

## Detailed Story Outline of The Smart Kid by Bob Miller

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TOM HOWARDSON, a thin, muscular, blond-haired boy, is in his sixth grade phys-ed class, at the top of the climbing rope, when the agents come to capture him, again. He knows that they aren't from Child Protective Services as they claim. He runs and they chase him with guns. Although they shoot at him several times, he narrowly escapes by jumping in the Arkansas River.

### Part 1: The Counselor

It is 1979. CHARLEEN THERRY, a short, dark-haired woman, 34 years old, is the new school counselor at Jefferson Elementary. She started working at the school late in the school year because just before she was to start, her husband and eight-year old son, Max, died in a car accident.

Ms. Therry, during her first week on the job, brings two new students to the sixth grade class. The new students are GREG AND KAREN URBANS; dark-haired twins with a troubled past, who moved to the city to live with foster parents.

MATTHEW JANSON, a thin, blond-haired sixth grader is very smart and is intrigued by Ms. Therry. He is in this small school in central Minnesota, blending in with the other students, in order to hide from someone.

Charleen is curious about Matt because he doesn't play with the other students but, instead, interviews them during recess and writes in a notebook.

Ms. Therry can't find any information about Matthew Janson. His school records are incomplete, only stating that he transferred from a school in Oklahoma. Matt's father will only speak to her on the phone. The woman who Charleen thinks is Matt's mother, turns out to be an actress, hired to portray the mother. Charleen has an angry confrontation with the actress and learns that she was hired by Matt's dad, over the phone, to meet with Charleen in order to try to stop her from prying into Matt's history.

During an investigative phone call to Matthew Janson's previous school in Oklahoma, she discovers that no student by that name attended the school.

When she finally tries to drive to his house to get this mess cleared, she discovers that the address is fake. So Matt seems to have no parents, home, or history.

When Matt gets into a fight, after school, protecting a boy from Greg Urbans, Charleen takes him to her home to bandage his face. Matt observes her home and immediately realizes that she is a widow. She is distressed that he was able to discern her secrets easily. She responds by revealing that she's been investigating him and has learned some of his secrets. But she has many more questions, which Matt agrees to answer, after she demonstrates her trustworthiness by helping him with a task.

Later in the week Charleen drives Matthew in her car as they follow the athletic coach, MR. EASTON, whom Matt suspects of intended abuse against DEENA SWENSON, a cute eight-year old curly blonde. The coach and Deena enter her house while her mother is at work. Matt stops the intended abuse while Charleen searches for, but fails to return with Deena's mother. The

coach runs away so there is no proof against him. It appears that the coach will get away clean. Matt reminds Charleen that she can't report the coach for spending time with a student off school grounds because that is what she was doing with Matt.

As Matt and Charleen return to school, Matt sees a dark pickup truck following them. In order to escape from the unknown trackers, Matt slams his foot down on the accelerator, while Charleen drives, dangerously speeding their car through a busy intersection. He tries to explain to the angry counselor that he's being pursued by sinister government forces, but she takes it as a joke due to obsessing about being a super-hero. Matt agrees to confess his secrets to Charleen, and to introduce her to his unseen father, now that she has demonstrated her willingness to assist him.

Charleen meets Matthew at his apartment later and is shocked by the secrets she learns about Matt. He lives alone. His father is dead. He has a unique ability to sound like a middle-aged man. He used that skill to hire the actress to portray his mother. He pretended to be his father when he talked to Charleen on the phone.

She is very angry at the deception and concludes that she needs to report him to the authorities.

But Matt convinces her to not do that when he reveals his greatest secret: He's really a 39-year-old man who looks like a child due to a rare disease that stunts his growth.

He has no identification, and no way to prove what he says is true. He claims that society won't tolerate a young boy living by himself. Well-meaning adults often report him to government authorities. So for many years, he has maintained this act that he has parents.

His mission, as a super-hero with a secret identity, is to help elementary students with their may day-to-day problems, including abuse. He is in a unique position, as an insider, to protect young children from abusive adults and give guidance, as a peer, to troubled kids.

