

## Chapter Two

Mr. Ortega is waiting for me outside my classroom with a plastic bag in his hand, as the first day of school comes to an end.

The second I exit Mrs. Hasselblad's computer class, he tosses me the bag and says, "Tyrell, I want you to clean up all of the ground litter, and when you're done, you can finish serving the rest of your detention in the main room."

It only takes me a few minutes to pick up the trash, so I am forced to spend the rest of my detention in the main room staring at the clock. The second that I have done my time, I race out the front door and head directly to the Patterson Skate Shop, which was where I originally bought the board. Clint Boreman, the owner of the shop, was one of the first people I met when we moved here from Oakland. When I finally make it to the Patterson Skate Shop, Clint is in the rear of the store repairing an old dirt bike.

The moment he finishes he looks up long enough to focus on the shattered remains of my skateboard and says, "Wow, it looks like you blew it up with a stick of dynamite."

"Just about Mr. Boreman, I guess I was going too fast. I hit a curb on the corner of M Street and Ward Avenue. Please, I need it fixed as fast as possible. The Patterson Skateboard Championships are in three weeks."

Clint shook his head several times before telling me "Let's see what we can save."

About a minute later, without saying a word, he begins tossing the pieces of my bamboo board into the trash can. Then just as soon as he finishes, he quickly checks out each of the wheels one by one to see if they still work.

Finally, he says, "I can save all four of the wheels, but that board is history. That's the most expensive board that I carry. It will take at least a week

before I can get you a new board. That board was a one of a kind, custom made in Santa Cruz. The polyurethane wheels held up much better than that bamboo board. The board will cost you \$75 dollars to replace.”

“Whatever you say, Mr. Boreman, but please fix it as fast as you can. I need it as soon as possible for the city championships. I'll check back with you in a week.”

“I'll call you the minute it's ready, Tyrell,” he replied.

The second I leave the skate shop I realize that I am getting really hungry, so I decided to go down the street and get a slice of pizza at Wilbur Garcia's Taqueria. Wilbur Garcia's is the after school hangout for most of Patterson High. The food is cheap, greasy, and popular.

Once I'm inside of Wilbur's, I am surprised to find the First Street Boyz hierarchy inside. Sitting at a table scarfing down a cheese pizza are Mambo and two of his subordinates, One-eyed Joey Galvan, and Jesus Christo Reyes. All three are “flaming” in red clothes, including red bandannas and red socks. Then only a moment later I hear the toilet flush in the men's bathroom. Soon afterward, Tiny Garcia strolls out. The second Tiny sees me he starts laughing.

Tiny is still chuckling when he says, “Too bad about that board of yours, Tyrell. How did that mud taste? If I were you I wouldn't worry about that stupid board because Mambo is going to win the city championship.”

Without thinking about what I was saying I told him, “I didn't know they had a skateboard park in juvenile hall, Mambo.”

Immediately, I realize that I have really blown it because Mambo looks like he wants to punch me.

His eyes bulge, and then he snarls, “I don't need to practice, Tyrell, and if you know what's good for you, you'll stay out of my way.”

“I'm going to win the Patterson Skateboard Championships, Mambo.”

At that very second, I tried to run for my life but before I could flee, the First Street Boyz surrounded me like rats. There are way too many of them to

fight off. Suddenly, Mambo leaps out of his seat and starts smacking me in the chest with his open hands. He then proceeds to smack me until I am flush against the ice-machine. Then, just when I think that things are as bad as they can get, Tiny Garcia takes out his brass knuckles.

I plead with them, "Come on you guys. I didn't do anything to you. Why don't you just leave me alone?"

Before I can even finish Mambo again whacks me in the head, but before he has the chance to hit another time, out of nowhere I hear a familiar voice, "You boys need to leave Tyrell alone. What the heck do you guys think you're doing in here?"

It's Mr. Phish. He has come into Wilbur Garcia's for a burrito, and when he sees that they are about to pound me to death, he came unglued.

Without hesitating, Mr. Phish leaps in Mambo's face shouting, "My God, Mambo. You just got out of juvenile hall a couple of hours ago. How about taking a break, and leave poor Tyrell alone? All of you guys need to back off, or I'm going to have to call the police."

