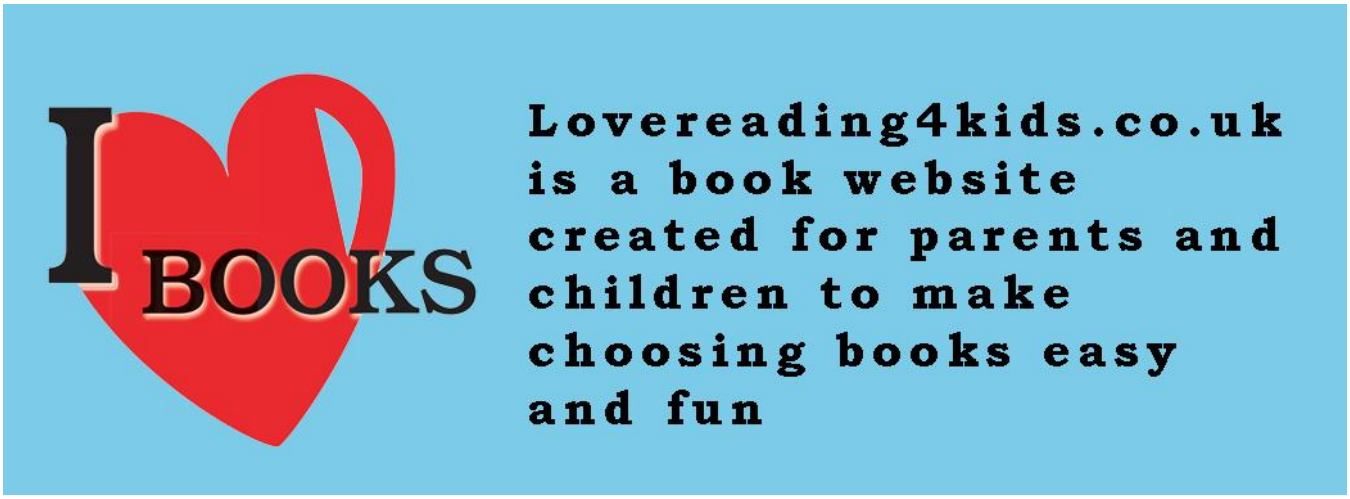


Opening extract from

Word of Mouse

Written by

James Patterson

and Chris Grabenstein

Illustrated by

Joe Sutphin

Published by

Arrow (Young) an imprint of Cornerstone)

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

WORD of MOUSE

JAMES PATTERSON
AND CHRIS GRABENSTEIN
ILLUSTRATED BY JOE SUTPHIN



1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Young Arrow
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road
London SW1V 2SA

Young Arrow is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com



Copyright © James Patterson 2016
Illustrations by Joe Sutphin
Excerpt from *Middle School: The Worst Years of My Life*
copyright © James Patterson 2011
Illustrations in excerpt from *The Worst Years of My Life* by Laura Park

First published by Young Arrow in 2016

www.penguin.co.uk

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Hardback ISBN 9781784754167
Trade paperback ISBN 9781784754211

Printed and bound by Clays Ltd, St Ives Plc

Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.



For Red Boy
—JP

For Parker, Tiger Lilly,
and Phoebe Squeak
—CG

CHAPTER 1



"The world is always biggest when you're small."
—Isaiah

My story starts on the day I lost my entire family. I'm running as fast as I can behind my big brothers and sisters. Down the hall. Past the mop bucket. Toward the open door.

We're escaping from a place that's foul and creepy and 100 percent HORRIBLE!

It's also the only home my family and I have ever known.

My brothers and sisters are leading the way to our freedom. All ninety-six of 'em. I'm the youngest, not to mention the smallest. All I have to do is tail after them, just like I always do. Wherever they lead, I will

follow. I know it'll be a safer place. And better. It has to be!

Abe says so. Winnie, too.

We squeeze through that tiny crack between the door and the wall and enter the Land of the Giants.

Outside.

The place none of us has ever been before.

Have I mentioned how terrified I am?

Oh, no!

A lumpy black mountain reeking of rancid vegetables blocks our way forward. It forces my family to split up. To scatter in all directions.

"You guys?" I cry. "Wait up!"

They can't wait. It's too dangerous.

I try taking a shortcut to catch up with them. I run *over* the mountain.

Bad idea.

