

THE
**FOUND
BOYS**



S. D. SMITH

AUTHOR OF THE GREEN EMBER SERIES

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*To Andrew Mackay,
With deep love and appreciation.*

Dear Reader,

I am so happy to share this story with you. My intention is to give you a gift, to love and serve you with a delightful, moving, inspiring, and soul-shaping adventure. *The Found Boys* is not really a story about race, but a story about people, and it involves race. I think it's a hopeful, humorous tale you'll enjoy.

This book is set in the early 1980s, and so to accurately represent the language of the day, I didn't capitalize anyone's race. My hope is that this will not distract from the story. I grew up in a holler in West Virginia. Behind my childhood church there were swings and a creek, and there was a stained-glass picture of Jesus above the baptistry, and the pews were full of white people. One year as my family was on our way to the mission field in South Africa, we visited lots of churches, telling them about our ministry. My dad had lots

of black pastor friends and so was often asked to preach at their churches. Their services were long and exuberant and I loved them. It made me wish we'd clap in our church and shout out encouragement sometimes. But I did get pretty hungry as the hours rolled by.

If you listened to kids talk in my school and among sports teams I played on, you would hear some nutty stuff about race. Sometimes their views were so wrong it was comical, and other times it very much wasn't. Sometimes laughter makes an evil thing shrink, and other times it makes it grow.

Eventually, we made it to South Africa where I turned thirteen the day Nelson Mandela was released from prison. When we left, he was the president. In between, the first church I was ever a member of was 99 percent black folks and I kind of got adopted into the Zulu tribe. *Unofficially*. Well, officially a church member, but not officially a tribe member. But so much of who I am and what I love was shaped in those days by those people. They are in my heart forever.

There's a defining story in my life that centers around my father. Yes, it *centers* him. He has been central to my life, and I'm grateful for that. When we moved to South Africa, I was shocked at the ordinary practice of every black man (of any tribe or age) calling any white man (or boy) "Boss." It was common practice for an elderly black man to refer to even a teenage white kid as "Boss," and for the white kid to call the elderly black man "Boy." My dad never referred to any black man as "Boy." Instead, and to their surprise, he always called them "Boss." This small act of unusual respect was out of step with the then-current culture, but in step with the culture of the coming Kingdom of God.

In the Kingdom of God, we will have a oneness that does not demand sameness, a unity beyond tribe or tongue or our melanin content. And in that Kingdom there is always—contrary to modern pop-dogma—forgiveness for the penitent and the genuine possibility of change.

So, we keep praying for the Kingdom to come and God's will to be done, in West Virginia, and

South Africa, and from the river to the ends of the earth. Until then, we aim to live in step with that Kingdom, even while the competing propagandas of our age fight over who gets to divide and devour us.

The Zulu word for “hello” is *sawubona*. It literally means “I see you.” Wouldn’t it be good if, every time we came in contact with other human beings made in God’s image, the first thing we announced and intended was to see them? That sounds like something from the Kingdom of God.

I hope you enjoy *The Found Boys*. It was written with a heart of love.

I see you,

Sam

Grandview, West Virginia



**CHAPTER
ONE**

You can learn a lot by a man's handshake—first, for instance, that he has a hand. Second, that he has a skill shared with our friends in the dog world—the ability to shake. Third, that he's a fool for trusting his precious human hand to the megaton squeezing power of mine.

"Ow!" said Tommy Tucker, two years my junior.

"Sorry, Tommy," I replied with deeply sincere concern. "Sometimes I forget how incredibly strong I am."

Tommy stuck out his tongue and rushed out the wide church doors. While our fathers, suit-clad and chatty, discussed the sermon, I chased after Tommy as he fled for the swings over the hill behind the old church.

The swings sat across from the new shelter where we had cookouts. Horseshoe pits and



a rotting volleyball net were crammed near the shelter to leave space for the softball field. Behind the field? You want to know what was behind the field? Woods and water. An explorer's paradise.

