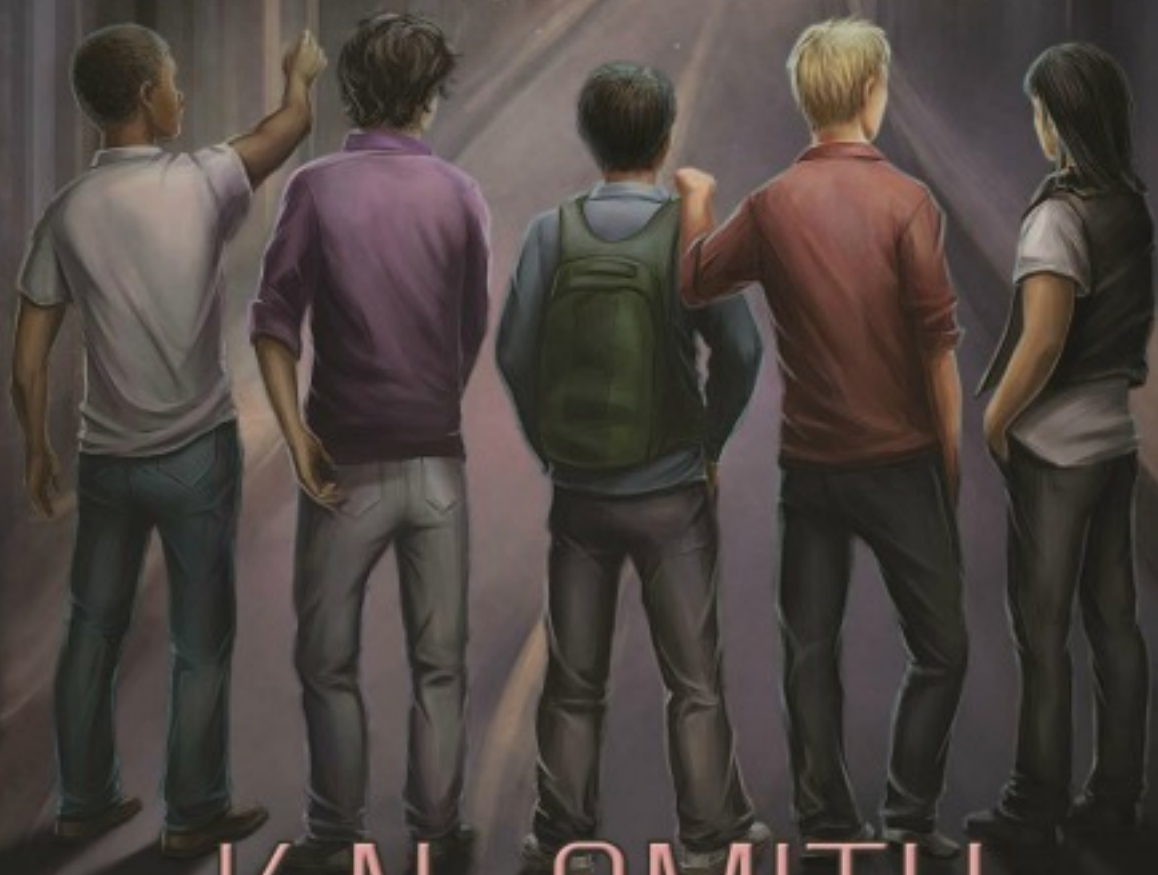


THE  
URBAN BOYS

Discovery of the Five Senses



K.N. SMITH

THE  
URBANBOYS™  
Discovery of the Five Senses

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*With dry, brittle leaves and debris suddenly thrust upward, the two were covered in a dark, hazy hell as they pursued a violent struggle for what seemed like an eternity.*

## PROLOGUE

### *Twenty Years Ago ...*

**H**UGE, CURVY LEAVES BEAUTIFULLY ARRANGED WITHIN THE PRESERVE offered the perfect backdrop for a midnight encounter between two friends who happened to be unequal in their mindsets as well as in their needs to control. Curiously, a beautiful, black midnight lent air and mystery to the setting of which each was familiar. But almost immediately the conversation went awry, and perhaps on purpose.

“You don’t think I’m capable of leading us in the right direction, do you? We can’t stay here going nowhere, and I’ve chosen you to go with me. We need to stay together!” said an imposing Joaquin Grayson as he squeezed the life out of Ross Dawson’s arm. “We’ve been doing fine for almost a year. Why you want to cut out now?”

“We’ve been going back and forth from here to there and everything’s alright, I guess,” said eighteen year old Ross. “But you’ve changed. It’s not the same. It’s like I don’t even know you anymore. Man, why do you need so much power?”

For the first time, the mellow, demure Ross trusted himself to speak up, to question the mounting dissention clouding their friendship. He remembered that only a short time ago a youthful adventure took place in this forbidden milieu. A place from where tales of strange happenings, mysterious noises, and unsolved disappearances emerged, or so it was said.

