

Smoldering Fires

Kermit Frazier

Dramatic

COREY: 12, African American

DASHAUN: 12, African American

COREY and DASHAUN are best friends living in a sometimes violent, drug-infested urban neighborhood. This scene takes place toward the beginning of act 1. The boys have just come from school and have raced each other to their favorite place in a park where they can hang out some before heading home. DASHAUN had been in the principal's office at their middle school, where he was reprimanded for nearly getting into a fight with another boy. COREY gave a book report in class on Freedom's Children (a nonfiction book written by Ellen Levine and published by Putnam in 1993) about activist young people during the civil rights movement. The boys run in and set down their backpacks.

COREY: *[Breathlessly.]* Caught you and beat you. *[They take off their backpacks while catching their breath.]* I'm always gonna be faster than you, D.

DASHAUN: Maybe. But you ain't never gonna be as big. Or as fly.

COREY: And that's why you got it on with Harold?

DASHAUN: No. Wasn't about all that. It was nothing.

COREY: Nothing? It was enough to make you miss my book report.

DASHAUN: Oh, yeah. How was it? Bet it was tight.

COREY: Tight as can be.

[They pound fists.]

DASHAUN: You got an A?

COREY: A-plus.

DASHAUN: Man, see. There you go again. That's why I be getting C's and D's in English.

COREY: What do you mean?

DASHAUN: Okay. It's my theory of balance, see. I figure that the whole class has got to be balanced out. And you keep on stretching the class way, way up there. So to even it out, somebody's got to be stretching it way, way down here.

COREY: And that somebody's got to be you?

DASHAUN: Hey, what are friends for?

COREY: You're crazy.

DASHAUN: I know.

[They laugh.]

COREY: But hey, check it out. [*He takes his paperback copy of Freedom's Children from his backpack.*]

DASHAUN: [*Reading the book cover.*] *Freedom's Children* . . . Must not be about us.

COREY: No, but it *is* about black kids. How they marched and demonstrated and fought for integration. You know, the civil rights movement.

DASHAUN: Oh, yeah, all that stuff way back when.

COREY: Not so way back. Wanna read it?

DASHAUN: Man, you know reading gives me a headache.

COREY: This won't.

DASHAUN: I don't know, Corey. Shoot, if they fought so hard for integration, how come we don't have any around here?

COREY: Huh?

DASHAUN: Well, integration is like mixing, right? Folks all mixed up together?

COREY: I guess. Sorta.

DASHAUN: Well, do you see any white people living around here?

COREY: Okay, but that's not the only thing about integration. I mean, we can go anywhere we want to now. Movie theaters, stores, amusement parks, beaches. Back

then, black people couldn't even use the same drinking fountains as white people.

DASHAUN: I know all that. I know we can "go" places. But people ain't always happy to be seeing us when we *do* go places. [*Looking toward downtown.*] It's almost like they wanna be stopping us sometimes. White people's eyes all up on us like we're gonna be ripping them off.

COREY: Not all of them. Just because some white people don't like us doesn't mean they all don't.

DASHAUN: And just 'cause they like *you* don't mean they like *me*.

COREY: Well, I know one or two *black* people who don't like you either.

DASHAUN: Fo' sho'.

COREY: Why'd you fight him *this* time?

DASHAUN: [*Reluctant to say.*] I don't know. . . . I just wish I had me some better clothes.

COREY: You look all right.

DASHAUN: [*Defensive despite himself.*] I know I look all right.

COREY: He talked about your clothes? [*DASHAUN says nothing.*] Man, don't you even wanna graduate from middle school?

DASHAUN: Yeah, like *tomorrow*, yo. [*He looks up at the sky.*]
Man, I sure wish I had me a pilot's license. And my own
personal jet. I'd be able to go anywhere at any time.

COREY: You'd be a great pilot.

DASHAUN: Yeah, I know. Zooming across the sky. [*Looking
around.*] And maybe I'd even drop a bomb or two on
certain rundown things around here.

COREY: It'd be better if we could fix stuff up. This ole
park, some of the houses. And kick out all the drug dealers.

DASHAUN: Well, you can forget that. They ain't going
nowhere ever.

COREY: They will if my Moms and Pops have anything to
say about it.

DASHAUN: Yeah, they're all right, your Moms and Pops.

COREY: Your grandma's not so bad either.

DASHAUN: Except when she gets on me. Also, she's
getting kind of old all of a sudden. Gonna be fifty soon.

COREY: Fifty?

DASHAUN: Uh-huh. And I got about zero dollars to buy
her a present with.

COREY: Wow, fifty!

[*DASHAUN begins beating out a rap rhythm.*]

DASHAUN: To make fifty put the five and zero together
It'll make you feel cool no matter the weather

Or not you're too hot or going down slow
To the sto' on the corner
Whenever you wanna
'Cause you're still my fine Grams
Who cooks me chicken and ham
And all the other things I like
To keep me hopping and psyched
And . . .

[*Faltering.*]

And . . . got no more rhymes my head
'Cause . . .

COREY: [*Rapping.*] Your feet's full of lead.

DASHAUN: Yo, what?

COREY: Just trying to help.

DASHAUN: Thanks.

COREY: I know. You could finish that rap and make *that*
your grandma's birthday present. That'd be free.

DASHAUN: Naw, it's got to be a thing. A big, expensive
thing!

COREY: But you don't have any money.

DASHAUN: I'll get me some somehow.

COREY: You could bag some groceries.

DASHAUN: Chump change.

COREY: Not if you keep saving it.

DASHAUN: Shoot, I'd be fifty myself by the time I'd saved enough. [*Pause.*] I just want stuff, Corey. You know?

COREY: I know. Me, too.

DASHAUN: A big ole house.

COREY: A big backyard.

DASHAUN: A big-screen TV.

COREY: A little red sports car.

DASHAUN: A girl I can talk to. [*DASHAUN and COREY suddenly look at each other, both a little embarrassed. They just as quickly look away.*] Well, you know . . .

COREY: Oh, man, I'm gonna be late.

DASHAUN: [*Jumping up.*] Yeah, let's bounce.

COREY: See you tomorrow, D.

DASHAUN: Yeah, all up in school.

COREY: [*Taking out the book.*] Wait, the book.

[*DASHAUN looks at the book, then takes it reluctantly.*]

DASHAUN: Thanks.

[*The boys pound fists.*]

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COREY and DASHAUN are 12-year-old African American boys. They are best friends living in a sometimes violent, drug-infested, urban neighborhood. This scene takes place toward the end of act 1. DASHAUN has been at home because he has been suspended for fighting in the schoolyard (actually defending COREY), when he suddenly decides in frustration that he will accept drug dealer Willis's offer to be a "slinger" for him. But when he gets to Willis's, DASHAUN overhears the dealer plotting with an addict to get revenge on COREY's parents for their neighborhood "stop the drugs" campaign. With that, DASHAUN rushes away. In this scene, COREY has met DASHAUN at their hangout spot in the park.

COREY: But that doesn't mean he's going to do anything, D.

DASHAUN: I'm just saying what I heard.