Mambo and Tiny aren't about to fight Mr. Phish. It is a battle they know they can't win. At the same time, Mambo doesn't want to be sent back to juvenile hall.

When Mr. Phish realizes that they still haven't budged he refuses to let up, he shouts, "Do not make me repeat myself. All of you guys need to take your act down the road, so get out of here."

He then repositions himself at the front door, where he waits until the First Street Boyz are out of sight. The very moment they are gone, Mr. Phish rushes over to see if I am alright, and he sees how shaken up I am so he offers me a ride home. I thought that it was a good idea.

Just as soon as we get in his car Mr. Phish asks, "What was that all about, Tyrell? It looked pretty grim in there. They were really going to work you over."

Still shaken, I responded, "They've been trying to get me to join their gang since I came to Del Cielo High. If you hadn't come along when you did

they would have killed me. I made a mistake by skipping classes and not taking school seriously. I don't want to join a gang, Mr. Phish. I just want to play football again at Patterson High.”

“That's all good, but right now they don't want you back, Tyrell. You're going to have to prove yourself before they'll give you another chance. That means passing algebra, getting good grades, and coming to school every day. Only then will they let you back in to Patterson High. ”

“Mr. Phish, you sound like my father.”

“Well, you should listen to your father.”

About a minute later we pull in front of my house. At the same time, I am completely surprised that he knows where I live because I haven't told him where I live.

I said, “Mr. Phish, you know where I live?”

“It's a small town,” he answers.

“Thank you, Mr. Phish. Thanks for saving me.”

Shortly after Mr. Phish drives away, my dad pulls up in front of our house in his carpet cleaning van. He is always working. Immediately, he senses that something is wrong. It is going to take a while to explain it all. I start by telling him about how my new board had disintegrated in a crash. I left out the parts of the story that make me look stupid. Eventually, I get around to what happened at Wilbur Garcia's Taqueria, and he really doesn't like what he is hearing. Just as soon as I finish, he let out a loud scowl.

Then he vents, “There's trouble everywhere that Mambo Rosas and Tiny Garcia go. Thank God that Mr. Phish came along. You really owe him, Tyrell. He saved you. Go in and get cleaned up, son. Your mom made you and your sister some chocolate chip cookies for the first day of school. I think that I better give you a ride to school tomorrow.”

I text messaged Sal, and told him what happened, and that I couldn't make it to the skate park. We decide to try again tomorrow. The next morning, I get up not wanting to go to school, but I don't really have a choice. The

school is filled with degenerates and they are degenerates who pack guns, sell drugs, and carry knives. After we each eat our bowl of cereal, Lavonne and I kiss my mother good-bye and we get in our dad's carpet cleaning van, which is our only form of transportation. This is because our Chevy Malibu is broken down in the driveway, and we don't have the money right now to get it fixed.

Just as soon as my dad gets behind the wheel of his van, he turns on his favorite country western station and before we knew it we are merging onto busy Ward Avenue. On both sides of the street, the sidewalks are packed with kids loaded down with backpacks filled with school books. Up until now my father has remained silent, but we are driving so slowly that I might as well have walked to school. It is when we pull up to the stop sign in front of Patterson Junior High to let Vonnie out of the van when I realized that I am about to get a lecture.

Then one more time my dad starts in with his standard lecture, "Tyrell, the last football game you played at Patterson High was one of the highlights of my life. Son, you have talent, you were a starting receiver on the varsity team as a sophomore. You could have gotten a scholarship. Your mama and I don't want you at that hoodlum school. We want to see you play football at Patterson High your senior year, and graduate."

With each word I shrank further and further into my seat. I know that he is disappointed because I have heard the same lecture all summer. He wants to make sure that I know I could do it, but the math scares me. Even if I did manage to pass algebra, and I did go to school every day, I will still have to make up credits in summer school if I want to graduate from Patterson High.