And during that youthful adventure within the preserve, when confronted by that mysterious accident, they all changed, and then *he* changed.

Somehow, the misunderstood, glowing energy that dripped from those huge leaves caused a solo ambition. And it had only gotten started on a dangerous course that would be littered with intense brutality checkered with misguided emotion and overtones of force and power - a deadly combination anxiously waiting in the wings.

As a result of this line of questioning, and while wondering what would happen to Ross' gift, Joaquin set his intention. Only nineteen years old, yet extremely demanding, he knew he would not be able to turn back. He let go of Ross' arm, turned away, and ran his slender fingers through his thick, shoulder length, medium brown hair.

At just under six feet, his lean yet muscular frame worked diligently to contain the rising tension within,

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being careful not to give any indication of his next move. A black tank top tightly hugged his chest to reveal lightly tanned skin that perfectly harmonized with his long, uneven hair.

And with his hair still clutched in his hand, he closed his eyes and breathed deeply as he listened for Ross' movements. Pacing a little, he rationalized that he was the only adequate soul who could orchestrate and command a new way of life. Surely, a concoction of domination that would ultimately gratify only himself.

And in the absence of even a hint of an exchange, Joaquin spun around and lunged at Ross, grabbed him by the throat, and knocked him down. With dry, brittle leaves and debris suddenly thrust upward, the two were covered in a dark, hazy hell as they pursued a violent struggle for what seemed like an eternity.

As he gained his footing, Ross shot back with a punch to Joaquin's head followed by several body punches. Joaquin stumbled backward and fell giving Ross those precious, few seconds required for escape.

With speed as the distinguishing factor that thrust him from walking to running, the shorter, 5-foot-8 Ross frantically stretched his quivering legs through any physical or mental process he could assemble. His rich, brown skin absorbed a rush of pulsating adrenaline. He tried to ignore his thunderous heartbeat, which was

now thumping clear to his ears, to concentrate on any and every path that would lead him out of the preserve and as far away as possible.

With his baseball cap blown to the wind, his short, curly hair openly embraced the moment, which was littered with deep panic and a singular appreciation for survival.

The unfortunate turn of events that took place only minutes earlier were actually the accumulation of countless episodes in which Joaquin expressed his need to control ... any and every thing. This sudden, violent spree was simply the smoky glow at the end of a dark tunnel, and they had ventured across the breaking point inside this familiar, gloriously lush landscape.



At that very same moment on the other side of the preserve, out where they were not supposed to be, Della Sato and Juson Yamada, both in their early twenties, examined the stars on what would be the defining night of their young lives.

Although somewhat disturbing tales had surrounded the mystery of the forest for generations, it offered a secret privacy unavailable in their everyday lives. They set foot within looking for the perfect place to nestle.



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Walking and talking, all was quiet and peaceful just as they had imagined.



Now heavy on his heels, Joaquin gained speed and caught up with Ross running up from behind, and he wrapped his arm tightly around Ross' neck. His long, brown hair whipped and swung, practically covering both of them. Unable to break free, Ross elbowed him in the ribs and Joaquin finally let go. They exchanged a flurry of punches, jabs, and kicks that set the bruising process in motion.

Although fatigue was setting in, Ross somehow found the strength to jump high circling backward. He landed a ferocious blow to Joaquin's back that knocked him down yet again. He frantically resumed his search for a way out, but Joaquin took only moments to compose his expressionless self, and the pursuit had fallen hopelessly back on track, and with furious traction.



With an assist from the moonlight, the curvaceous appeal of those big, wavy, round leaves with their lime, jade, and avocado tones mesmerized Della and Juson. Now resting in a shallow place, Juson looked deep into

Della's almond eyes as he stroked her straight, black hair, and told her what she meant to him.

"You know we'll be married someday. It's in the cards," he laughed. "No, seriously, I really love you."

"I love you too," said Della.

His solid, athletic frame meshed with her delicate figure. And being completely hidden behind a massive, beautiful leaf, their passion spilled over in total privacy.

*They drew in close and kissed with animated fervor.*

But suddenly, the sickening roar of the brawl between the two friends inched closer and closer to Della and Juson. He put his hand over Della's mouth and listened cautiously to determine the source of the fracas. He squinted his eyes and shook his head to signal the need for silence as they waited it out.

With no verbal exchange between the unseen individuals, it was impossible to conclude the situation. Juson peeked out for a split second and saw a brutal fight taking place between what looked like two men.

Joaquin landed multiple blows upon Ross' head and took a few in return, and they continued fighting without pause. And as Joaquin charged forward, Ross was pushed onto a tree where a low, dry, brittle branch met his torso. The branch crashed to the ground leaving Ross with a serious wound.

