**Opening Chapters**



**Contents**

[**The Hate U Give – Angie Thomas** 2](#_Toc32344408)

[**The Poet X – Elizabeth Acevedo** 14](#_Toc32344409)

[**Pigeon English – Stephen Kelman** 16](#_Toc32344410)

[**The Enemy – Charlie Higson** 19](#_Toc32344411)

[**The Lie Tree** 27](#_Toc32344412)



# **The Hate U Give – Angie Thomas**

Sixteen-year-old Starr lives in two worlds: the poor neighbourhood where she was born and raised and her posh high school in the suburbs. The uneasy balance between them is shattered when Starr is the only witness to the fatal shooting of her unarmed best friend, Khalil, by a police officer. Now what Starr says could destroy her community. It could also get her killed.

Inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement, this is a powerful and gripping YA novel about one girl's struggle for justice.

**CHAPTER 1**

I shouldn’t have come to this party.

I’m not even sure I *belong* at this party. That’s not on some bougie shit, either. There are just some places where it’s not enough to be me. Neither version of me. Big D’s spring break party is one of those places.

I squeeze through sweaty bodies and follow Kenya, her curls bouncing past her shoulders. A haze lingers over the room, smelling like weed, and music rattles the floor. Some rapper calls out for everybody to Nae-Nae, followed by a bunch of “Heys” as people launch into their own versions. Kenya holds up her cup and dances her way through the crowd. Between the headache from the loud-ass music and the nausea from the weed odor, I’ll be amazed if I cross the room without spilling my drink.

We break out the crowd. Big D’s house is packed wall-to-wall. I’ve always heard that everybody and their momma comes to his spring break parties—well, everybody except me—but damn, I didn’t know it would be this many people. Girls wear their hair colored, curled, laid, and slayed. Got me feeling basic as hell with my ponytail. Guys in their freshest kicks and sagging pants grind so close to girls they just about need condoms. My nana likes to say that spring brings love. Spring in Garden Heights doesn’t always bring love, but it promises babies in the winter. I wouldn’t be surprised if a lot of them are conceived the night of Big D’s party. He always has it on the Friday of spring break because you need Saturday to recover and Sunday to repent.

“Stop following me and go dance, Starr,” Kenya says. “People already say you think you all that.”

“I didn’t know so many mind readers lived in Garden Heights.” Or that people know me as anything other than “Big Mav’s daughter who works in the store.” I sip my drink and spit it back out. I knew there would be more than Hawaiian Punch in it, but this is way stronger than I’m used to. They shouldn’t even call it punch. Just straight-up liquor. I put it on the coffee table and say, “Folks kill me, thinking they know what I think.”

“Hey, I’m just saying. You act like you don’t know nobody ’cause you go to that school.”

I’ve been hearing that for six years, ever since my parents put me in Williamson Prep. “Whatever,” I mumble.

“And it wouldn’t kill you to not dress like . . .” She turns up her nose as she looks from my sneakers to my oversized hoodie. “*That*. Ain’t that my brother’s hoodie?”

*Our* brother’s hoodie. Kenya and I share an older brother, Seven. But she and I aren’t related. Her momma is Seven’s momma, and my dad is Seven’s dad. Crazy, I know. “Yeah, it’s his.”

“Figures. You know what else people saying too. Got folks thinking you’re my girlfriend.”

“Do I look like I care what people think?”

“No! And that’s the problem!”

“Whatever.” If I knew following her to this party meant she’d be on some *Extreme Makeover: Starr Edition* mess, I would’ve stayed home and watched *The Fresh Prince* reruns. My Jordans are comfortable, and damn, they’re new. That’s more than some people can say. The hoodie’s way too big, but I like it that way. Plus, if I pull it over my nose, I can’t smell the weed.

“Well, I ain’t babysitting you all night, so you better do something,” Kenya says and scopes the room. Kenya could be a model, if I’m completely honest. She’s got flawless dark-brown skin—I don’t think she ever gets a pimple—slanted brown eyes, and long eyelashes that aren’t store-bought. She’s the perfect height for modeling too, but a little thicker than those toothpicks on the runway. She never wears the same outfit twice. Her daddy, King, makes sure of that.

