

# The Eleventh Sense

“Flush the turd! Flush the turd!” chanted all the kids who, Simon was absolutely positive, were profoundly grateful to not be the target of this particular bad mood. Why did Jax seem so much worse on Fridays? Wasn’t he happy to be going home for the weekend?

As Jax dragged him through the bathroom door, a sudden heat blazed in Simon’s chest. Just because Jax was big didn’t give him the right to dole out punishment. And besides, Simon had enough to worry about at home.

“Let me go!” Simon shouted, shoving as hard as he could against Jax’s broad chest. Amazingly, Jax grunted, stumbled backward, and let go of Simon’s shirt.

What a stroke of good luck to get one up on Jax! Simon wasn’t one to question good luck when it came his way. He took off, hit the bathroom door at a dead run, and flew out into the corridor, shoving people out of his way. His only chance was to get to the classroom before Jax caught him again.

But his luck didn’t hold. Jax caught Simon and dragged him back toward the bathroom, mumbling, “Gonna pound you now, Bug Boy. No more making me look stupid, uh uh, no way...”

“But it’s so easy for you.” The words spilled out, surprising Simon. How could his mouth say something like that?

“Huh?” Jax looked at Simon as if he were a bug about to be skewered on a stick pin.

“I said, it’s so easy for you, you know, to look stupid.”

Jax’s eyes widened and he looked stunned. Simon barked laughter, then tried to duck when Jax’s wide fist came at his face.

The blow hit him on his neck, and Simon sprawled at Jax's feet, dazed. A wild buzzing filled his ears. He shook his head, trying to clear it.

But the buzzing grew louder. Simon saw Jax's sneakers step away from him, and then heard Jax scream. It was not the scary yell of a schoolyard bully about to pound his victim into the dust. No. This was the high-pitched shriek of a panic-stricken human in fear for his life.

Simon shook off his daze and jumped to his feet. A swarm of fat black bumblebees, at least ten of them, swooped around Jax's head, buzzing crazily. Jax batted at them, but they simply soared out of reach, then dove at his face again, stingers at the ready.

Simon stepped back, warily looking around for more of the angry bees, but they seemed to be completely ignoring him and instead zeroing in on Jax.

"Get him!" Simon cried jubilantly.

The largest bumblebee broke away from the rest and hovered in front of Simon. "Are you zzzhure?" he buzzed.

Black dots swam in front of Simon's eyes. What was happening here? Bees did not get involved in the problems of people. They certainly did not save him just because he wasn't quick enough to escape a bully, much less ask him if he was sure he wanted saving.

Still, he wasn't getting hit anymore...

"I'm sure," Simon whispered.

The bumblebee bobbed once, then turned back to the swarm. "Zzztrike!" he hollered, diving in and spearing Jax's wildly swatting hand.

Simon turned and ran to class, Jax's screams of pain echoing in his ears.



Jax had gone home sick from the bee stings, making this the most peaceful Friday at Greenhorn School since Jax had moved into the area. Simon's mouth twitched into a smile as he remembered telling his best friend Quinn, over lunch, about the bee attack, leaving out the part about the bees talking to him. Quinn had laughed so hard that he'd snorted chocolate milk out his nose.

It was last period, and Simon was counting down the eleven minutes until the final bell rang, and trying to be invisible. His teacher, Mr. "Pit Bull" Pascal, was a balding, dumpy man who wore thick, black-framed glasses that made his brown eyes look huge and he had a philosophy of "two hours of homework every night and more on weekends." He had strict punishments for every infraction, including inattention in class, and had a voice that could break rocks. All the kids despised him.

"Now class, we will be studying a branch of biology called entomology. Can anyone tell me what that is?" Simon closed his unusual indigo eyes and ran his fingers through his dark hair, wishing he knew the answer. He was just sure that Mr. Pascal was about to call on him.

"Simon?" Sure enough, the teacher's eyes locked on him.

"Uh..."

“Entomology is the study of insects,” a high, squeaky voice whispered in Simon’s right ear.

Simon jumped slightly and glanced around. Who said that? No one was looking at him except the scowling teacher, which was not a good sign.

“Uh, the study of, uh, insects?” Simon said hesitantly.

Mr. Pascal’s mouth twitched faintly upward in what Simon recognized as beaming approval.