Charleen and Matt bond together to create a tenuous friendship, and she agrees to keep his secret, although she isn't completely convinced. As she leaves his apartment, someone in a car snaps photographs of her.

At the start of the next week Matt never shows up for school. Charleen calls her mother and tells her about Matt's secret. But her mother doesn't believe and insists that Matt is trying to manipulate her for some reason.

There is a sixth-grader named WAYNE whom Charleen doesn't like because he is the son of the man who killed her family. Charleen becomes suspicious of Matt when she discovers that he has forged her signature to repeatedly send Wayne to her office for counseling. Maybe her mom is right.

Later Matt claims that the secret government committee is real, and is run by well-respected SENATOR JOHN PERKINS, and they are trying to catch him. Charleen doesn't believe Matt. They go to his apartment where he has proof in the form of a letter. But Matt can't find the letter.

During her time waiting for Matt, Charleen sees a TV news report about a deranged 19-year old man who looks like a 12-year old. He's an escaped mental patient and a master of psychological manipulation. Charleen becomes more suspicious.

They have a confrontation in the apartment, which makes Charleen fearful. She leaves the apartment believing the news report more than Matt.

During the ensuing weekend, Charleen decides to report Matt to the authorities.

On the way to school she meets Matt. She accuses him of trying to manipulate her by sending Wayne to her office with the forged notes. But Matt claims that he did it for her own good, because he wanted her to face her own fears to be healed of the pain.

But she doubts him and tells him that she knows he's really an escaped lunatic and offers to get him psychiatric help. He jumps out of the car and they part ways.

That morning she is called into the principal's office in a surprise interrogation. Charleen is accused of having an inappropriate relationship with Matthew Janson. The accusation comes from the coach, who has resigned his position at the school. Photos are presented showing Charleen leaving Matt's apartment. They were taken by the coach. Other photos are presented that show the coach entering the house with Deena Swenson. Charleen claims that she didn't take the photos and doesn't know who did. But she also is forced to admit that she has spent much time with Matt Janson. The chairman of the school board puts her on suspension immediately.

She goes to her office to pack up her belongings.

Meanwhile, as Matt is walking away from his last encounter with Charleen, he sees the same dark truck following him. He begins to run through the neighborhood to get away. A chase ensues, Matt running through yards and alleys while the truck shadows him along the street. Matt hides. The truck tracks him and someone yells his childhood name, Michael Shale. It is his fully grown twin brother, MARK SHALE.

Charleen sees Wayne crying and presumes that Wayne's father has finally died. She feels guilty for having dark wishes that Wayne wasn't alive to continually remind her of her lost son. She overcomes her own fear and has compassion for him. She apologizes and comes to a point of healing, due, in part, to Matt forging notes to send Wayne to her repeatedly.

Men in dark suits arrive at the school claiming to be from Child Protective Services and they are looking for Matthew Janson. Charleen realizes that she's made a mistake about Matt and leaves to warn him. To avoid detection she borrows the secretary's car, which happens to be a 1972 Ford Pinto.

When she reaches Matt's apartment building, she apologizes for not believing him. She announces that she has come to face the reality of her family's death, through the help of Matt. She is surprised to meet Matt's fully-grown twin brother, Mark. They enter the apartment and begin to tell her why they are being chased by Senator Perkins.

## **Part 2: The Senator**

This part begins with Michael Shale's first day of sixth grade when he decides that, as a sixth-grader, his goal will be to help the young students in his school.

In 1958, Senator Perkins is first appointed to the Defense and Development Select Committee, which is tasked with controlling the secret, black budget for ARPA.

About this same time, Michael Shale begins college where he faces discrimination and taunting due to his diminutive size. His college roommate happens to be a dwarf and he offers Michael advice on how to handle the discrimination by others. From a psychology class, Michael learns about Altruism, and begins to develop that as a way of life, as demonstrated by his kindness to a mentally-handicapped man at the college.

Senator Perkins learns that Michael doesn't grow and also doesn't age, effectively having

eternal life. Perkins meets with old confidants who encourage him to pursue this investigation because it would benefit him politically. And they also encourage him to keep his committee in the dark about his true motivations while also keeping them culpable for all actions performed on behalf of the committee. The Senator's wife dies of cancer, and the doctors claim that it is just something that happens with old age.

