” Maria says, flashing me an annoying smile while jabbing me in the shoulder. Instead of being quiet like most people, Maria makes up embarrassing stories about people to make herself laugh. She knows it’s okay to do it to me but she’d never let somebody else embarrass me like that. “I’m not bothering him. We been talking about it *all* summer. Right, Simon? It’s called the Freedom of Information Act, ‘Buela. I make sure he knows what’s up.” Maria rolls her eyes at her grandma and waves a quick goodbye to me and Mom. I watch Ms. Estelle go off on her in Spanish while she skips toward the door like she’s never seen a cloud in the sky.

As Mom and I get out of the car to walk toward our apartment building after unloading all my new school clothes, I can feel the butterflies floatin’ around all crazy in my stomach. I’m not ready for

us to be doin' nothin' too major in the first week of school. What if we have to get up in front of everybody?! Even though I can rap all I want at home, I just know I can't do anything like that in front of a whole classroom full of other kids. They all gon' be lookin' at me weird. Last time I tried to talk to a whole bunch of people, the room got spinny, my hands got sweaty, and I felt like I was gon' blow chunks all over the place! I guess even the Notorious D.O.G. can get the back-to-school, Sunday night blues.



LE, BROWN YOUNG READERS



**MONDAY**



## CHAPTER 2

### IF THE WEST SIDE HAD A HELICOPTER

that could take people in the air to look down on different neighborhoods, Creighton Park probably would look like a big ol' rectangle with a whole lot going on inside. Like a shoe box with a bunch of toy cars, LEGOs, and pieces of broccoli in a little corner of it. And nobody really likes broccoli, so you wouldn't see any people in that part. I haven't left Creighton Park much since I was a little kid, and there's marks on the walls in our house to prove it. But that's okay because it feels like a whole world here.

Next to the big mirror that Dad put right by the front door, Moms (I call her that now sometimes. It'll stick one day!) has been marking up the wall to keep track of everybody's height. I once got in trouble when I drew a big S across my wall when I was learning how to write my name in preschool, but Moms says when she does it, it's different. *It helps you remember how far you've come*, she says. But I've been at the same mark on the wall for almost three years. On our way out the door for school, I take a quick look at myself to make sure, from the very first day, all the other kids see me as the new Notorious D.O.G. in my *new* Chicago Bulls T-shirt, black joggers with a white stripe down the side, and matching Air Maxes, scrubbed clean after I scuffed them a little bit on the way home last night.

**HAIR LOOKS GOOD, CHECK!**



**NEW SHOES ON, FRESH!**

**BULLS T-SHIRT AND MY BLACK PANTS ON DECK!**

**FIRST-DAY SI, I'M FLY, THAT'S A BET!**



**THE D.O.G. IS SICK, SOMEBODY CALL A VET!**



**WOOF! WOOF!**

“Hurry up, Simon. The way you movin’ you’ll be late for whatever fashion show you think you goin’ to, baby.” I give Moms a quick look out the corner of my eye. “Okay, big man. Let’s go.” She thinks this is a game.

We live in the Creighton Crest Apartments, and you can almost see my school from the sidewalk in front of our building. Me and Moms walk to the corner where the signs say LOCUST STREET and LOVING STREET, right before the corner store all the neighborhood kids go to for our candy, Flamin’ Hots, and grape pop. Moms walks past it ahead of me so I won’t ask her for nothin’, like she’s in a hurry. But I know me and Maria can probably get Ms. Estelle to stop there after school. Past Chicago Corner farther down Locust is Mr. Ray’s Barbershop, where me, C.J., and Dad go to get fresh cuts every other Saturday. It’s usually closed on Mondays, but today Mr. Ray is standing outside in front of the windows spray-painted WELCOME BACK TO SCHOOL, waving at all of us as we walk by even though we’ve seen him all summer. Mr. Ray seems just as excited as Maria for our first day.

“Mr. Barnes with the fresh cut! Watch out, now!” Old people always get weird about school and the first days of everything. Moms turns around to give me a look to make sure I’m not rude to him.

“Good morning, Mr. Ray,” I say back through my teeth.