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The thunderous thud whipped the leaf covering Della and Juson, but it quickly snapped back in place. And when it did, Ross could be heard stumbling backward and over the branch. He tripped and fell to the ground landing only inches from Della and Juson. Joaquin pounced upon Ross choking him as he punched him in the face.

Still hidden, and with that huge, curvy leaf now pressing against Della and Juson, Joaquin wrapped his hands tightly around Ross' neck. He pressed his full weight into the evil action and waited for the end to arrive. He was entirely exhausted, and when it was over, he fell beside Ross and stayed there for a few minutes while the forest absorbed this malicious, vile act intentionally choreographed by Joaquin.

Ross' empty, wide open eyes expressed the fear of the moment, or perhaps the horror of what he feared he was destined to face. Joaquin stood up and let out painful moans as he rubbed his eyes, which were suddenly burning. Unable to see clearly, he stumbled out of the forest and into the night going anywhere it would take him. With his eyes burning under a furious, deep red, he would remain in this agonizing condition for three, long days.

Completely terrified, Della and Juson were clear on what just happened, but had no choice but to exact

more patience than they could have imagined would ever be needed in their lifetimes. As though they were totally blindfolded, and not knowing who it was, there was no reference point for this deadly, vicious act.

And as the night progressed, they found the moment to make their move. In disbelief, they ran home and enshrined this secret in their hearts under that striking, glowing moonlight on the most fateful night of their young lives.

*The community of Danville Heights offers the scenic route to a carefully crafted universe, where mature trees beckon the weary and envelope their plight through casts of shadows that cool and soothe.*

Chapter One  
*An Average Day*

**T**HE COMMUNITY OF DANVILLE HEIGHTS offers the scenic route to a carefully crafted universe. Slightly remote, its lush qualities exhibit the care and attention bestowed upon public gardens of the award-winning variety. Humid summers often afford such beauty whereby the depth and array of even a single hue delivers explosions of color that captivate and amaze. Mature trees beckon the weary and envelope their plight through casts of shadows that cool and soothe.

In this town, a simply stretched hand could easily collect ripe tomatoes, fragrant peaches, and loads of warmth. And with their expansive porches, slender fences, and perennial delights, comfortable homes seem to have been plucked from the pages of a country interiors magazine.

Winding paths offering both structure and texture mimic red carpets via celebratory deliveries of common folk from one place to another. In essence, everyone was glad to see everyone else, or at least they were

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extremely polite in greetings protocol. As such, a warm smile that's always on the menu is reassuring indeed.



Across the way, the flutter of early morning resonated. Clearly, there was evidence of a noisy conspiracy amongst little children in this town beginning with four wheels on a skateboard going round and round. Shoestrings tied into a fancy bow. Flowing red hair. These combined elements shaped a young girl's fantasy: a red-haired Barbie doll sailing to exotic locales in a boat flowing along with the tide.

This invention traveled up and down a hallway located right outside Kinsu's bedroom. And much to his dismay, it didn't take long for the noise to travel inside.

A seventeen year old with shoulder length, black hair who was named after an uncle from Japan, Kinsu Yamada reckoned with himself. Should he get up now knowing that the tide would rise on this boat therefore causing the noise to rise with it? Or, should he chance a backward slide into the sleepy zone where his own mind could flourish with fantasy of another sort?

No chance. His little sister, Christine, who was seven, was serious, and so was Barbie. She had taken one of Kinsu's shoes to fashion the boat and tied his laces with fanciful, graceful twists; thus, the sails.

With Barbie's red hair in continuous flow, Kinsu expressed something like a grumble, and the 5-foot-9, muscular quarterback dragged himself across the room, and then opened the door and exclaimed, "What in the world?"

Christine looked upward with her big, almond eyes and answered stoically with just a hint of attitude, "Barbie's on a sailing vacation."

Being naturally mellow, he stared, smiled, and shook his head all at the same time. With a yawn, he rubbed his eyes and looked back into his room to momentarily greet a friend: the sun. He thought, unfortunately, it's time to get up.



Back, forth, back again, then forth with a kind of curve in the middle. That's a rocking chair for you, a solid one that was built with real wood. It had beautiful grain, carvings, and curves just the way the soft smiling, always waving, silver haired Mrs. Perkins remembered from childhood. At nearly seventy-five, she sat in it every day, especially early in the morning before the sun peeked through those sprawling trees, and again late at night.

A peaceful neighborhood quite a ways from the town of Sandry Lake, Danville Heights was just the way she liked it. Small community feel, opportunities to get



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to know your neighbors, and even more opportunities to know their business. Just the way she liked it. After all those years, she was still the town's nosy rosy. Meant well, however.

As she rocked, a phenomenon was happening. Sparkling dew slowly evaporated from tall, shiny green, chlorophyll-laden blades of grass. The dew mysteriously appeared when the cold enveloped the blades during the night and very early morning. When the sun appeared, it suspended this action and retracted the moisture that was so refreshing to the blades.