Perkins convinces his committee of the military benefits of using Shale's biological secrets to make an army of soldiers that don't age. The committee agrees to invite Shale for medical evaluation but Michael and his family reject them.

After a series of political setbacks, like the failed attempt to create a mobile laser weapon, Senator Perkins convinces his committee of the military necessity of capturing Shale and gaining his biological technology before a foreign power does first and creates their own immortal army against the U.S. One of the committee members, GENERAL JOSHUA THOMPSON, a veteran of World War 2, reluctantly agrees with the rest of the committee to forcibly conscript Michael Shale.

Senator Perkins has withheld, from the committee, the fact that Shale is a college student and, therefore, legally void of a draft call. Perkins calls on the help of corrupt FBI agents to plant false evidence of drug use in Shale's dorm room. Michael is kicked out of college, arrested, and instantly drafted. Michael agrees to help the government in exchange for getting the drug charges dropped. He gets one last call from jail to his mother, who supports his decision. He promises to visit her as soon as he is able.

Michael is taken away and drugged. He wakes up, wearing a hospital gown, locked in an abandoned military school somewhere. His identification has been taken. He finds evidence that the government has already been doing medical tests on him. The armed guards don't tell him anything as they escort him to a medical lab where more tests are performed on him against his will. Michael is incarcerated for months while doctors do many medical tests on him.

Senator Perkins is upset because no progress is being made on the medical testing. The doctors claim that they need to compare Michael's DNA with someone from his family, and his normally-aging twin brother would be the perfect candidate.

Michael is awakened in his jail cell one morning by the guards at his door who have Mark. Months later they get a report that their father has died of an illness. This just adds to Mark's anger and conviction to find an escape. Michael has given up hope of escaping. He's as trapped in this jail as he is in his own small body.

The doctors report to the Senator that they've discovered the source of Michael's longevity: he has an extra chromosome. It is an artificially-created 47<sup>th</sup> chromosome using advanced genetic engineering that is unknown to the medical establishment. Senator Perkins tasks the medical team with discovering a way to transfer the longevity gene from Michael to anyone else. The Senator has a goal of using the biological technology himself to avoid death.

Knowing that he and his brother are continually under surveillance, Mark draws a map for Michael showing how he can escape through a ventilation shaft that Mark has managed to unscrew the cover from. Michael whispers a cryptic message to Mark that explains how he can be found "among his own kind." Michael escapes the prison, but not Mark.

Once Michael is out he discovers that he's in southern Pennsylvania. He wants to hitchhike back to Iowa, but first he must get to a major highway. Michael discovers a busload of

elementary students on a class trip. He decides, for the first time in his life, to impersonate a young student so he can get a ride to a major highway.

He has success and gets to the major highway where he begins to hitchhike. The first trucker who picks him up tells him not to lie about being 23. A busload of hippies gives him a long ride to Kansas City. During that ride, Michael discovers that he has the ability to sound like a grown man. A woman pins a flower to his hair in an act of friendship. In Kansas City, a man in a Studebaker gives him a ride to Des Moines. During that time a waitress mistakes the man for Michael's father. Michael is allowed to sleep in a church where he reads a passage from Ecclesiastes, which adds to his understanding of the purpose of life.

The next day Michael calls his mother and explains that he and Mark have been incarcerated. His mother agrees that he shouldn't come to visit her since he may be recaptured at her home. While hitchhiking along the interstate, Michael gets picked up by a highway patrol. Out of panic, Michael tries to run, but is caught. He lies about who he is and where he lives. But the patrolman takes him to a jail and handcuffs him to a bar. The police find a bulletin announcing that he's a drug dealer. When they leave the room to report to the police chief, Michael picks the lock on the cuffs using the hairpin from the hippie girl.

Michael runs and hides out in a barn. As he contemplates his future and his next step he finds a Captain Marvel comic book about a boy who can become a man at will. He decides that he would rather die than let the Senator have his special gift. He realizes that he must get money in order to avoid capture, and so he decides to go to the family bank to complete a plan that he's already discussed with his mother.