Shortly after, I get out of my dad's van, the Westly-Greyson school bus pulls up loaded with migrant students. Some of the migrant girls are really pretty, but my Spanish is really lousy. The first person I ran into when I walk into the main room was my friend Wendell Chung. Wendell and his family moved here from China a little over 3 years ago. Their native language is Mandarin Chinese. After 2 years in Mr. Phish's language acquisition class, Wendell speaks fairly good broken English with a thick Chinese accent. His face cracks a big wide grin when he finally sees me. Then as he reaches out to shake my hand, his grip surprises me because it is almost as strong as mine.

He says, "I washed dishes all summer in my family's new Chinese restaurant."

I thought that pushing the carpet cleaner all summer had gotten me into pretty good shape. Wendell is real excited about something that Mrs. Purdy had told him before I arrived.

"Tyrell, Mrs. Purdy wants me to try out for the school volleyball team. She says that we have been invited to the Rosehaven High Volleyball Tournament in Turlock. It's the largest continuation school volleyball tournament in California. The players on the top three teams get amazing trophies," he enthusiastically informs me.

Surprised, I told him, "Did she also tell you that the last time we entered the tournament we got our butts kicked, and we only won one game. They're going to have to buy extra body bags if we're going to enter it again. I'd hate to be involved in a repeat."

Wendell said, "You know that Mr. Phish is the coach."

I shook my head before giving him the rest of my sermon, "I think he'll be lucky if he gets enough players for a team. Most of those other schools are huge. I don't think that we have a chance."

Wendell isn't about to quit on me.

He says, "Tyrell, if we had you, at least we would have some height. We need taller players who can block the ball at the net and spike."

"I'll think about it, Wendell, but I like football and skateboarding."

I didn't want to hurt his feelings, but we don't stand a chance. It isn't like Del Cielo High is known for sports. The school has been around forever, yet according to Mrs. Purdy, the best that a Del Cielo High team had ever done was fifth place in a ping pong tournament in Los Banos. We have a trophy case, but the only thing in it is a fire extinguisher. He must be desperate if he thinks we can win the Rosehaven Tournament.

Suddenly, Wendell utters, "Tyrell, I heard about your wreck from Sunny

Luna. She and the other cheerleaders saw the whole thing. Your old girlfriend, Leticia Lopez, is telling everyone at Patterson High that you landed on your face in the mud. The whole town is talking about it.”

Instantly, I am horrified by what he is telling me. It makes me feel so small, almost mortally wounded. Still, I need to hear it one more time.

I choked, sputtered, and then when I could I asked, “Wendell, Leticia said she saw the whole thing?”

Wendell frowns, and without hesitating nods his head “yes,” and the result is I feel even worse. I probably am never going to have another girlfriend. I mean who would want a boyfriend who had flunked out of Patterson High and was famous for sticking his face in the mud.

The instant our conversation ends, the most elegantly dressed woman I have ever seen enters the school through the front door. The first thing that I thought was that she must be lost because nobody ever came to Del Cielo High dressed that nicely. She looks expensive and everywhere she goes she makes the room smell better.

Gracefully, she floats over to Mrs. Purdy's desk and asks, “Is Mr. Ortega in?”

Mrs. Purdy replies, “Yes, of course, Mrs. Wadsworth Huffington, go ahead and take a seat in his office, he is expecting you. Mr. Ortega will be right with you. It's so wonderful that you came here yourself this year.”

Mrs. Wadsworth Huffington grinned from ear to ear before making her way into Mr. Ortega's office. At the same time the students are all staring at her like she is covered in dollar bills. Just as soon as she steps into his office, Mrs. Purdy brings her a cup of coffee.

Then as Mrs. Purdy exits Mr. Ortega's office she peers in my direction, and says, “Tyrell, you make sure that the kids in your class are on their best behavior. Mrs. Wadsworth Huffington is the President of the Bank of Patterson.”

I replied, “Mr. Phish warned us yesterday, but he didn't say anything about Mrs. Wadsworth Huffington herself coming. My dad says that she has

more money than God, and that she owns the whole town.”

Every year, during the first week of school, someone from the Bank of Patterson comes to sign us up for savings accounts. No one really expected that she was personally coming. It was highly unusual because most of the prominent people in town stayed as far away from Del Cielo High as possible.