My right rear paw punches through something as thin as an eggshell. My leg plunges down into a slimy hole, and I can't lift it out. This isn't a mountain. It's a big, black plastic sack filled with garbage.

"You guys?"

My brothers and sisters have totally disappeared.

And I'm trapped.

So, I do what I always do. I panic.

"HELP!" I yell.

This escape was my big brother Benji's idea. But Benji's gone. So are Abe and Winnie and—

I hear the heavy thuds of human shoes behind me.

Someone's coming.

I yank at my leg. It won't budge. I yank again.



On the third yank, I finally tug my foot free. I need to run. I need to find my family. Because without them, I don't have any idea where I'm supposed to go or what I'm supposed to do!

On the other side of the garbage mountain, I skirt around a crumpled bag labeled D-O-R-I-T-O-S and reach a ledge.

"Winnie? Abe?"

I look around. Can't see anybody.

Then I look down.

There's a three-foot drop to a steel grate covering a dark tunnel.

I close my eyes tight and leap.

I land with a splash in cold, scummy water. I hate when my feet get wet.

"You guys?" I call out. "Did anybody else take the sewer drain? Anybody? Hello?"

No answer. Not even a squeak. Just my own voice echoing back at me.

I've heard humans say, "Are you a man, or are you a mouse?" when one of them is afraid and the other one needs him to be brave.

Well, I am definitely a mouse.

My name is Isaiah. I have never been more frightened in my whole life, and that's saying something, because my whole life has been one big fright fest. But it doesn't get any worse than this.

I don't know where I am. And I've lost my family.

Or they lost me.

Either way, for the first time in my life, I'm completely alone.

CHAPTER 2



"God gave us the acorns,
but He doesn't crack them open for us."
—Isaiah

I hear a siren.

Flashes of red light slice through the darkness, along with the shrieks of a siren. *Yipes!* Someone just sounded the alarm.

I want to hide forever in the darkest corner of this dripping drain, but something inside me says, *Keep running, Isaiah. Never let them catch you! Go find your family! Hurry! Move it or lose it!*

I scamper deeper into the darkness.

I'm extremely speedy. It's all those months I spent on the exercise wheel. Swinging out my tail for balance, I round a blind curve. The strobing flashes of

red disappear. So does all the other light. I use my whiskers, just like Mom taught me before she disappeared from the Horrible Place, to feel my way along the damp walls. I barrel headfirst into a black tunnel of nothingness.

And my feet keep getting wetter.

Suddenly, up ahead, I see a split shaft of light.

It's another storm drain.

I scuttle up the slick side wall and come out in an alley littered with trash, some of which looks pretty tasty. But when you're a mouse on the run, trying to catch up with the rest of your family, you really can't stop for a snack, no matter how tempting. I slip on a squishy brown banana peel, slide sideways toward a pile of boxes, and skid through an opening skinnier than a page in a book.

When I glide out (on my bottom) on the other side, I hear voices.

Human voices.

"Find them, you idiot!" snarls one. "Find them all!"

"This isn't my fault," blubbers the other. "I only left the ding-dang door open for a second."

I don't wait to hear any more.

I scale the side of a building. Climb straight up

it using tiny holes that humans wouldn't even know were there. When I reach the top, I see a thick, black utility line swaying in the breeze. I spring off the wall, fly through the air, and land with a *boing* and a bounce.

Using my tail for balance, the way a tightrope walker uses a pole, I race along the bobbing wire.

Soon I'm over another alley. Or maybe a toxic waste dump. The air smells so extremely gross, it makes my whiskers quiver. Rust. Putrid chemicals. The scent of rotting eggs.

My ears are blasted by the shrieks of that alarm horn. It makes my spine shiver all the way down to the tip of my tail. I need my brothers and sisters to buck me up and make me brave.

But I still can't see any of them.

I shout down to the ground anyway.

"You guys? Abe? Winnie? Anybody? *Where are you?*"


NO
DUMPING!

CHAPTER 3



"A mouse may run swiftly,
but it can never escape its own tail."
—Isaiah

I feel like I've been running for hours, even though it's probably been only five minutes.

The humans are far behind me now, but they're loud—and my ears are extremely sensitive.

"That's ninety-five," says one.

"Make that ninety-six," says the other. "Gotcha!"

Oh, no! They caught my whole family. Abe and Winnie and Benji and—

"Good work," cries one of the humans. "Who's missing?"

"One of the ding-dang blue ones. The runt."