

Perry's Own Path

By Michelle Hardaway



A Journey of Character and Purpose



The first day of eighth grade felt different. Not just because Perry was starting at a new middle school. Not just because he was now one of the oldest students in the building. It felt different because everyone seemed to be looking at him.

As Perry walked through the crowded hallway searching for Room 214, students turned their heads. Girls smiled. Boys whispered. One student accidentally walked into a trash can because he was staring too long.

‘Great,’ Perry thought. ‘I’ve been here three minutes and someone already lost a fight with a trash can.’



Perry wasn't trying to impress anyone. He was tall, athletic, and naturally handsome, but he never thought that made him better than anybody else. His parents had always taught him that character mattered more than appearance.

Still, by lunchtime, everyone seemed to know his name.

'That's Perry.' 'The new kid.' 'I heard he's smart.' 'I heard he's rich.' 'I heard he wrestled a bear.'

Perry blinked. 'A bear?' People really would make up anything.



Over the next few weeks, Perry became an observer. And there was a lot to observe. There were the jocks. The mean girls. The troublemakers. The school spirit crowd. The teacher's pets. The smart and goofy kids. Every group had its own table, style, and unwritten rules. It reminded Perry of a nature documentary.

'Here we see the wild Middle School Spirit Squad gathering near the cafeteria...' The thought made him laugh.



Soon the invitations started arriving. ‘Come sit with us.’

‘You should join our group.’ ‘You’d fit in over here.’

Some invitations were friendly. Others came with conditions.

‘If you’re hanging with us, you can’t talk to those kids.’

‘People like us don’t associate with them.’

Perry hated that. The moment someone tried telling him who he could or couldn’t be around, he lost interest.



One day, a group of students cornered Perry at lunch.

‘So what group are you choosing?’

Perry looked around. ‘Choosing?’

‘Yeah.’

‘You have to pick.’

Perry took a bite of his sandwich. ‘No, I don’t.’

Then he stood up and walked away. Just like that.

The entire table sat frozen. One student still had a French fry halfway to his mouth.

Nobody moved. Nobody spoke.

Perry simply kept walking.



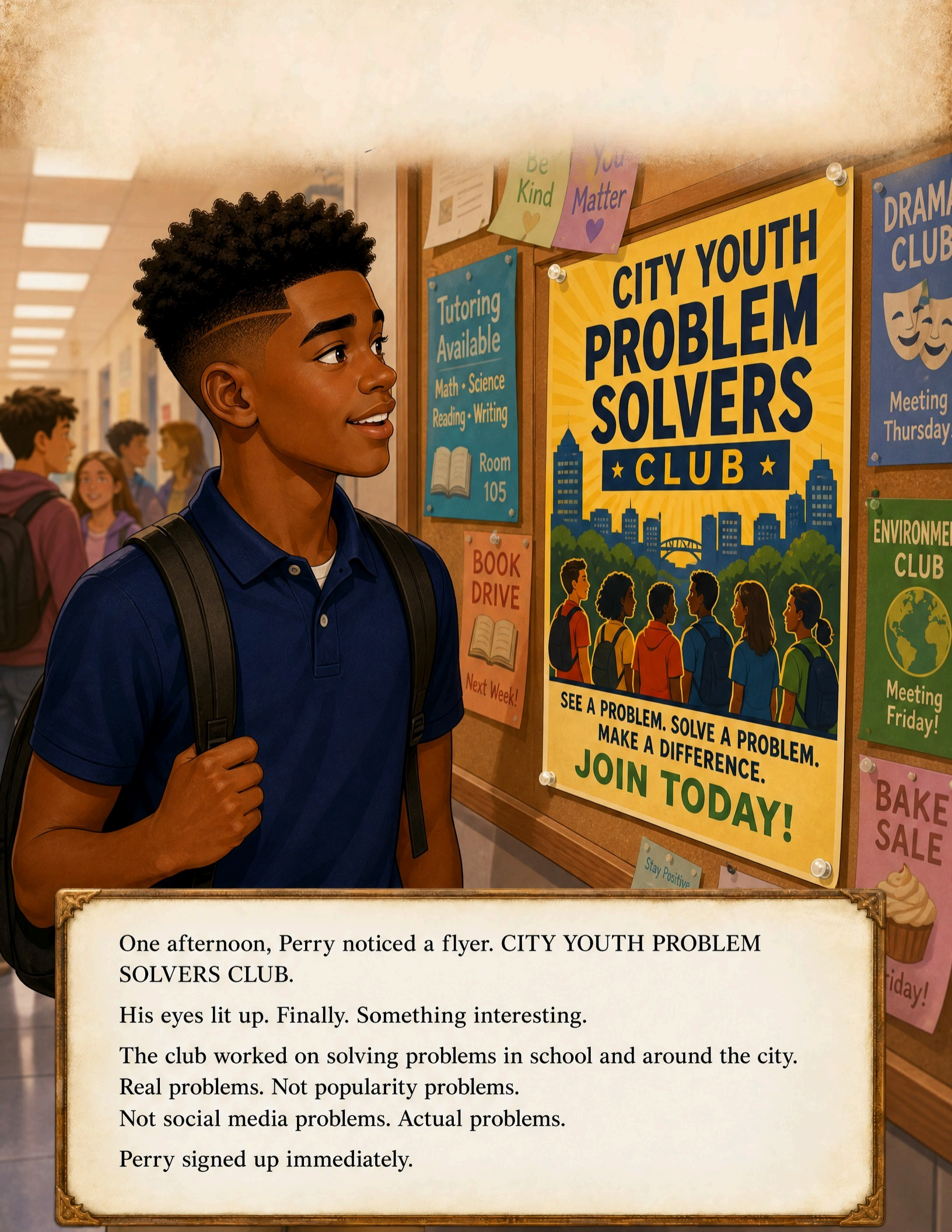
Word spread quickly. Some students respected Perry. Others were offended. A few decided they didn't like him anymore.