“Yes. And which insect makes this sound?” Mr. Pascal hit a button on the tape recorder and the room filled with a distinctive chirruping sound.

“Crickets!” Susie Whillocks, the class brain, piped up.

“Very good. Now who can tell me how a cricket makes that sound?”

No one raised a hand, not even Susie Smartypants.

Mr. Pascal sighed. “A male cricket rubs its wings together to make cricketsong,” he said, “as a mating call to find a female.”

Simon sank his head into his hands. He liked crickets all right, but really, could this class be any more boring? His eyes lifted to the clock above Mr. Pascal’s head. Nine minutes to go. He sighed deeply. If only he had some of Kira’s natural enthusiasm for school, but no. Somewhere in the sixty-two days since Simon’s mom had died, Simon had lost his drive to perform well in school. Even math, his favorite subject, seemed like nothing more than a boring waste of time.

“School is what you make of it, just like life,” the squeaky voice said, very clearly, in his right ear. Simon jumped so

violently that he knocked his book off his desk. "Is there a problem?" Mr. Pascal inquired, lips pinched together.

"Sorry," Simon mumbled. He quickly picked up his book, looking around. Who had spoken to him? Quinn was sitting right in front of him, fiddling with his pencil. No, the voice Simon heard was too high and squeaky to be Quinn's voice.

Hmm, Susie Whillocks sat in the next aisle, right in front of Jax's empty desk. She had flaming red hair, green eyes, and vivid freckles dotting her cheeks, and lived on a horse ranch at the edge of town. She also walked around with her nose in the air all the time. Simon did not understand her at all, but he figured she was way too much of a snob to even say hello to him, much less play a practical joke.

"It's time to step up and accept the gift," came the squeaky voice again, this time from his left.

There was no one seated on the left. Simon sat by the windows. In fact, the only living thing that Simon could see was a cricket perched on the windowsill nearest his desk.

The cricket hopped to the edge of the sill, closer to Simon, looking at him with interest. "Have you figured it out yet, or are you really that big of a doofus?"

Simon blinked. He had just hallucinated a cricket calling him a doofus. Maybe he needed more protein in his diet.

The inky black cricket put two of his legs on his hips and shook his head sadly. "I don't know what she sees in you. You're supposed to be a Communicator." He hopped away, squeezing through a small hole in the screen.

Simon stared after it, mouth hanging open, unbelieving. And weirder still, he thought he felt the strange birthmark on his left shoulder twinge sharply, like he had just been bitten by a bug.

“Oh, by the way,” the cricket poked his head back through the hole, “if she asks, tell her Duke delivered the message.”

And he was gone. A moment later, Simon heard Duke crooning, “Hey baby, do you like jazz?”

The bell rang just as Simon was raising his hand to tell the teacher he was about to be violently ill and could he please have a bathroom pass.

The other students scrambled out of their seats toward freedom. Quinn caught Simon’s eye and mouthed, “Meet me by the lockers.” Quinn was almost as tall as Simon and sported long, sandy-brown hair and wire-framed glasses over his hazel-green eyes. He probably wanted to hang out after school, or make plans to see a movie.

Somehow, Simon thought that he wasn’t going to be enjoying much of anything this weekend, what with his brain turning to mush right there in science class.



# The Eleventh Sense

by

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*Living  
Creativity*

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## Chapter 1

# The Communicator

**T**HE MADNESS ALL STARTED when Simon jumped off the bus and bumped into Jax.

“Hey, lookee here!” Jax bellowed. An ugly bruise blackened his left eye, and his nose was swollen. A red welt scarred one cheek like a brand. “It’s Bug Boy!” Jax seized Simon’s collar and pulled him in so close that Simon could smell the Cheerios Jax had eaten for breakfast on his breath.

“Sorry Jax,” Simon apologized, sincerely meaning it. Jax could smell a bluff a mile away. “I wasn’t watching where I was going. It’s totally my fault.” He tried to pull away, but Jax had a vise-grip on his shirt.

“I think it’s time for a tune-up,” Jax sing-songed. The other kids started to chant, “Tune up! Tune up!” and Simon knew he was toast. At least he would have an excuse to not do his homework. His eyes would likely be swollen shut for the next two days.

Even though Simon was the taller of the two, Jax was stronger. He dragged Simon over to the boy’s restroom and banged the door open, yelling, “This turd is getting flushed!”