Kenya is about the only person I hang out with in Garden Heights—it’s hard to make friends when you go to a school that’s forty-five minutes away and you’re a latchkey kid who’s only seen at her family’s store. It’s easy to hang out with Kenya because of our connection to Seven. She’s messy as hell sometimes, though. Always fighting somebody and quick to say her daddy will whoop somebody’s ass. Yeah it’s true, but I wish she’d stop picking fights so she can use her trump card. Hell, I could use mine too. Everybody knows you don’t mess with my dad, Big Mav, and you definitely don’t mess with his kids. Still, you don’t see me going around starting shit.

Like at Big D’s party, Kenya is giving Denasia Allen some serious stank eye. I don’t remember much about Denasia, but I remember that she and Kenya haven’t liked each other since fourth grade. Tonight, Denasia’s dancing with some guy halfway across the room and paying no attention to Kenya. But no matter where we move, Kenya spots Denasia and glares at her. And the thing about the stank eye is at some point you feel it on you, inviting you to kick some ass or have your ass kicked.

“Ooh! I can’t stand her,” Kenya seethes. “The other day, we were in line in the cafeteria, right? And she behind me, talking out the side of her neck. She didn’t use my name, but I know she was talking ’bout me, saying I tried to get with DeVante.”

“For real?” I say what I’m supposed to.

“Uh-huh. I don’t want him.”

“I know.” Honestly? I don’t know who DeVante is. “So what did you do?”

“What you think I did? I turned around and asked if she had a problem with me. Ol’ trick, gon’ say, ‘I wasn’t even talking about you,’ knowing she was! You’re so lucky you go to that white people school and don’t have to deal with hoes like that.”

Ain’t this some shit? Not even five minutes ago, I was stuck up because I went to Williamson. Now I’m lucky? “Trust me, my school has hoes too. Hoedom is universal.”

“Watch, we gon’ handle her tonight.” Kenya’s stank eye reaches its highest level of stank. Denasia feels its sting and looks right at Kenya. “Uh-huh,” Kenya confirms, like Denasia hears her. “Watch.”

“Hold up. *We?* That’s why you begged me to come to this party? So you can have a tag team partner?”

She has the nerve to look offended. “It ain’t like you had nothing else to do! Or anybody else to hang out with. I’m doing your ass a favor.”

“Really, Kenya? You do know I have friends, right?”

She rolls her eyes. Hard. Only the whites are visible for a few seconds. “Them li’l bougie girls from your school don’t count.”

“They’re not bougie, and they do count.” I think. Maya and I are cool. Not sure what’s up with me and Hailey lately. “And honestly? If pulling me into a fight is your way of helping my social life, I’m good. Goddamn, it’s always some drama with you.”

“Please, Starr?” She stretches the please extra long. Too long. “This what I’m thinking. We wait until she get away from DeVante, right? And then we . . .”

My phone vibrates against my thigh, and I glance at the screen. Since I’ve ignored his calls, Chris texts me instead.

Can we talk?

I didn’t mean for it to go like that.

Of course he didn’t. He meant for it to go a whole different way yesterday, which is the problem. I slip the phone in my pocket. I’m not sure what I wanna say, but I’d rather deal with him later.

“Kenya!” somebody shouts.

This big, light-skinned girl with bone-straight hair moves through the crowd toward us. A tall boy with a black-and-blond Fro-hawk follows her. They both give Kenya hugs and talk about how cute she looks. I’m not even here.

“Why you ain’t tell me you was coming?” the girl says and sticks her thumb in her mouth. She’s got an overbite from doing that too. “You could’ve rode with us.”

“Nah, girl. I had to go get Starr,” Kenya says. “We walked here together.”

That’s when they notice me, standing not even half a foot from Kenya.

The guy squints as he gives me a quick once-over. He frowns for a hot second, but I notice it. “Ain’t you Big Mav’s daughter who work in the store?”

See? People act like that’s the name on my birth certificate. “Yeah, that’s me.”

“Ohhh!” the girl says. “I knew you looked familiar. We were in third grade together. Ms. Bridges’s class. I sat behind you.”