Just a short time later, the warning bell rang telling us that we are to start moving in the direction of our first class. Unfortunately, when I finally get in the classroom, all of the good seats in the back rows are gone and the only seats left are the ones in front of Mr. Phish's desk. I took a deep breath and sat down.

After taking role, Mr. Phish calls on the remaining students one by one up to the front of the class for their presentations. The first up was my buddy, Wendell Chung. Wendell tells the class how he spent the summer working in his family's new restaurant. His parents opened up the first Mandarin Chinese restaurant in town, and it's directly across the street from Wilbur Garcia's Taqueria. Next up is Jesus Christo Reyes. Everybody in the class knew how Jesus spent his summer. Reyes occupied the corner of First Street and M Street with his pit bull named Kilo.

Next, it is my friend Veech Martinez's turn. Veech is the nicest guy I have ever met. Unfortunately, his life recently took a turn for the worse when his mother couldn't take his father's drinking any longer, and she filed for divorce. Then, just after his mother found a new boyfriend, Veech's dad got jealous, and in a jealous rage his father shot and killed his mother. It is a bad assignment for him.

Many of the speeches are about working in the fields, or in a packing shed. Finally Mambo's girlfriend, Chili “Pepper” Rodriguez delivers the last speech. She tells us that being pregnant means that she spent most of her summer going to the bathroom, eating ice cream, and getting kicked in the stomach by the baby. She also tells us the story about how her first baby had been born in her cell in juvenile hall. Thankfully, we are finished.

The moment Chili finishes, Mr. Phish calls the main office to tell Mr. Ortega that we are ready for Mrs. Wadsworth Huffington. Our eyes glare out the classroom window as we watch her walk across the school yard in the



direction of our classroom. None of us have actually ever met her, but we have all seen her around town in her beautiful pink Cadillac. We also know her by reputation because during the economic collapse, she had foreclosed on homes all over town. The second she walks into the classroom all the eyes in the room are drawn to the glare of the giant diamonds on her fingers.

She immediately shakes Mr. Phish's hand and says, "Please to meet you, Mr. Phish. Thank you for inviting me to speak to your class."

Mr. Phish blushes before turning to address the class, "Attention class, we have a very important guest here today, Mrs. Wadsworth Huffington, the President of the Bank of Patterson. She is here to talk to us about the importance of opening up checking and savings accounts."

Mrs. Wadsworth Huffington looks like she hasn't exercised a day in her life. Huge jowls hang from her cheeks, and she wears so much makeup, that it makes you wonder what she actually looks like.

Grinning ear to ear she begins her presentation, "Thank you, Mr. Phish. I am so happy to be here. I have heard nothing but great things about your school and the remarkable job Mr. Ortega is doing here. This is the first time that I have been on your campus and I hope that this is just the first of many visits to come. Does anyone know what the president of a bank does?"

Wendell's hand quickly shot up in the air.

Mrs. Huffington immediately calls on him, "Yes, young man, speak up!"

"You own the bank!"

"Well not exactly, there are also many shareholders. Largely, I run the daily operations and supervise the loans. Does anyone know the difference between a savings account and a checking account?"

The entire room went silent because none of us had a clue. However, she knew that we didn't know, and she is prepared. She proceeds to explain the difference between both types of accounts. She also tells us about the importance of saving money, and how money can work for us. I think that

her presentation is actually pretty good.

Then after Mrs. Huffington has spoken longer than any of us can listen, she asks, "Does anyone have any questions?"

I have a question, "What if you're out of money, but you have checks left. Can you still write checks?"

"No, young man, but it happens all of the time. You can go to jail for that. You can only write checks for the amount of money you have in the bank. Mr. Ortega tells me that many of you have worked hard all summer, and don't have a safe place to keep your money. Your money is much safer in the bank than under a bed or buried in a tin can. Besides, we will pay you interest if you keep your money with us. Let me see the hands of those who would like to open a savings account with me right now."

Five of the migrant students shot their hands into the air. She isn't going to get any response from the Latin Kings or the First Street Boyz. Stolen cars and selling drugs are cash businesses. They don't need a checking account. One by one the migrant students went up to her desk and Mrs. Huffington enrolls them in a savings account. Then, just as she was finishes, Mr. Ortega enters the room.

