



Drifting Toward Love: Black, Brown, Gay, and Coming of Age on the Streets of New York

Kai Wright

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Drifting Toward Love tells the stories of Manny, Julius, Carlos, and their friends, young gay men of color desperately searching for life's basic necessities: homes that provide more than shelter and security against more than violence or disease. As these teenagers navigate the rocky waters of adolescence, they wade through pains and passions that are typical of any young person coming of age. But they do so with few resources-material or emotional-in a world where the cards are stacked against their success.

Journalist Kai Wright paints vivid, intimate portraits of these young men's sometimes tragic, often heroic lives. Manny is a working-class city kid making awkward teenage discoveries about his sexuality. In a troubled relationship with his mother and a stifling, combative school environment, he clumsily elbows out enough space to find himself. In the process, he and best friend Jason move from a budding love based on videogames and music to a troubled bond held together by drugs and sex for money. In one devastating instant, Manny will realize the demons Jason truly faces. Out of the wreckage of the life he builds with Jason, Manny drifts into an explosive social movement, fighting for public space for queer youth, and finds his calling as an activist.

Julius's story, meanwhile, is a classic New York tale: a young, dynamic gay man flees his rural home, seeking freedom in the big city. With no one to help guide his journey in New York, however, Julius never finds his footing, tumbling rapidly through homelessness, hustling, and drug abuse. He gradually confesses that his primary goal remains elusive: discovering love, and holding on to it.

Wright finds Julius in a gay-friendly shared house in a rough spot on the east side of Brooklyn. Carlos considers that same house a lifesaver, an unlikely safe haven in the middle of his childhood neighborhood, but he must balance his efforts at independence with the growing demands of his large Puerto Rican family, in which he serves as the lynchpin.

In *Drifting Toward Love*, Wright tells these stories and more, weaving in years of reporting on the broader social, economic, and political dynamics that box in gay men of color as they come into their own. By the end, a powerful and sometimes troubling story has unfurled that offers a unique and vital snapshot of the often overlooked lives of young people like Manny, Julius, Carlos, and their friends.

Kai Wright is a writer and editor living in Brooklyn, New York. His writing has appeared in *Essence*, *Mother Jones*, *The Progressive*, and the *Village Voice*. He is also publications editor for the Black AIDS Institute and author of two previous books on African American history.

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