Drying out right before her very eyes seen yet unseen, each blade had a story to tell as it emerged into the new day. Many stories, much like the ones Mrs. Perkins had stored in memory. She knew a lot about the personalities around Danville Heights. Guessing correctly, confidentiality was not one of her stronger suits. On the other hand, she was clear that some secrets were not to be revealed. The trick was in imitating the blades' mastery of secrecy through the decades.

In any case, the contribution of the rocking chair was part of the puzzle in the day's awakening. It meant that everyone was active in making the day work. Kids were up and running around, boys were slowly rolling out of bed, and coffee was on.

Kinsu's mother, Della, a black-haired Japanese beauty who was now forty-three, found her way into the front room to open the curtains. She welcomed the sunlight and the energy it gave to her creative, peaceful space.

All of this lent to the familiarity of the neighborhood and its inhabitants, and made for a smooth transition from night to day without interruption of normal events.



A few blocks away, deep slumber was the preferred guest in a scenario where sixteen year old Chase Freeman, a 5-foot-10, slender, basketball playing friend of Kinsu's, had blocked any notion of school since yesterday. Chase's older sister, Reneé Freeman, who was twenty-four years old, was raising him. Their single mother had passed away nearly two years ago from breast cancer. They only had each other now and were doing their best to make it from day to day and semester to semester.

An especially pretty girl with mocha skin, a slender frame, long, kinky-curly hair, and deep hazel eyes, Reneé was definitely in charge. She kept the house in order taking care to do what her mother would have done. As Chase matured, she gave her all toward trying to keep him focused and forward thinking. A big job for

a girl whose wounds still seemed fresh while dealing with such responsibility, but it appeared to be working so far.

Reneé worked at a café while taking online college courses, and Chase was a junior at Danville Heights High School. He was a good student and needed a lot of food and a lot of sleep, but not this morning. If he was going to catch a ride with Reneé he had to get up ... *now*.

Ever busy, Reneé rushed by his room while putting away the laundry, and considering the pot of oatmeal on the stove, they needed to get moving quickly. Sensing there might be a penchant for feet dragging in the next room, she shouted, “Chase, you’re walking today!”

“Okay, okay, I’m up, see,” he quipped. Powerful for a young man, he stood and grabbed all his covers in one hand, and in a daze, suspended them for a moment. “See, I *am* up,” went his farewell to his warm sanctuary. His deep brown skin glistened in the sunlight.

His sister heard him and laughed, “You’d better be, or you’re walking,” went her final, giggly warning.



Several streets over just past the flowing wisteria situated above pots bursting with sunny colored mums, the conspiracy amongst small kids furthered as they

made their presence known without hesitation or care. They couldn't help it if they were physiologically designed to get an early start almost every day. After all, they weren't totally aware of the concept of hushing-up while others were sleeping. They also frequently awoke to a familiar rumble, in the jungle that is. When it was time to eat, it was just time to eat, so feed me, went the rationale.

Their father, Gabriel Morales, was hip, he got it. Either that or it was his day to give mom an opportunity to be in love with her pillow for a couple more hours. Knowing he would have to deal with pancake dust flying or crunchy round things greeting the floor, he inquired, "Cereal or pancakes? What do you guys want?"

A smart and insightful man of fifty, Gabriel knew the best arguments were always the absolute shortest, if at all possible. After he dropped the question, the small ones looked at each other, puckered their lips, and at the same time gave opposite answers, and then just stood there staring at dad.

"Sounds good to me," said Gabriel as he made a mad dash for the kitchen.

These were Alex's adorable left and right hands, younger siblings Matthew, who was five, and Maria, who was eight.

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Alejandro Morales, or Alex, a classmate to Chase and Kinsu, was newly eighteen and definitely ready to graduate high school and move away from Danville Heights to pursue an exciting career as an architect. At 5-foot-9, Alex wasn't as tall as some, but he was a big thinker and considered a leader and role model amongst his friends. Boasting a mix of Hispanic and Native American, he was good looking with medium brown skin, dark hair and eyes, and had a girlfriend named Josie Perez.

A close knit unit, Alex and his friends had discovered wondrous things in their short lives, often relying on him to un-jam them in sticky situations. As morning unfolded, Alex could hear small feet rumbling outside his door, so he turned his pillow and buried down to get the last wink possible.



Interestingly, there was no awash of the sun this morning in the not too distant town of Sandry Lake. Considering the height of the downtown east side buildings that usually got a golden kiss by now, this seemed odd. Didn't the rooftops feel lonely as they awaited the moment to greet the bright, refreshing rays that gave energy to the earth? They did, but it wasn't

happening and even the alleys seemed dry, almost powdery, and empty.

There was always action on the freeway, but the pace was void of hectic, and the mood was incredibly sunken and slow. With a lull in the air, the town was quiet and subdued. A stark contrast to the sunny bonds being made in Danville Heights.

