

• CHAPTER 1 •
Three Seconds



Little Rhino stepped up to home plate. He gripped the bat tight. The breeze in the treetops sounded like the crowd at a Major League Baseball game. He imagined that the bases were loaded.

Hit this one out of the park, he told himself.

Rhino glared at the pitcher. Here came the ball!

With a hard, steady swing, Rhino connected. The smack of the bat against the ball sent a thrill through his body.

“Nice hit!” said Grandpa James with a smile.

Rhino smiled back. He dropped the plastic bat and watched as the ball flew over the tall hedge.

He'd hit it out of the backyard! Rhino had never hit one that far before.

Grandpa pitched to Rhino every day after Rhino's homework was done. "Books first, baseball second" was the rule in their house. Rhino always raced home from third grade, had a snack, and did his work. Then he changed into shorts and an oversized jersey, grabbed his bat and glove, and met Grandpa in the yard.

"You're really hitting them now, Rhino," Grandpa said. Rhino's real name was Ryan but everyone except his teachers used his nickname. "Better get that ball before it rolls all the way to Main Street!"

Rhino laughed. He knew the ball hadn't gone that far. It was just a plastic one—not like the real MLB baseball they used for playing catch. He hit with a plastic one because a real one might break a window. That would be bad.

Rhino trotted out of the yard. He stopped cold when he saw Dylan on the other side of the street.