“Oh.” I know this is the moment I’m supposed to remember her, but I don’t. I guess Kenya was right—I really don’t know anybody. Their faces are familiar, but you don’t really get names and life stories when you’re bagging folks’ groceries.

I can lie though. “Yeah, I remember you.”

“Girl, quit lying,” the guy says. “You know you don’t know her ass.”

“‘Why you always lying?’” Kenya and the girl sing together. The guy joins in, and they all bust out laughing.

“Bianca and Chance, be nice,” Kenya says. “This Starr’s first party. Her folks don’t let her go nowhere.”

I cut her a side-eye. “I go to parties, Kenya.”

“Have y’all seen her at any parties ’round here?” Kenya asks them.

“Nope!”

“Point made. And before you say it, li’l lame white-kid suburb parties don’t count.”

Chance and Bianca snicker. Damn, I wish this hoodie could swallow me up somehow.

“I bet they be doing Molly and shit, don’t they?” Chance asks me. “White kids love popping pills.”

“And listening to Taylor Swift,” Bianca adds, talking around her thumb.

Okay, that’s somewhat true, but I’m not telling them that. “Nah, actually their parties are pretty dope,” I say. “One time, this boy had J. Cole perform at his birthday party.”

“Damn. For real?” Chance asks. “Shiiit. Bitch, next time invite me. I’ll party with them white kids.”

“Anyway,” Kenya says loudly. “We were talking ’bout running up on Denasia. Bitch over there dancing with DeVante.”

“Ol’ trick,” Bianca says. “You know she been running her mouth ’bout you, right? I was in Mr. Donald’s class last week when Aaliyah told me—”

Chance rolls his eyes. “Ugh! Mr. Donald.”

“You just mad he threw you out,” Kenya says.

“Hell yes!”

“Anyway, Aaliyah told me—” Bianca begins.

I get lost again as classmates and teachers that I don’t know are discussed. I can’t say anything. Doesn’t matter though. I’m invisible.

I feel like that a lot around here.

In the middle of them complaining about Denasia and their teachers, Kenya says something about getting another drink, and the three of them walk off without me.

Suddenly I’m Eve in the Garden after she ate the fruit—it’s like I realize I’m naked. I’m by myself at a party I’m not even supposed to be at, where I barely know anybody. And the person I do know just left me hanging.

Kenya begged me to come to this party for weeks. I knew I’d be uncomfortable as hell, but every time I told Kenya no she said I act like I’m “too good for a Garden party.” I got tired of hearing that shit and decided to prove her wrong. Problem is it would’ve taken Black Jesus to convince my parents to let me come. Now Black Jesus will have to save me if they find out I’m here.

People glance over at me with that “who is this chick, standing against the wall by herself like a lame-ass?” look. I slip my hands into my pockets. As long as I play it cool and keep to myself, I should be fine. The ironic thing is though, at Williamson I don’t have to “play it cool”—I’m cool by default because I’m one of the only black kids there. I have to earn coolness in Garden Heights, and that’s more difficult than buying retro Jordans on release day.

Funny how it works with white kids though. It’s dope to be black until it’s hard to be black.

“Starr!” a familiar voice says.

The sea of people parts for him like he’s a brown-skinned Moses. Guys give him daps, and girls crane their necks to look at him. He smiles at me, and his dimples ruin any G persona he has.

Khalil is fine, no other way of putting it. And I used to take baths with him. Not like *that,* but way back in the day when we would giggle because he had a wee-wee and I had what his grandma called a wee-ha. I swear it wasn’t perverted though.

He hugs me, smelling like soap and baby powder. “What’s up, girl? Ain’t seen you in a minute.” He lets me go. “You don’t text nobody, nothing. Where you been?”

“School and the basketball team keep me busy,” I say. “But I’m always at the store. You’re the one nobody sees anymore.”

His dimples disappear. He wipes his nose like he always does before a lie. “I been busy.”

Obviously. The brand-new Jordans, the crisp white tee, the diamonds in his ears. When you grow up in Garden Heights, you know what “busy” really means.

