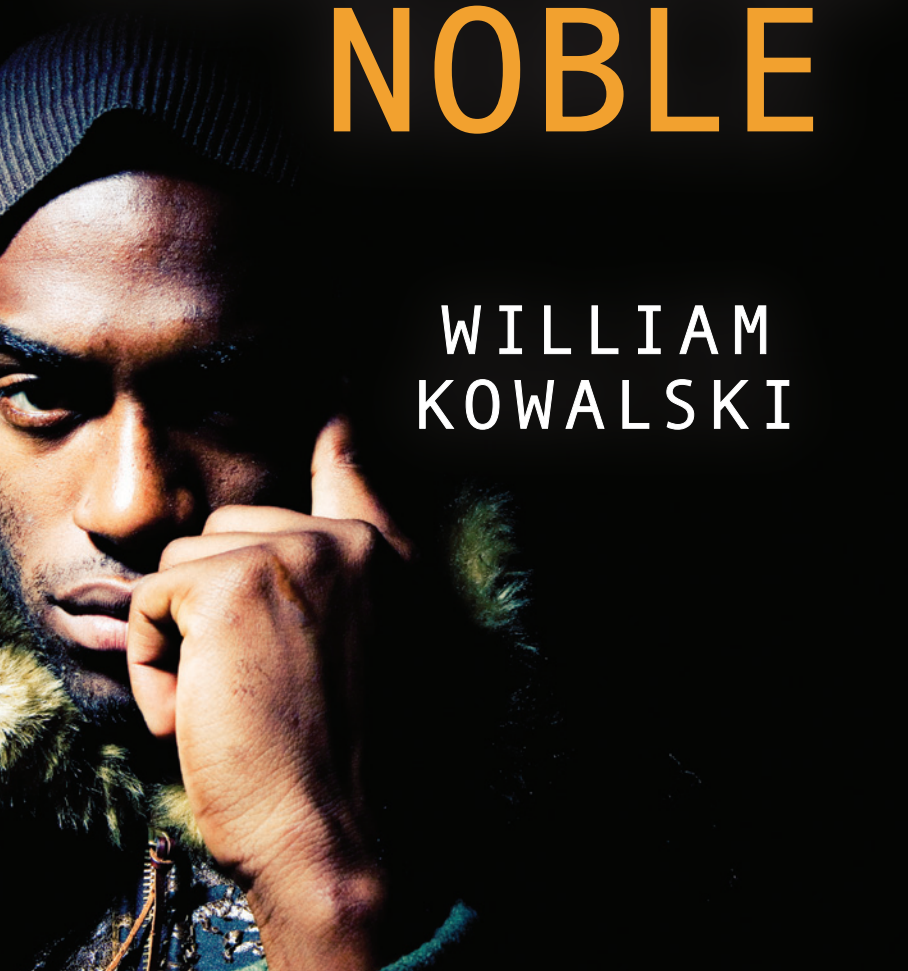




RAPID READS

# SOMETHING NOBLE

WILLIAM  
KOWALSKI



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WILLIAM KOWALSKI



RAVEN BOOKS

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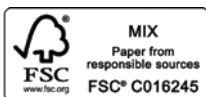
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**Summary:** In order to save her son's life, a single mom must try to convince a selfish drug dealer to donate one of his kidneys to his half brother. (RL 3.0)



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*To all those who need a second chance*

## CHAPTER ONE

**I** just want to tell you straight up that this story has no happy ending.

But it doesn't have a sad ending either. It's a story about being a mom, so it has a lot of happy and sad in it. Like motherhood itself, it has no ending at all.

That's because you never stop being a mom. You don't stop when your kids go to sleep at night. You don't stop when they grow up and move away. Being a mom is not just a job. It's an identity. Maybe you already know what I'm talking about.

If not, you will by the time you're done hearing my story.

My life has never been boring. I'm not an important or exciting person, but sometimes some pretty wild things happen to me. Usually they don't come right on top of each other like this though.

This is the story of one remarkable year that was full of one wild thing after another. It was a year that changed my life and the lives of everyone I cared about. And it starts in my least favorite place of all: a doctor's office.

Let me take you back to that doctor's office right now.

\* \* \*

My son, Dre, is sixteen years old. He's been feeling sick for a while. We've been having a lot of tests done. Now we're sitting and waiting for the doctor to come talk to us.

## Something Noble

Dre feels too sick to be nervous, so I'm nervous for both of us. He lies on the exam table with his arm over his eyes. He's so tall that his feet hang way down off the end of the table. I still can't believe how big my baby is. I carried him on my hip for so long sometimes I can still feel him there. Now look at him. He's a giant with dreadlocks. So handsome the girls can't take their eyes off him.