We pass the empty basketball court that will be full of high schoolers arguing and playing five-on-five when we get out later. Just then the sidewalk starts turning left into the school parking lot, packed with teachers’ cars and teachers directing everybody in and out. Suddenly it feels like my heart is playing drums on the inside of my chest, getting faster and faster, louder and louder in my ears. Moms turns around and smiles. *Chill, Moms.*



Some kids call our school Booger T. Washington, but not me. I figure, since we spend five days a week in that place, might as well put a little respect on its name. Plus, I can’t picture any famous rappers using the word *booger*.

MAYBE, JUST MAYBE, I'D SAY SNOT.



BUT BOOGER? OH NAH!

DEFINITELY NOT!



“Don’t kiss me in front of everybody, okay?” I remind Moms just before we reach the steps to the front entrance. Even though that’s what she always does when she drops me off anywhere, I don’t need her blowing up my spot. It kinda makes me feel all fuzzy inside, but we can’t be doing all of that now. This is fifth grade, feel me?

“I get it. Maybe I should pretend I’m not even your mom anymore,” she says with a laugh as she gives my hand a quick squeeze, which still feels kind of good. She looks a little sad when she laughs, but I gotta be tough. Big new things are happening. “But all these other kids’ moms probably still kiss them.” I squeeze her hand back two times and hope she gets my message somewhere up there in Mom World.

Once we get to the playground outside of Booker T., Moms turns to me and gives me a weird

overhead high five that's probably just as embarrassing as a hug. "Have a good day, Simon. I luhh you."

*Gah!*

"Don't forget to use that voice today, big guy," she says before leaving.

Maria is already in the line for fifth graders and saved me a spot. I slouch against the tall brick school building looking down on me, keeping my eye out for my other best friend, C.J., who's always late, even on important days like the first day of school.

"Siiiiimon! Earth to Siiiiimon!" Maria always says stuff like that to me when she wants my attention, whether it's about something important—*Chess Club got moved to room 302*—or something not-so-important—*That new Drake song is fire! You heard it yet, Simon?*

"What?!"

"I was saying, do you have all your stuff ready? I sharpened my pencils last night and labeled all of my different-colored folders so I could be prepared. *By failing to prepare, you're preparing to fail.* My tío has that written on a poster in his office," she explains in her deepest, most serious voice.

“Oh, and I did a bunch of multiplication flash cards last night before I went to bed, because Camille told me I’d better be ready for more math this year. What about you?” This is when Maria turns and looks me right in the eye, all up in my face like she, too, is one of our new teachers. She’s big on eye contact and gets real serious when she asks her questions. She’s already doing the most.

“Umm, yeah. Yup...” I say, trying to ignore the pit that’s forming in my stomach. More math? I hate math. And flash cards? Who gets excited about more flash cards and memorizing number stuff?

**MATH’S HARD! FLASH CARDS?**



**NO WAY, NO THANKS!**





**ALL THOSE QUOTES AND STICKY NOTES—NOPE,  
NOPE, NOPE!**

Camille is probably just trying to scare us like her and her friends always do. And Maria’s love of fancy quotes and school supplies makes me feel kinda low. I guess I’m not really excited for school like she is.

I pull my new all-blue book bag tighter onto my back, squeezing the shoulder straps, and feel the gold Black Panther pin I attached to it press against the inside of my hand. It's already too heavy, filled with proof that Moms overdid it once again. I didn't do everything Maria did last night, but by the weight of this thing, I know *something* in there will work.

Just then, C.J. runs up, breathing extra hard and wiping sweat off his forehead. Of course he ran all the way here. We all look at one another and bust out laughing. C.J.—short for Cornelius Jeremiah—is always a hilarious dude to look at with his lop-sided T-shirt and shorts riding up his butt after an almost-late morning school hustle. His first-day look ain't no different than any other: This morning he's rockin' his favorite yellow Goku tee, his dad's hand-me-down dark red basketball shorts, and mismatched Steven Universe socks inside a pair of classic high-top Chucks that he probably won't ever stop wearing until they're so old his feet rip through the soles and his toes are barking through

the front. He made sure to seal the look with his signature high-top fade and an extra-crispy side part right above his left eyebrow.