Fuck. I wish *he* wasn’t that kinda busy though. I don’t know if I wanna tear up or smack him.

But the way Khalil looks at me with those hazel eyes makes it hard to be upset. I feel like I’m ten again, standing in the basement of Christ Temple Church, having my first kiss with him at Vacation Bible School. Suddenly I remember I’m in a hoodie, looking a straight-up mess . . . and that I actually *have* a boyfriend. I might not be answering Chris’s calls or texts right now, but he’s still mine and I wanna keep it that way.

“How’s your grandma?” I ask. “And Cameron?”

“They a’ight. Grandma’s sick though.” Khalil sips from his cup. “Doctors say she got cancer or whatever.”

“Damn. Sorry, K.”

“Yeah, she taking chemo. She only worried ’bout getting a wig though.” He gives a weak laugh that doesn’t show his dimples. “She’ll be a’ight.”

It’s a prayer more than a prophecy. “Is your momma helping with Cameron?”

“Good ol’ Starr. Always looking for the best in people. You know she ain’t helping.”

“Hey, it was just a question. She came in the store the other day. She looks better.”

“For now,” says Khalil. “She claim she trying to get clean, but it’s the usual. She’ll go clean a few weeks, decide she wants one more hit, then be back at it. But like I said, I’m good, Cameron’s good, Grandma’s good.” He shrugs. “That’s all that matters.”

“Yeah,” I say, but I remember the nights I spent with Khalil on his porch, waiting for his momma to come home. Whether he likes it or not, she matters to him too.

The music changes, and Drake raps from the speakers. I nod to the beat and rap along under my breath. Everybody on the dance floor yells out the “started from the bottom, now we’re here” part. Some days, we *are* at the bottom in Garden Heights, but we still share the feeling that damn, it could be worse.

Khalil is watching me. A smile tries to form on his lips, but he shakes his head. “Can’t believe you still love whiny-ass Drake.”

I gape at him. “Leave my husband alone!”

“Your *corny* husband. ‘Baby, you my everything, you all I ever wanted,’” Khalil sings in a whiny voice. I push him with my shoulder, and he laughs, his drink splashing over the sides of the cup. “You know that’s what he sounds like!”

I flip him off. He puckers his lips and makes a kissing sound. All these months apart, and we’ve fallen back into normal like it’s nothing.

Khalil grabs a napkin from the coffee table and wipes drink off his Jordans—the Three Retros. They came out a few years ago, but I swear those things are so fresh. They cost about three hundred dollars, and that’s if you find somebody on eBay who goes easy. Chris did. I got mine for a steal at one-fifty, but I wear kid sizes. Thanks to my small feet, Chris and I can match our sneakers. Yes, we’re *that* couple. Shit, we’re fly though. If he can stop doing stupid stuff, we’ll really be good.

“I like the kicks,” I tell Khalil.

“Thanks.” He scrubs the shoes with his napkin. I cringe. With each hard rub, the shoes cry for my help. No lie, every time a sneaker is cleaned improperly, a kitten dies.

“Khalil,” I say, one second away from snatching that napkin. “Either wipe gently back and forth or dab. Don’t scrub. For real.”

He looks up at me, smirking. “Okay, Ms. Sneakerhead.” And thank Black Jesus, he dabs. “Since you made me spill my drink on them, I oughta make you clean them.”

“It’ll cost you sixty dollars.”

“Sixty?” he shouts, straightening up.

“Hell, yeah. And it would be eighty if they had icy soles.” Clear bottoms are a bitch to clean. “Cleaning kits aren’t cheap. Besides, you’re obviously making big money if you can buy those.”

Khalil sips his drink like I didn’t say anything, mutters, “Damn, this shit strong,” and sets the cup on the coffee table. “Ay, tell your pops I need to holla at him soon. Some stuff going down that I need to talk to him ’bout.”

“What kinda stuff?”

“Grown folks business.”

“Yeah, ’cause you’re so grown.”

“Five months, two weeks, and three days older than you.” He winks. “I ain’t forgot.”

A commotion stirs in the middle of the dance floor. Voices argue louder than the music. Cuss words fly left and right.