"Tommy, you ignorant Philistine," I yelled patiently, "wait for me!"

"You're too slow!" he shouted back, much like Goliath might have shouted at the hosts of Israel. He sped ahead.

Now, I wasn't slow. I was just careful. I prided myself on my ability to outthink the opposition and swiftly arrive at conclusions by means of my brain. I would always win because I didn't need to outrun anyone; I could outsmart them. I thought about my brainpower as Tommy Tucker's form grew smaller in the distance.

When I caught up to him, Tommy was slumped into the seat of the best swing, pretending to sleep.

I frowned. "You took the best swing again."

Tommy pretended to wake up, yawning widely as he tried to hide his smile. "Oh, hello, Scott. I

got tired of waiting for you and took a little nap here on Old Number One.” He rattled the swing’s chain and grinned. “The rocket launcher.”

“You always get the rocket launcher,” I said, not whining for sure.

“To the victim goes the spoiled.”

I rolled my eyes. “It’s ‘to the victor go the spoils.’”

“Nuh-uh,” he said, leaning into a deep pump to get the rocket launcher fired up. In a few moments, he was soaring high and smiling wide, like a spoiled victim of too much speed.

I started pumping my legs—tightly tucked in on retreat, extended like two jutting javelins on outswing—and tried to catch up to Tommy’s dizzying heights.

I rose higher and higher, side-eying Tommy all the while, as the foundations of the swing set shook and the rhythmic *ding* of chain on aluminum provided the only percussion to ever come this close to Valley Baptist Church.

Then Tommy flew.

He sailed free of the swing, arms flailing and

wild joy on his face. It was a dirty trick, launching without any warning. Everyone knows the rules. You don't just launch without an announcement. But he was intent on depriving me of the rocket launcher. *Not today, Tommy!*

Instead of launching in turn, I dug the heels of my wingtips into the dirt and slipped off my swing just as Tommy was turning to race back and reclaim Old Number One. Ignoring the mom-defying dirt on my wingtips, eyes wide to spy out Tommy's progress, I stepped sideways to secure my prize. Seeing that Tommy was well behind me, I spun to grab the swing. I had failed, however, to properly calculate the trajectory of the rocket launcher. It rocket-launched into my face, slapping me with the faded plastic seat, then following up with a flailing beatdown by chain. I reeled, of course. It was the only thing possible to do. Any boy would have reeled, and I did reel. Spinning away, I struck my head on the swing's A-frame pole and slumped to the ground.



Tommy was very concerned and inquired if I was okay from the comfort of his seat on Old Number One.

“I’m fine,” I said, feeling the knot form on my head through my hair. “I was just checking out the grass. It’s very short, I find. Must have got a trim.”

“Do you have a concussion?” Tommy asked.

“Yeah,” I replied, not wanting him to know that I had no idea what a concussion was. “My dad got me one.”

“No he never,” Tommy said. “A concussion is when you bang your brain and you go stupid for a while.”

“Nah.” I rubbed my head some more, then spit enthusiastically. “Stupid isn’t in my vocabulary. It’s just a stinger. Let’s go to the creek.”

Tommy nodded, then frowned and scowled at me. “You trickin’ me so you can get the rocket launcher?”

“Nope,” I said, though now that he mentioned it, it was a great idea.

“You swear?”

“Not allowed,” I said, pointing to the church. “But I give you my word.” I spit in my hand and held it out to Tommy. He nodded, solemnly spit into his, and our hands squished together in a human-to-human shake. I preferred the human shake, as I had been secretly terrified of dogs since forever. One minute they are shaking your hand, and the next they are biting it off. You can’t trust them. In my book, dogs are man’s best enemy. The wizard up the creek had dogs. I thought about the pearl he stole, and a thrilling shiver of fear jolted through me.

Me and Tommy sprinted for the creek, and I glanced back up at the church as we ran. My parents were outside in the parking lot now, still talking away. I had an eerie feeling I might not ever see them again.