He then tells Mrs. Wadsworth Huffington, "Mr. Horseman's class is ready for you next door. After you finish with Mr. Horseman's class, would you like to have lunch with us, we're having cheeseburgers. The ladies make them in the Patterson High cafeteria. If I do say so myself, I think that they're pretty good."

"Why I would love to stay for lunch. Everything that I heard about this school is wrong. These students are so well behaved. I can't wait to tell the people in this town how wrong they are about this school. They are just wonderful, and they ask such good questions. I'm so glad I came here. What a refreshing experience!"

Not long afterward the bell rang, and the next class I have is English. English is followed by the ultimate nightmare called algebra, and when algebra ends we play volleyball. Nobody likes P.E. more than I do and volleyball can be fun, especially when there are rallies that go on forever.

I start the game with a sizzling serve that nicks the top of the net. Then, I hit another and then another, until finally one hits the net and drops on our side with a thud. Everyone is playing much better than yesterday, and the rallies are lasting longer. At the same time, most of us are pretty surprised by our success.

Wendell is doing a great job of setting me up for the kill, and the First Street Boyz are having trouble returning the balls that I'm hitting. My serves are really starting to make Mambo angry. Over and over he tries to stop them at the net and make us eat it, but so far he's not having much success.

In response to his repeated failure, I yelled, "What's wrong, Mambo? Can't take the heat?"

We had all heard it before, nobody makes fun of Mambo on his turf, but after he tried to jump me at Wilbur Garcia's, the rule book was about to be rewritten.

After a short while, Mr. Phish senses that things are about to boil between us, so he jumps in, "Cool it, Mambo. This is only a game, if you want to get even, then learn to block with your eyes open."

Without hesitating, Mambo snarls, "I know how to block Cat Phish, I bet I've played more volleyball than anyone here. That's all we did in juvenile hall."

Mambo wants nothing more than to beat the Latin Kings and me, and soon the ball is moving faster and faster, and the game is getting more and more exciting. Before we know it, the period was over and the lunch bell rang. We had won, and it had been so much fun that everyone on our side had big smiles on their faces.

Mr. Ortega was correct when he said that the cheeseburgers here are pretty good. On a day like today we like to eat outside on the wooden tables. It looks like Mr. Ortega has asked all of the teachers to join Mrs. Wadsworth Huffington at the faculty table. Veech, Wendell, and myself all sat down at the empty table next to them. At the same time, Mambo, Chili, Jesus, One-eyed Joey, and Tiny Garcia all decide to sit down a couple of tables away.

In his most boisterous voice we can all hear Mr. Ortega's spiel, "No matter

what, Mrs. Huffington, we have to teach to the test. If we don't keep the test scores up, the state will take over the school, and we certainly don't want that to happen. At Del Cielo High, we are very academically oriented. We don't tolerate foolishness, and we expect a lot from our students. We haven't had a fight here for a long time.”

Then as Mr. Ortega continues to speak I can see a guy in the distance emerge from behind the administration building. He wore a blue bandanna, and in his right hand he is holding an enormous blue pencil. At the same time it looks like he is heading straight for the First Street Boyz, and I can see fire in his eyes. In just seconds he thrusts the pencil deep into Mambo's neck. It happened so fast that nobody has the time to react, and almost immediately blood shoots out of his neck like a geyser. Chili Rodriguez can't believe what she is seeing, and she lets out the most horrific scream that I have ever heard.

At that very moment, Mr. Ortega leaps from his seat and takes off running in hot pursuit of the attacker, who is now running as fast as he can towards a waiting car. Then just as the attacker is about to escape, Mr. Ortega tackles him. End over end they tumbled across the sidewalk and into the street, until he has the attacker pinned to the ground. At the same time, the driver of the getaway car realizes that it is hopeless and he takes off. Inside the car, there are three guys wearing blue bandannas, which is the formal attire of the Latin Kings.

Just as fast as she can, out of the corner of my eye I can see Mrs. Wadsworth Huffington heading in the direction of her car, leaving behind a large puddle of urine. Then no sooner is she gone when Mrs. Purdy races as fast as I have ever seen her toward Mambo's convulsing body with the First Aid Kit. She doesn't waste even a second, as fast as she can she put pressure on Mambo's wound, in a desperate attempt to stop him from bleeding to death.