My first thought? Kenya walked up on Denasia like she promised. But the voices are deeper than theirs.

*Pop!* A shot rings out. I duck.

*Pop!* A second shot. The crowd stampedes toward the door, which leads to more cussing and fighting since it’s impossible for everybody to get out at once.

Khalil grabs my hand. “C’mon.”

There are way too many people and way too much curly hair for me to catch a glimpse of Kenya. “But Kenya—”

“Forget her, let’s go!”

He pulls me through the crowd, shoving people out our way and stepping on shoes. That alone could get us some bullets. I look for Kenya among the panicked faces, but still no sign of her. I don’t try to see who got shot or who did it. You can’t snitch if you don’t know anything.

Cars speed away outside, and people run into the night in any direction where shots aren’t firing off. Khalil leads me to a Chevy Impala parked under a dim street light. He pushes me in through the driver’s side, and I climb into the passenger seat. We screech off, leaving chaos in the rearview mirror.

“Always some shit,” he mumbles. “Can’t have a party without somebody getting shot.”

He sounds like my parents. That’s exactly why they don’t let me “go nowhere” as Kenya puts it. At least not around Garden Heights.

I send Kenya a text, hoping she’s all right. Doubt those bullets were meant for her, but bullets go where they wanna go.

Kenya texts back kinda quick.

I’m fine.

I see that bitch tho. Bout to handle her ass.

Where u at?

Is this chick for real? We just ran for our lives, and she’s ready to fight? I don’t even answer that dumb shit.

Khalil’s Impala is nice. Not all flashy like some guys’ cars. I didn’t see any rims before I got in, and the front seat has cracks in the leather. But the interior is a tacky lime green, so it’s been customized at some point.

I pick at a crack in the seat. “Who you think got shot?”

Khalil gets his hairbrush out the compartment on the door. “Probably a King Lord,” he says, brushing the sides of his fade. “Some Garden Disciples came in when I got there. Something was bound to pop off.”

I nod. Garden Heights has been a battlefield for the past two months over some stupid territory wars. I was born a “queen” ’cause Daddy used to be a King Lord. But when he left the game, my street royalty status ended. But even if I grew up in it, I wouldn’t understand fighting over streets nobody owns.

Khalil drops the brush in the door and cranks up his stereo, blasting an old rap song Daddy plays a million times. I frown. “Why you always listening to that old stuff?”

“Man, get outta here! Tupac was the truth.”

“Yeah, twenty years ago.”

“Nah, even now. Like, check this.” He points at me, which means he’s about to go into one of his Khalil philosophical moments. “’Pac said Thug Life stood for ‘The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody.’”

I raise my eyebrows. “What?”

“Listen! The Hate U—the letter U—Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody. T-H-U-G L-I-F-E. Meaning what society give us as youth, it bites them in the ass when we wild out. Get it?”

“Damn. Yeah.”

“See? Told you he was relevant.” He nods to the beat and raps along. But now I’m wondering what he’s doing to “fuck everybody.” As much as I think I know, I hope I’m wrong. I need to hear it from him.

“So why have you really been busy?” I ask. “A few months ago Daddy said you quit the store. I haven’t seen you since.”

He scoots closer to the steering wheel. “Where you want me to take you, your house or the store?”

“Khalil—”

“Your house or the store?”

“If you’re selling that stuff—”

“Mind your business, Starr! Don’t worry ’bout me. I’m doing what I gotta do.”

“Bullshit. You know my dad would help you out.”

He wipes his nose before his lie. “I don’t need help from nobody, okay? And that li’l minimum wage job your pops gave me didn’t make nothing happen. I got tired of choosing between lights and food.”

“I thought your grandma was working.”

“She was. When she got sick, them clowns at the hospital claimed they’d work with her. Two months later, she wasn’t pulling her load on the job, ’cause when you’re going through chemo, you can’t pull big-ass garbage bins around. They fired her.” He shakes his head. “Funny, huh? The *hospital* fired her ’cause she was sick.”

It’s silent in the Impala except for Tupac asking *who do you believe in?* I don’t know.