I was only sixteen myself when I had Dre. I try to imagine him becoming a father at this age. It's a horrible thought. I didn't know a damn thing when I was sixteen. For the millionth time, I think about how amazing it is that we even survived. I was so stupid when I was that age. So young and stupid.

But here we are. We made it through a lot of bad times. Only now my baby is sick, and I have this horrible feeling that more bad times are around the corner.

When I get nervous, I talk. So I keep on chattering away to Dre, even though he isn't answering me.

After a while he says, "Mama, give it a rest. I'm too sick for small talk."

So we sit and wait in silence.

Finally the door opens. A new doctor walks in. He stops and looks at Dre, then at me. Then he looks at his chart, like he's making sure he has the right people. We get that a lot. That's what it's like when your kid's skin is a different color from yours. I guess people wonder if you're just borrowing him or something.

"Señora Gonzalez," says the doctor. "*Buenos días. Me llamo Doctor Wendell.*"

I get that a lot too. People think I don't speak English just because I look Latina. I don't even get mad anymore. I don't have the energy.

"Hi," I say. "How you doing, Doctor Wendell."



“Fine,” says the doctor, without missing a beat. And I realize he wasn’t being rude. We live in a big city. He must meet a lot of people who don’t speak English. So maybe he’s not so bad after all. He closes the door.

“Let’s talk about Dre,” he says. He pronounces it *Dree*.

“It’s pronounced *Dray*,” I say.

“Sorry,” says the doctor. “I know you weren’t expecting to meet a new doctor today. So let me tell you about myself. I’m a kidney specialist. I was called in because of the results of Dre’s tests. I think the reason Dre feels so sick all the time is because he might have kidney problems.”

I nod. I knew it was going to be something serious.

“What kind of problems?” I ask.

“Well, the job of your kidneys is to clean the impurities out of your blood. If they can’t do that, your blood gets dirtier and dirtier. It’s like you’re being poisoned.

So what's going on here is that Dre's kidneys need some help doing their job."

Dr. Wendell puts down the clipboard and waits for me to talk. It used to be that doctors never had time for us. We were just one more poor family of color. I used to hate it. It made me feel like our lives were unimportant to them. But now they are spending more and more time with us. They look at us in a new way now. And even though it sounds crazy, I hate this even more. It shows how serious Dre's case is. I almost miss the days when we weren't worth paying attention to. At least then nothing was really wrong.

I look at Dre. He hasn't moved. I grab his toe and wiggle his foot.

"Well, baby," I say, "at least now we know what the problem is."

"Mmm," says Dre. That's the sound he always makes when he's sick. I can tell he feels horrible.

“Is it one kidney or both?” I ask.

“I’ll need to run some more tests to be sure,” says Dr. Wendell. “The nurse will take your blood, Dre.”

“Mmm,” says Dre again. He’s so sick he doesn’t even complain about one more needle. The nurse comes in again and draws another vial of blood. Dr. Wendell promises to call us as soon as he gets the results. Then I help Dre out to the car, and we head home.

“What time is it?” he asks.

“Three o’clock,” I say. “Why?”

“Because I gotta go do my paper routes.”

“Uh-uh,” I say. “No way. You’re gonna have to give those up. The doctor said you gotta rest.”

“But, Mama,” says Dre. “What about the money?”

Dre makes about three hundred bucks a month from his two paper routes.

It might not sound like much, but it makes a big difference to us. Yet our neighborhood is getting worse and worse. I won't be sorry to see him stop walking the streets by himself.

I got mugged last year right in front of my own house. Broad daylight. He pointed a knife at me and everything. I didn't get hurt, but I was scared to death. And he took the twenty bucks I had on me. That was twenty bucks I could not afford to lose.

I would move to a safer neighborhood, but moving costs money. Right now I'm just keeping it together financially. I'm mostly unemployed. I only have one job, as opposed to my usual three or four. We have enough to eat and pay the rent. But I'm just one flat tire or one speeding ticket away from being bankrupt. And the house is mine. I'm not giving it up just because punks have taken over the east side of the city. They'll have to kill me first.

“Forget about the money,” I say. “We’ll figure something out.”

“But what?” Dre says.

“I dunno,” I say. “You’re too young to worry about these things.”

“No, I’m not,” he says. “You were my age when you had me.”

“Let me worry about money. That’s my job. You just take care of yourself. That’s all that matters.”

“I’m not all that matters. There’s Marco too,” says Dre quietly.

I love him for saying that. I look out the window so he doesn’t see me crying.