Suddenly, without warning, the sound of peeling tires erupts in the school parking lot. The noise frightens us all to death. That is until the cloud of smoke disappears and we realize that it's Mrs. Huffington's pink Cadillac. She is fleeing for her life as fast as her car could move, and only moments after she vanishes, the first police cars begin arriving on the scene.

Sergeant Sanchez is driving the first patrol car that arrives on the scene.

He pulls up right next to Mr. Ortega, who is still sitting on top of Mambo's would-be assassin, and places the Latin King member in handcuffs. Just a short time later, the first ambulance drives on to the school lawn and pulls up next to Mambo. Immediately, the emergency technicians placed him on the gurney. Chili is overwhelmed by what is unfolding. She clenches Mambo's hand as tightly as she can while they load him into the ambulance.

We can all hear her pleas, over and over she says, "Please don't die on me, Mambo. Please don't die."

Hastily, the EMT's slam the door of the ambulance shut and sped away with the siren blaring. The ground under where Mambo had laid is soaked in blood because no one had been able to stop the flow. The nearest hospital is in Turlock, thirty miles away. We all wondered if he would live. Then, just as soon as the ambulance is gone, Mrs. Purdy bursts out sobbing.

You'd think that we would get to go home after all of this, but instead we're told to go straight to class. My next class is Mrs. Hasselblad's computer class. After I take my seat, I'm having a hard time concentrating. During the entire class period, I keep looking over my shoulder. Then as class is about to end, Mr. Ortega enters our classroom accompanied by a Patterson police officer. At first, the two of them just stood there looking around the computer room.

Finally, Mr. Ortega announces, "The police department is here to collect all of the large blue and red pencils. Please do so voluntarily. Let's not make this experience any worse. The police department tells me that several kids got stabbed with pencils in juvenile hall this past summer. From now on only pencils of 4 inches in length will be permitted at school. Did anyone know this guy?"

Mr. Ortega is met with deafening silence. No matter what has transpired it is an unwritten rule that we can't talk to the police, and if we do we will be chastised. Maybe if Mr. Ortega had asked the class without the policeman, he would have gotten a response. No one was going to talk in front of a policeman and be labeled a snitch.

Nobody gave up a pencil, and I can't wait for the last bell to ring. Under

normal circumstances some of the students would have hung out after school and shot some baskets but not today. The campus empties so fast I couldn't believe it. I immediately texted Sal Marquez and ask him to meet me at the skate park after football practice ends.

When I first arrived at the skate park, I just took my place on the side lines watching my old friends go through their moves. The fact that I don't have a board makes me really jealous of everyone else's. Finally, after about a half an hour, Sal shows.

He says, "Tyrell, Sunny tells me that you had a bad crash on the way to school, and that your board exploded into pieces. I brought along my old board for you to use. You can keep it until yours gets fixed. It's funky, but at least your moves won't get rusty?"

"Thanks, Sal. I promise that I won't wreck this one."

"When are you going to get your board back?" he asks.

"In about a week, but it's going to leave me flat broke," I replied.

"Are you and your family coming to my first game football game Friday night?"

"Of course, we wouldn't think of missing it, everyone in town will be there,"

"The team looks pretty good this year," he said.

"I wish I could be out there with you," I told him.

"How are your grades so far, Tyrell?"

"I still don't think I can do the math."

Sal doesn't like what I'm telling him.

He states, "Sure you can, you just need to get off your rear end and apply yourself."

I said, "I wish it were that easy."

The second he stops talking Sal takes off on his board and heads straight for the small ramp for a 180. Then he roars up and down on the quarter pike each time going for more air. Right now, Sal is the best one out here, and at this point he is probably unbeatable. He really does some great tricks. On the other hand, I don't like the way his old board handled, which is probably the reason he got a new board.

After an hour of failing to do a 360 with his clunker board I decide to head home. The entire way home all I could think about was how different my life would be if

I had gotten to school on time, and kept my grades up. It isn't that I didn't like playing football; I just didn't like taking classes. Every subject in school is hard for me, except P.E. The only thing that I know for certain is that right now I'm a big disappointment to everyone in my family.