A random observer might easily conclude a certain gloom over Sandry Lake that would someday meet these sleepy boys under circumstances no genie could predict. There was no guessing at what lie ahead, but for now, everything was on task in Danville Heights where the sun could honestly believe it had a multitude of friends on which to rely for the next stretch of time.

*Russell was often in deep thought about Talia's downward spiral and its fatal conclusion. His blank stare mirroring the same on her face as her left hand unknowingly pulled the wheel across the center divide and into the path of another car.*

## Chapter Two

### *Gifted*

**L**EXICOGRAPHY. THE WORK OF WRITING A DICTIONARY. Proscenium. An arch framing for a conventional stage. Erythrocyte. Mature red blood cells containing hemoglobin. Words, words, and more words, Mason Parker loved words. At twelve years old and in the sixth grade, he was one of his teacher's favorites and was studying for a super-sized spelling test. Not the normal realm of vocabulary for that age group, but he asked for the challenge and his teacher delivered. He wanted to be a newspaper reporter when he grew up and perhaps write a few books and short stories. Even at that young age, he was on a journalistic path to wonder and discovery.

Jordan and Mason, extremely handsome brothers who looked like unevenly aged twins with huge waves in their dark brown hair that matched their coffee-colored eyes, were being raised by their father. His name was Russell Parker, who was forty-five. He was a tall, browned-skinned, humorous and hands-on dad who fought to protect his kids years ago. His substantial dimples handsomely framed his thick mustache, and



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the tiny waves in his lightly salty hair looked distinguished whenever he flashed that warm grin.

Their mother, Talia Platero, also a gifted writer who had a promising career in television production, was a curvaceous, Spanish beauty who captured Russell's heart during a two year courtship. They married, dreamed of having children, and lived their version of the American dream. Pretty basic for a couple in love, but all of it easily derailed when the swish of a bottle entered the picture as an unwelcome guest in an otherwise unblemished scenario.

It started innocently. Hanging out after production meetings with co-workers and feeling high solely from the pace of the day's events. A drink here, a cocktail there.

For someone who did not envision herself as a drinker, the creeping of an elusive sense of fulfillment given by too much alcohol may have been unexpected and not easy to grasp until it was too late. Soon, production meeting get-togethers turned into any opportunity to socialize and booze, or at least that was the impression given to Russell.

Children at home, a husband at home. Not a good situation for a woman with a family. Russell tried to intervene, but Talia's emotional condition would not allow her to explain herself, and their relationship

deteriorated. Unfortunately, denial can be a friend at times like these. In fact, the worst kind of companion.

Nearing the breaking point, Russell found himself contemplating separation and divorce, and had been preparing himself for a rough legal fight to distance his children from their mother's irresponsible behavior. He tried to get her the help she needed, but her denial stood in the way. He was angry and heartbroken at the same time.

Russell was often in deep thought about Talia's downward spiral and its fatal conclusion. His blank stare mirroring the same on her face as her left hand unknowingly pulled the wheel across a thin, wispy center divide and into the path of another car.

*Darn those two lane highways with nothing in between but hope and a prayer!*

In reflection, she was likely neither hoping nor praying, just staring or maybe dazing or sleeping, and now she's gone forever. Sadly, Russell and the boys would never know any more than that.

As Russell played this scene over and over in his mind, reality intruded. He heard rapid clicking or tapping, perhaps the sound of a keyboard. Mason was using the computer's dictionary to find more words, then ventured further to see if he could find them in the printed dictionary too. His bright green

highlighter squeaked as it made acquaintance with the words on the page.

It was either the squeaking or the tapping that broke Russell's trance-like state of mind, and his eyes blinked rapidly. He realized he'd need to whip up some pancakes, toast, or something else for the boys as they got ready for school. In doing so, he quickly returned Talia's high school yearbook photo to the shelf. A deep inhale thrust him forward as he shuffled toward the kitchen.

Mason must have been in agreement with his dad. From his room he yelled, "Dad, is breakfast ready?" Before he could get an answer, he picked up his notebook and flipped the pages. Cool air flew into his face as he searched for a word.

"In a minute," Russell shouted.

"A whole minute?" he whispered to himself, and then pondered using that minute to dig deeper to find his lost word. Exfoliate. To scrub skin with a gritty substance to remove the dead surface layer. "Found it!" he exclaimed. He would definitely need this word for his test.

Feeling satisfied for now, Mason gathered his books and notes for presentation to his backpack. It was a little messy, but that was okay, at least everything was in one place. Math on top, then spelling, then history,

all in order for his teacher, Ms. Hollander. With his work organized, he bounced all the way to the kitchen to get his hands on some of those pancakes, which might have been the best batch his dad had ever made.

A few minutes later, Mason's older brother, Jordan Parker, who was seventeen years old, entered the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. Trim and athletic at 5-foot-11, he grabbed a carton of milk and started drinking from it.