 **MY BIG HOMIE C.J., AS COOL AS IT GETS,  
SO CONFIDENT, FROM HIS HAIR TO HIS 'FITS,  
A HILARIOUS DUDE, FUNNY DOWN TO HIS BONES,  
I'M GLAD HE'S MY FRIEND, CORNELIUS JONES.** 

“Whoa, I made it!” C.J. says, smiling and opening a medium-sized bag of Flamin’ Hot Cheetos. I’m pretty sure he loves them just about as much as he loves anime, playing ball, and watching Saturday morning cartoons while FaceTiming us from the couch leaned over a bowl of Fruity-O’s. He low-key probably loves eating Flamin’ Hots just as much as he loves old-school Derrick Rose. So... that means, A LOT. He pulls out a handful and stuffs them in his mouth all at once. You’d think he didn’t have breakfast like he does every morning with his little sister, but we know this is just Breakfast: Part Two. “Y’all know you want some. Corn and cheese



are breakfast foods, don't be lookin' at me all funny." We crack up at this speech we've heard a million times.

I've been friends with C.J. since I was really little, so we're basically cousins. That's how it is on the West Side—anybody that's not your cousin can still be your

cousin if they've known your family long enough. It's weird, but it's a thing. I even call his mom Auntie Sharon. But that's also because I'd have big problems with my mom if I called a grown-up just by their first name. And I don't want those problems. C.J.'s tall and big, so people think he's tough. But the joke's on them, because he's kind of like a teddy bear, actually, and he loves watching Disney movies, on top of his regular cartoon faves, with his little sister. But I'm not snitchin' on him because I don't mind other kids thinking C.J. is a big, bad part of the Notorious D.O.G. squad. I want

kids to think he's like my security or something—especially kids like Bobby Sanchez.

“Hey, Simon. Did you get *any* taller over the summer? They're probably gonna send you back to kindergarten for being so short, so I don't even know why you're in the fifth-grade line, bruh!” Bobby teases, jabbing his elbows into his friends' sides, egging them on to laugh. Bobby has walked up with his friends Justin Cook and Victor G., and they both look at me and laugh a little too hard along with their leader. All three of them are dressed like it's basketball season—Bobby in his usual extra-long white tee, some vintage-looking Pistons shorts, and what look like hand-me-down all-white Air Force 1s—even though all of them would be better talkin' stuff on the sidelines. They're the kind of kids who make a lot of noise wherever they go, even if they're not really saying anything anybody else wants to hear.

I try to think of something—anything!—to say back to Bobby, but the words just won't come out of my mouth.

SEE, I CAN'T STAND THIS STUFF,  
BOBBY SANCHEZ ALWAYS MAKING THINGS



TOUGH,



PICKING ON ME CUZ I'M SMALLEST IN THE  
GROUP,

WISH I HAD THE GUTS TO STAND UP TO HIS  
CREW!

I'D SAY SOME OF THIS AND PROBABLY SOME OF  
THAT,



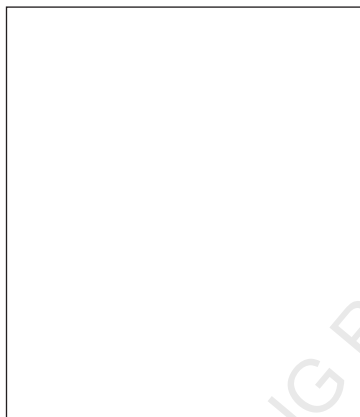
THEN EVERYONE WOULD LAUGH AT MY FUNNY  
CLAPBACKS.

BUT THAT AIN'T ME, I'M THE NICE ONE, SEE?  
SMALL GUY, BIG HEART, NOTORIOUS D.O.G.



*Briiiiing! Briiiing!*

Now here's the bell. Oh, class. School. Right.



**DWAYNE REED** is America's favorite rapping teacher. In 2016, the music video for his hit song, "Welcome to the 4th Grade," went viral, and it has since been viewed nearly two million times on YouTube. When he's not writing, rapping, or teaching amazing kids in Chicago, Dwayne can be found presenting at educator conferences across the US or loving on his beautiful wife, Simoné.