My phone vibrates again, probably either Chris asking for forgiveness or Kenya asking for backup against Denasia. Instead, my big brother’s all-caps texts appear on the screen. I don’t know why he does that. He probably thinks it intimidates me. Really, it annoys the hell out of me.

WHERE R U?

U AND KENYA BETTER NOT BE @ THAT PARTY.

I HEARD SOMEBODY GOT SHOT.

The only thing worse than protective parents is protective older brothers. Even Black Jesus can’t save me from Seven.

Khalil glances over at me. “Seven, huh?”

“How’d you know?”

“’Cause you always look like you wanna punch something when he talks to you. Remember that time at your birthday party when he kept telling you what to wish for?”

“And I popped him in his mouth.”

“Then Natasha got mad at you for telling her ‘boyfriend’ to shut up,” Khalil says, laughing.

I roll my eyes. “She got on my nerves with her crush on Seven. Half the time, I thought she came over just to see him.”

“Nah, it was because you had the Harry Potter movies. What we used to call ourselves? The Hood Trio. Tighter than—”

“The inside of Voldemort’s nose. We were so lame for that.”

“I know, right?” he says.

We laugh, but something’s missing from it. *Someone’s* missing from it. Natasha.

Khalil looks at the road. “Crazy it’s been six years, you know?”

A *whoop-whoop* sound startles us, and blue lights flash in the rearview mirror.

**CHAPTER 2**

When I was twelve, my parents had two talks with me.

One was the usual birds and bees. Well, I didn’t really get the usual version. My mom, Lisa, is a registered nurse, and she told me what went where, and what didn’t need to go here, there, or any damn where till I’m grown. Back then, I doubted anything was going anywhere anyway. While all the other girls sprouted breasts between sixth and seventh grade, my chest was as flat as my back.

The other talk was about what to do if a cop stopped me.

Momma fussed and told Daddy I was too young for that. He argued that I wasn’t too young to get arrested or shot.

“Starr-Starr, you do whatever they tell you to do,” he said. “Keep your hands visible. Don’t make any sudden moves. Only speak when they speak to you.”

I knew it must’ve been serious. Daddy has the biggest mouth of anybody I know, and if he said to be quiet, I needed to be quiet.

I hope somebody had the talk with Khalil.

He cusses under his breath, turns Tupac down, and maneuvers the Impala to the side of the street. We’re on Carnation where most of the houses are abandoned and half the streetlights are busted. Nobody around but us and the cop.

Khalil turns the ignition off. “Wonder what this fool wants.”

The officer parks and puts his brights on. I blink to keep from being blinded.

I remember something else Daddy said. *If you’re with somebody, you better hope they don’t have nothing on them, or both of y’all going down.*

“K, you don’t have anything in the car, do you?” I ask.

He watches the cop in his side mirror. “Nah.”

The officer approaches the driver’s door and taps the window. Khalil cranks the handle to roll it down. As if we aren’t blinded enough, the officer beams his flashlight in our faces.

“License, registration, and proof of insurance.”

Khalil breaks a rule—he doesn’t do what the cop wants. “What you pull us over for?”

“License, registration, and proof of insurance.”

“I said what you pull us over for?”

“Khalil,” I plead. “Do what he said.”

Khalil groans and takes his wallet out. The officer follows his movements with the flashlight.

My heart pounds loudly, but Daddy’s instructions echo in my head: *Get a good look at the cop’s face. If you can remember his badge number, that’s even better.*

With the flashlight following Khalil’s hands, I make out the numbers on the badge—one-fifteen. He’s white, midthirties to early forties, has a brown buzz cut and a thin scar over his top lip.

Khalil hands the officer his papers and license.

One-Fifteen looks over them. “Where are you two coming from tonight?”

“Nunya,” Khalil says, meaning none of your business. “What you pull me over for?”

“Your taillight’s broken.”

“So are you gon’ give me a ticket or what?” Khalil asks.

“You know what? Get out the car, smart guy.”

“Man, just give me my ticket—”

“Get out the car! Hands up, where I can see them.”

Khalil gets out with his hands up. One-Fifteen yanks him by his arm and pins him against the back door.