"Hey!" yelled Mason.

Jordan looked at him with a puzzled expression. "It's mine, little man," he said.

Russell could sense the rising tension centered on the potential of backwash in the milk, a furious pet peeve of Mason's. He quickly interjected, "I know how you hate that, Mason, so I bought him his own."

"Yeah, dad bought me my own milk so I'll drink it as much as I want, okay," said Jordan.

Mason sat there and lowered his eyes to his pancakes. "Whatever," he said with a half-sideways shoulder shrug.

Mason then reached for the comics and started reading and laughing. "Dad, how can a dog actually be that big, bigger than the people? Where do you get that kind of dog?" he asked.

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Russell had already settled into the fact that one of the side effects of a gifted student is that they ask a ton of questions. Mason had always been very curious and wanted to know the *whys* of life. His dad and brother did the best they could to satisfy his ever-busy, thought-provoked mind.

Just then, Jordan's cell phone rang. He picked it up. It was Ronald Berry, a tough wide receiver from the football team. He answered, "Hey man, I'm just about out the door. What's up? Today? Are you serious? Oh, wow, after yesterday's practice I don't know if I can hang!" Apparently, Coach Thomas felt the team needed double conditioning before the big game against Markley High School on Saturday, so he called for an extensive practice.

Jordan, a popular running back at Danville Heights High School, was in Ronald's team phone tree so he knew Ronald didn't create the bad news, he only delivered it. But to an overworked, sore, tired bunch of players, this was the worst news, especially in the middle of pancakes with crispy edges.

"Okay, I'll see you on the walk," said Jordan.

"Does that mean you'll be home late again, Jordan?" asked Russell.

“Two points for you, dad. I mean, yes,” Jordan respectfully clarified. “The game against Markley is going to be a battle, but we’re up for it.”

“Mason and I will be there to push you guys, cheer, shout, scream, or whatever else we can do to show some love,” said Russell.

Taking a pause from the funnies, Mason said, “Right, dad.”

Russell then exited the room to look for his car keys. He needed to hear a jingle right then lest he be late for work.

When Mason finished his breakfast, he cleared his plate and then somehow became curious about the on-off switch on the coffee machine. What would happen if it was turned off for just a split second? He figured he could sneak in a micro-experiment to see what would happen. The coast was clear, so he raised his finger, but against his luck, Russell came around the corner with jingling keys in hand and looked him dead in the eye.

“What are you doing?” asked Russell.

“Wondering if I want to have a cup of coffee?” said Mason, this time displaying a gigantic shoulder shrug, brown eyes darted to the extreme left. “I guess not.” He then grabbed a paper towel and slowly moved toward the table.

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Staring at Mason, Russell maintained that familiar, mixed-up expression that often accompanied such episodes, and then said, "Alright boys, I'll see you after work."

"Bye, dad," the boys said in unison.

Jordan moved away from the table and put his dishes in the dishwasher. He stood and stretched broadly rubbing his arms, neck, and stomach. His eyes followed the winding path of the deep brown intertwined lines in the granite countertop. With a blank stare he reassured himself, "Another practice. Okay, I can do this." His fist met the counter with a double thud, and then he proceeded to his room.

"Five minutes, bud," he said to Mason.

"Sir, yes sir! Packed and ready to go," Mason replied.

*Jordan realized that whatever he did hear was real. He didn't see anything, but he heard something like a multitude of different noises getting louder, coming out of nowhere.*



Chapter Three  
*Predestination*

**W**ITH HIS DAD OFF TO WORK AND HIS BROTHER FINISHING-UP TO GET READY FOR SCHOOL, Mason was by himself. Perhaps he needed a moment to be alone with his thoughts. Characteristically, he took his time to think carefully in formulating a poem in his mind. His paper supplies were already packed so the paper towel was the next best thing. With careful attention to the hills and valleys of the rhyme, Mason felt the weight of his words and pushed to get them out. He knew he only had five minutes, hardly any time, and with pen to paper towel he wrote:

Boys like brothers  
Always together  
Thick or thin  
Playing to win

The ball goes up  
The sun rises too  
They never have to ask  
Who's watching who

Mom is gone  
Dad works hard  
Brother's on the field  
Gonna be a star

We're way out here  
Doing our best  
House is like a home  
Home is like a nest

We love our dad  
Keep pushing for him  
Boys like brothers  
Playing to win

And simultaneous to writing the line *playing to win*, BAM! - a concentration shattering thud hit the front door without any warning. With its fury, it almost broke the glass, and then there was silence.

Slowly, the pen Mason had been writing with rolled off the table and crashed to the floor. Mason whipped around and stood facing the door. His heart beat so fast he could hear it. He was hesitant to go near, but then heard familiar voices outside. He walked over and slowly opened the door.