Soon after I round the last corner, I am really surprised to see Mrs. Purdy's car in our driveway. Mrs. Purdy and my mama first met at the First Baptist Church.

People often remark that the two of them could pass for sisters because they both have similar facial characteristics. The moment I enter through the front door, my heart skips a beat when I realized that they are talking about the stabbing. Word travels fast in Patterson. The second I walk into our living room my mother hugs me so tightly that I feel like I am the one that had gotten stabbed, not Mambo.

Then as she checks me for puncture wounds she asks, "Did you see it happen? Mrs. Purdy says the boy might die."

"Mama, do we have more of those chocolate chip cookies? I'm starving. I didn't get to finish my lunch."

"Tyrell, did you know that Mambo's the same boy that stabbed that boy after the basketball game? How did he get out of juvenile hall?"

"I don't know, mama, but I think he said it was self-defense."

Mrs. Purdy replied, "They stopped punishing these kids a long time ago. None of them has ever faced any serious consequences for their actions."

I grabbed a box of cereal and then took some milk out of the refrigerator, but before I can sit down and eat it, I had something to say, “Mama, don't you always say that this is what comes around goes around world, and that we reap what we sow?”

“Yes, of course, Tyrell. Of course I do.”

“Mambo acts like he has nothing to lose.”

My mother replied, “But that doesn't excuse him for stabbing that poor boy.”

“I know it, mama, but the other boy had a knife. I'm not saying what he did was right, but I can't help believe that if he'd had a father he wouldn't have turned out so bad.”

Mambo and his nine brothers and sisters grew up in a small two bedroom house on an alleyway just off of First Street. The police are always at the house because someone in the house is always in trouble for something. All ten of the brothers and sisters have different last names, and there never has been a father figure. When I asked Mambo where he slept, he told me that he slept in the bathtub. He says that there is never any food in the house because his mother trades their food stamps for drugs. That's why he's so street smart. He had to be street smart to survive. His gang is his real family, and before the gang, it was like Lord of the Flies.

Mrs. Purdy said, “One day, Mambo's mother came to school to pick him up. She was so out of it that she could barely stand up. Then when she reached across my desk for the sign-out sheet, she exposed her right arm. It was covered in infected drug tracks.”

I could tell that my mom wanted to change the subject, when she asked, “Tyrell, would you like a piece of chocolate cake?”

My eyes lit up, “Can I have a large piece?”

Suddenly, Mrs. Purdy shook her head like a light bulb had just gone on.

She asks, “Oh my, Tyrell, I almost forgot. I hope that you're going to try out for the volleyball team? Wendell said you weren't interested, but Mr. Phish could sure use you.”



I am a little confused, so I asked, "Why do you want me to play volleyball, Mrs. Purdy?"

"Mr. Phish's job is on the line, the school budget is empty, and the school district is laying people off that can't perform up to expectations. After four years of coaching, Mr. Phish hasn't won a single title. Superintendent Davis and the board are only interested in winning coaches. Dr. Davis told Mr. Ortega that if Mr. Phish can't bring home a winner this year, then he is going to be out of a job."

I had no idea.

I told her, "Yes. Of course I'll play. I like Mr. Phish, but fielding a team good enough to win will be really tough. We really don't have much in the way of athletes. I read the volleyball rules on the poster. We have to have two girls in the lineup. That tournament is only a month away."

# Tyrell Walker Chapter Two Questions

Answer using complete sentences

1. Where did Tyrell go the moment that school let out?
2. Who did Tyrell find inside Wilbur Garcia's?
3. How did Mr. Phish save Tyrell?
4. Who is Wendell Chung?
5. Why isn't Tyrell enthused about playing in the Rosehaven Volleyball Tournament?
6. Why was Tyrell horrified by what Wendell had told him?
7. Briefly describe Mrs. Huffington Wadsworth?
8. How did Mr. Ortega capture mambo's attacker?
9. Describe Mambo's home life.
10. Why is Mr. Phish in danger of losing his job?