The corrupt FBI agent, WATTS, is lying in wait at the Shale family bank, having tapped the phone line. The agents see Michael's mother, MRS. SHALE, exit the bank with a boy that matches Michael's description and they pounce on them. But the boy is Michael's younger brother TOMMY. The agents disband having been tricked by Michael, who is waiting at the bank's branch location in another city. Michael is forced to use subterfuge by convincing a bank teller that an older couple are his parents, so that the bank teller will give him a large amount of money.

Realizing that Michael has outwitted him again, Perkins fires agent Watts and calls on the help of another corrupt agent, KAN. Kan is the agent who creates the idea of searching for Michael under the guise of Child Welfare Services so as to avoid suspicion.

Michael is on his way to Sioux Falls, SD to create a new life. Using the past events as inspiration he concludes that he must hire actors to portray his parents.

Perkins receives a report from Kan that they've discovered Michael is living in Sioux Falls, and that a car has been dispatched to capture him. Perkins is ecstatic. He decides that Mark is no longer of any use to him and orders him to be killed. As Mark is being dragged from his prison cell and his head is forced under water to simulate a drowning, Kan is meeting with Perkins. When Kan learns what Perkins has ordered he criticizes the Senator and says that Mark could be used to lead them to Michael. Just in the nick of time, Perkins rescinds the order to have Mark killed.

As Michael is leaving a cafe, he is forcibly abducted and hauled into the back of a dark car. General Joshua Thompson has picked him up in order to prevent Perkin's team from re-capturing Michael. The General tells how he became suspicious of the Senator's secretive actions.

Thompson claims to have served with Michael's father, who was his C.O. in WW2, and he has a photo of them together. The General admonishes Michael to always be on the run and to not trust anyone, or to ever contact his mother again because that's how he almost got caught in Sioux Falls.

The General agrees to get Michael some new fake birth certificates that he can use to hide out in elementary schools under false names to avoid capture by Perkins. Michael asks for the new birth certificates to be shipped to a post office in Illinois where he will hide out. He also informs Michael that Mark has been killed since he was no longer of use to the Senator. Believing that his brother is dead, Michael takes a depressing bus ride to retrieve his birth certificates which will be waiting for him in Aurora, IL. Having suppressed his tears in front of the General, Michael is finally able to release them when the news on the bus radio announces that President Kennedy has been killed.

When Michael reaches the post office in Aurora and retrieves his new fake birth certificates he also finds a note from General Thompson announcing that Mark is still alive and has been released so that Perkins can track him to Michael. And so begins Michael's plan to hide out in the thousands of elementary and middle schools in the country. He will only hide out in certain schools that match the pre-planned pattern that he cryptically shared with his brother. And he will leave clues that a similarly-minded twin would catch but would be missed by Senator Perkins and his evil team. Now he will just have to hold out until Mark finds him.

Years later, Senator Perkins gets a report that agent Kan has finally tracked Michael to a school in Arkansas. Kan sends in an agent to act as a student teacher and befriend Shale, who is hiding under the name of Tom Howardson. The undercover agent will scope out the school and help to create an escape-proof plan. Agent Kan listens on the radio as the plan starts out as they intended, allowing Shale to see the agents when he's at the top of the rope so that he'll run through the locker room into the pool area where they can capture him without witnesses. But Shale narrowly escapes by climbing across tree branches as if they were ropes and falling into the Arkansas River just narrowly avoiding getting shot by an overzealous agent who fired at him while young students watched.

Perkins is called to report his failures to a powerful, silent partner on the committee, the very secretive CEO of Chrysalis Chronology, who has been helping to fund the Senator's efforts. The CEO threatens to remove all future funding for the Senator if he fails one more time. The Senator reluctantly announces that he'll personally supervise the next capture.

### **Part 3: The Team**

Michael and Mark Shales have just finished telling Charleen the story of why Senator Perkins and his team are chasing them.

Charleen tells the twins about how her job is in jeopardy and that the sleazy coach knows where Michael's apartment is.

Mark admits that he's the person who took the photos of the coach with Deena, in order to help Michael on his final mission.