"Markley on Saturday night and you're *catching* like that?" shouted Kinsu.

"Markley on Saturday night and you're *throwing* like that?" replied seventeen year old Rhee Smith, the

football team's six foot right guard. "That was all on you, man. Are you sure you're ready?"

Playfully, they punched each other, and Rhee picked up the football that held responsibility for the deafening bash against the door. His blonde haired, blue eyed combo showed off nicely with his dark blue jeans and white T-shirt, but good thing Russell was already gone. Laughing, they saw Mason standing there with a telling frown.

Rhee, sensing Mason's discomfort with the rude intrusion, shouted, "Hey Mason, you ready to go? Where's Jordan?"

"He's coming," said Mason, who then ran back inside and yelled for Jordan. Both boys gathered their belongings and exited the house. In a show of brotherhood, Kinsu punched Jordan as he came down the steps.

"Good morning to you too, Kinsu," said Jordan as he rubbed sore muscles kindly gifted from yesterday's practice.

Rhee grabbed Mason and rubbed his knuckles into his head. He reminded him, "That's why we're all friends, because we can act any way and say anything to each other." Still schooling Mason, Rhee furthered, "Living way out here, far away from other cities, you have to learn to rely on people who are your friends.

You need to know who you can trust. This is a slower, but safer place, Mason. Aren't you glad you have so many big brothers to watch out for you?"

"Now that I think about it, I guess I am," replied Mason. Finally, it was time to get going, time to get on *the walk*. Their first stop was Mason's school, Cane Rapids Elementary School, just down the street from Danville Heights High School. Mason usually walked home with a few friends, especially when Jordan had a late practice. With just a short time before the school bell, everyone picked up the pace. But after fiercely kicking up dirt underneath his shoes, Jordan suddenly slowed down and then stopped completely. He stood there and looked around. The guys noticed this and asked him what was wrong.

"What's up, dude?" asked Kinsu. Jordan did not answer. He turned his head sideways so as to shift his hearing to make it more accurate.

He squinted his eyes, "Did you hear that?" Rhee moved to answer him, but as soon as he began talking Jordan interrupted with, "The what?"

Kinsu probed Jordan for an explanation, "What does it sound like?"

Jordan just stood there silent. He couldn't really put his finger on it, but he was sure he heard something, and it caused a painful reaction in his ears. He squinted

again and pushed against his ear, “You guys don’t hear anything?”

He then bent down, shook his head, and his hearing suddenly returned to normal. With his eyes now fully round and alert, he blinked repeatedly. They all stood there looking at each other and asked him again if he was okay. Apparently he was, so they resumed walking to school with one eye planted on Jordan.

“You sure you don’t have water in your ears, aqua boy?” said Rhee.

They pushed him and he mustered a half smile. “Water, maybe?” said Jordan as he glanced around in what seemed like slow motion.

Jordan realized that whatever he did hear was real. He’d been swimming plenty of times and knew what water in the ears felt like, and this was not it. He didn’t see anything, but he heard something like a multitude of different noises getting louder, coming out of nowhere. Was it a memory, someone’s music, or a plane overhead? He wasn’t sure, but he knew he had to keep moving in order to beat the school bell. He had Mason with him so all they could do was keep moving.

As they walked, Mason took out his spelling test notes and rattled off another word on the super-sized test, “Predestination. A predetermined destiny.” He was sure to do good on his test.

*As they walked toward Danville Heights High School, the tranquility of their surroundings stood out amongst them, which framed them like subjects tangled in a luscious piece of art.*

## Chapter Four

### *Remote Tranquility*

**L**IKE AN AIR COURIER SHEPHERDING PRECIOUS CARGO ON A STRICT DEADLINE, Jordan always had his protective hand on Mason and made sure he made it to school safely and on time. His father made it clear that this was his expectation and warned him to never fail his family. They had grown even closer through their struggles, and as a result, their lives in Danville Heights had been thoughtfully organized by their father based upon the principles of openness, hard work, and dedication to each other.

Separated by a large, natural preserve, Danville Heights was serene with forest-rich outskirts, a scenic river, and large, relaxed homes. The population was less than 12,000 and everyone there wanted to keep it that way. They were not open to the idea of Danville Heights turning into a mini Sandry Lake with its traffic, crime, and noise.

The overall thought was: *the smaller, the better*, especially if one had lived there all their life. Others who had moved there had reasons of their own for leaving cities and other locales.

Between the families of Jordan, Chase, Kinsu, Alex, and Rhee there were numerous justifications why Danville Heights was better than any other community. The healthy development and well-being of children was at the core of their parents' decisions and there was no discussion around that. Comparatively, it was safer, cleaner, and had the amenities that would allow kids to be kids, and to grow up unaccustomed to unnecessary stress and strife.