Perry didn't lose sleep over it.

He wasn't trying to win a popularity contest.

He was trying to figure out who he wanted to become.

And those were two very different things.



One afternoon, Perry noticed a flyer. CITY YOUTH PROBLEM SOLVERS CLUB.

His eyes lit up. Finally. Something interesting.

The club worked on solving problems in school and around the city. Real problems. Not popularity problems.

Not social media problems. Actual problems.

Perry signed up immediately.



The first meeting surprised him. Nobody cared how tall he was. Nobody cared how handsome he was. Nobody cared who sat with him at lunch. They cared about ideas. Solutions. Creativity. Teamwork.

For the first time all year, Perry felt completely comfortable.

Not because he was trying to fit in.

But because he didn't have to.



The club began researching issues affecting their city. One topic stood out. Water quality. Some neighborhoods were experiencing concerns about water cleanliness and outdated infrastructure.

The students gathered information. Interviewed community members. Presented recommendations. Worked alongside local leaders. Perry loved every second of it. He wasn't just learning. He was helping.



Not everyone understood. One day a student asked him, ‘Why are you wasting your time doing that?’

‘Wasting my time?’

‘Yeah. You’re popular. You could be hanging out with us.’

Perry smiled. ‘Helping people isn’t a waste of time.’

The student rolled his eyes.

Perry shrugged. He had stopped worrying about what people thought a long time ago.



Graduation finally arrived. The gymnasium was packed. Families filled every seat. Students wore their caps and gowns proudly. Then the principal stepped to the microphone.

‘This year’s Valedictorian is Perry Thompson.’

The crowd erupted. His parents stood and cheered. His teachers smiled. His friends applauded.

Later, Perry also received an award recognizing his contribution to community improvement efforts and was voted Most Likely to Succeed. He couldn’t stop smiling.



As the school year continued, Perry became known for something far more important than being the new kid. Teachers admired his leadership. Students respected his honesty. Community leaders appreciated his work. Even some of the students who once criticized him started asking questions about the club.

Perry realized something important. People notice confidence. But they remember purpose.



Perry's Own Path

When Perry Thompson starts at new middle school, everyone notices his looks. But Perry wants to be known for something more.

Join Perry as he navigates the social hierarchies of eighth grade, finds his true purpose in the City Youth Problem Solvers Club, and learns that the most important path is the one you walk yourself.

MIDDLE GRADE FICTION