They start packing up Michael's belongings.

Mark and Michael argue about what they should do next. Michael wants to run, like he's been doing for 15 years. But Mark doesn't want to hide away forever, he wants them to fight

back. At first, Michael is unwilling to put his life at risk again, until he learns that his mother is still alive and living in a nursing home. For their Mom's benefit, they spend the night devising a plan to lure Perkins to St. Cloud and to confess his crimes while he's secretly recorded by a television news crew.

Michael calls the government hotline and says that he and his brother are ready to stop running in exchange for Charleen Therry getting re-instated in her job and a face to face apology by Senator Perkins. A meeting is arranged at the local theatre.

The team breaks into the theater at night and prepares for the meeting with Senator Perkins. The Senator enters the front door of the theater and walks onto the stage to face Michael.

Michael tries to get the Senator to apologize for what he's done. During the Senator's rant, he admits to capturing and incarcerating Shale, and confesses everything that Michael had hoped he would. Then the Senator wickedly laughs as he informs Michael that the television news crew isn't secretly taping this conversation because they were sent away by his security force. The doors burst open and six security guards in full riot gear run in from the front of the theater. Michael loses all composure and kicks the Senator in the nuts, and standing eye to eye, also punches him in the nose.

Michael grabs one of the stage battens and hangs onto the bar as his brother, in the control room, raises it up to aid in Michael's escape. A security guard takes final aim at Michael and just as he's about to fire, all the lights go out in the theater. Michael uses this distraction to complete his climb up the rope and escape out the back of the theater where Charleen and Mark are waiting.

Mark jams the back door shut. Charleen victoriously waves a VHS tape that was recorded from the control room during the Senator's confession. Charleen and Michael escape in her borrowed car while Mark leads the security team on a chase in the wrong direction. As Mark races through the city, he realizes that Agent Kan will be waiting at Charleen's house. Mark must stop the security team so that he can warn Michael about the trap. Mark smashes the back of his truck into the pursuing vehicles to stop them from following him.

Meanwhile Agent Kan is lying in wait at Charleen's. As the agents trail the Pinto on the highway, Mark, in his truck, catches up and tries to ram the agents off the road. The Pinto now speeds down the highway and takes a side road into a granite quarry. As the three vehicles kick up dust and gravel in the quarry, all visibility is lost. The Pinto crashes through a wooden gate and flies down to the bottom of the quarry where it bursts into flame.

Mark knows that no one could have survived that crash. He breaks down and cries. Kan also stands and watches. Mark, in a rage, jumps Kan and punches him until his face is bloody.

Agent Kan apologizes and admits that everything will get covered up. He leaves. Mark makes his way down to the fiery wreckage and sees the two unrecognizable smoldering bodies. By the time Mark gets to the top of the quarry again a sheriff and TV news crew are already at the scene having been called anonymously by someone.

Mark drives from the scene and meets up with a taxi approaching the quarry. Michael and Charleen exit the taxi. They explain that the car was stolen by the troubled Urban twins who tried to take it to Minneapolis to visit their mother. Michael had called the police about the theft, not knowing at first who had stolen their car. Mark tells them to hide in his truck since the Senator will now think that they are dead. Charleen still has the videotape which Mark gives to the TV

news crew.

Several days later the TV news is reporting that Senator Perkins has resigned and is being investigated for numerous crimes.

The trio goes to visit Mrs. Shales, who is thrilled to have both of her boys back with her. She has a letter from a member of the Senator's security team. Michelle Hanson was the person who turned off the lights at the theater to help Michael escape. She did it because she was one of Michael's schoolmates in Arkansas, and she thought that he'd been shot dead years ago. That was what led her to join the FBI, where she was assigned to Perkin's security team.

Michael is happy that he has finally returned to his mother, as he promised her on the phone while he was in jail so many wasted years ago. His mother concludes that his years weren't wasted, they were used to help all of the students Michael met through the years.

**Epilogue:**

Mark and Charleen are married and running a highly successful counseling practice for children. Their secret weapon is Michael, who befriends the patients and encourages them to share things that they may be reluctant to share with an adult.

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