With his hand on Mason's shoulder, Jordan guided his brother into the school yard and sent him along to have a great day. But instead of walking in as usual, Mason turned around to look at Jordan and wondered if he was okay. He knew Jordan heard something and was not joking. Although he seemed back to normal, he tried not to worry about his big brother.

"I'm okay, man," said Jordan.

He motioned to give Mason a high five, and they did. Mason walked into the school yard, met up with some buddies, and was off to start his day.

A minute later, football teammate Ronald Berry spotted Jordan, Rhee, and Kinsu and moved in their direction. Ronald was coming from his little sister's classroom where she was in second grade at Mason's school. Jordan usually met up with him a little earlier on



## Discovery of the Five Senses

the walk, but today their timing was off. Customarily, they bumped fists and continued on.

As they walked toward Danville Heights High School, the tranquility of their surroundings stood out amongst them, which framed them like subjects tangled in a luscious piece of art. Lush foliage spanned dark emerald to apple green spread in all directions. The complement pops of colorful, fall flowers were like new friends who brought a touch of joy to the morning routine.

As the sun touched upon the tree tops in the distance allowing just enough light to shine through, they noticed how they almost never had to wear jackets because the temperature was perfectly suited for their activities at almost every hour. In the distance, the soothing voice of the river flowing at amazing intervals gave life to everything it touched.

Surely, these atmospheric qualities penetrated the hearts of the parents who transposed their families into this refuge. Perhaps they wanted to experience this every day with their kids in tow, in hopes of exposing their sons and daughters to the freedom of thought that often comes through peace and serenity. Growing up in this space would not only offer that and more, it would yield better adjusted families who could concentrate on core values, love, and harmony. After

all, there is a balance to life that must be sought, and hopefully found.

As they walked, Ronald spotted two cute girls waving at him. His dark brown hair was laid just so, and certainly an attention getter on this clear, sunny day. There was no doubting his popularity as a celebrated wide receiver on the football team, and his impressive physique caught the attention of many, hopeful, future girlfriends. He darted off in their direction and hugged both of them while he made his way to class.

As Jordan, Rhee, and Kinsu entered the busy school grounds, all that stood out was the curve of a girl's lips in-filled with a succulent hue of red, like a sea of lusciousness waiting to be discovered by a willing explorer. She walked toward the boys, but they did not recognize her, for she was new. As if in a daze, the boys passed her and she passed them, and she caught Kinsu's lingering gaze.

He had no words and kept moving in the direction of the group, which was into the classroom. Everyone made it inside except for him because he had somehow turned backward. This time, his eye shifted to the hem of her skirt and the motion it generously gave to his curiosity. He knew he would be late if he kept this up, so he turned suddenly to enter the room and was met by the door frame with a harsh reality.

## Discovery of the Five Senses

*WHACK!*

He took it in stride as everyone laughed at his infectious goof appeal, and what must have been a very sore forehead.

## *Inside the Book*

### *Additional Chapter Intros ...*

#### *Chapter 4*

*As they walked toward Danville Heights High School, the tranquility of their surroundings stood out amongst them, which framed them like subjects tangled in a luscious piece of art.*

#### *Chapter 8*

*The preserve seemed to sparkle underneath the moonlight and the on-off-on of tiny, blinking actions bore excitement in the twilight like melodic offerings from creative beings seeking new friends.*

#### *Chapter 9*

*The little being also contributed to the amazing glow ricocheting from sprawling fronds to soaring trees to fallen leaves as its creativity advanced in a display of twirls and spins that astonished the boys. And they followed their little friend further and further into the forest.*

#### *Chapter 14*

*They referred to him as “he,” likely not even knowing his name. In fact, the mind washing was so elaborate that they had even forgotten their own names. So far away from the truth were their lives that it would be impossible to salvage any one of them.*

#### *Chapter 20*

*Their martial arts excellence could not be denied as kicking, punching, and blocking moved to new levels. With an inherent need to clear things out, they charged forward to finish their business in anticipation of getting to the big one.*

## *Chapter 22*

*Appearing sound asleep, Kinsu never moved when Juson entered his room. Either way, when the window slammed down and the can fell to the floor, Juson and Della heard it. And thus, a fraction of a mishap had forthrightly revealed itself.*

## *Chapter 26*

*She reached behind her back and pulled out slender, black nunchucks and simply invited them to come get her. Their eyes could barely follow the chucks as they circled around her shoulders and torso slapping back and forth, and up and under, while she remained focused and composed with her eastern, tomboy flair.*

## *Chapter 27*

*Jordan took a deep breath and faced the hallway realizing he was on a death march to the kitchen where Russell and Mason were deep in toast and eggs. "Morning," said Russell. Jordan did not answer back, and Russell gave him an intimidating stare through the thick silence.*

## *Chapter 32*

*And it took only a few steps for their senses to flare as they saw numerous thugs running behind them. Practically tripping over one another to get to the boys, they advanced with Olympic-level speed, and swarmed like ants upon the group.*

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