I fight to find my voice. “He didn’t mean—”

“Hands on the dashboard!” the officer barks at me. “Don’t move!”

I do what he tells me, but my hands are shaking too much to be still.

He pats Khalil down. “Okay, smart mouth, let’s see what we find on you today.”

“You ain’t gon’ find nothing,” Khalil says.

One-Fifteen pats him down two more times. He turns up empty.

“Stay here,” he tells Khalil. “And you,” he looks in the window at me. “Don’t move.”

I can’t even nod.

The officer walks back to his patrol car.

My parents haven’t raised me to fear the police, just to be smart around them. They told me it’s not smart to move while a cop has his back to you.

Khalil does. He comes to his door.

It’s not smart to make a sudden move.

Khalil does. He opens the driver’s door.

“You okay, Starr—”

*Pow!*

One. Khalil’s body jerks. Blood splatters from his back. He holds onto the door to keep himself upright.

*Pow!*

Two. Khalil gasps.

*Pow!*

Three. Khalil looks at me, stunned.

He falls to the ground.

I’m ten again, watching Natasha drop.

An ear-splitting scream emerges from my gut, explodes in my throat, and uses every inch of me to be heard.

Instinct says don’t move, but everything else says check on Khalil. I jump out the Impala and rush around to the other side. Khalil stares at the sky as if he hopes to see God. His mouth is open like he wants to scream. I scream loud enough for the both of us.

“No, no, no,” is all I can say, like I’m a year old and it’s the only word I know. I’m not sure how I end up on the ground next to him. My mom once said that if someone gets shot, try to stop the bleeding, but there’s so much blood. Too much blood.

“No, no, no.”

Khalil doesn’t move. He doesn’t utter a word. He doesn’t even look at me. His body stiffens, and he’s gone. I hope he sees God.

Someone else screams.

I blink through my tears. Officer One-Fifteen yells at me, pointing the same gun he killed my friend with.

I put my hands up.

**Things to consider:**

How does the writer create realistic dialogue?

How does the structure of the chapters create an interesting story?

Did you like the chapters? Justify your reasoning.

# **The Poet X - WINNER OF THE CILIP CARNEGIE MEDAL 2019The Poet X – Elizabeth Acevedo**

Xiomara has always kept her words to herself. When it comes to standing her ground in her Harlem neighbourhood, she lets her fists and her fierceness do the talking.

But X has secrets – her feelings for a boy in her bio class, and the notebook full of poems that she keeps under her bed. And a slam poetry club that will pull those secrets into the spotlight.

Because in spite of a world that might not want to hear her, Xiomara refuses to stay silent.

*A novel about finding your voice and standing up for what you believe in, no matter how hard it is to say. Brave, bold and beautifully written - dealing with issues of race, feminism and faith.*

**Surprise!** Don’t read this book, Listen to it…

Use the link below OR Go to YouTube and search Chapter 1 of THE POET X – Elizabeth Acevedo | Audiobook

<https://youtu.be/oBHGtzOhOwU>

Please make sure it is this version – this is the Author reading her own work.

**Glossary:**

 Stoop – the steps at the front of a house.

**Think:**

This book is written in verse – poetry – how does this effect the story, consider the pace and emotions revealed in this chapter.

# **https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/413bnlFoIKL._SX336_BO1,204,203,200_.jpgPigeon English – Stephen Kelman**

Eleven-year-old Harrison Opoku, the second best runner in Year 7, races through his new life in England with his personalised trainers - the Adidas stripes drawn on with marker pen - blissfully unaware of the very real threat around him. Newly-arrived from Ghana with his mother and older sister Lydia, Harri absorbs the many strange elements of city life, from the bewildering array of Haribo sweets, to the frightening, fascinating gang of older boys from his school. But his life is changed forever when one of his friends is murdered. As the victim's nearly new football boots hang in tribute on railings behind fluorescent tape and a police appeal draws only silence, Harri decides to act, unwittingly endangering the fragile web his mother has spun around her family to keep them safe.

You could see the blood. It was darker than you thought. It was all on the ground outside Chicken Joe's. It just felt crazy.

Jordan: 'I'll give you a million quid if you touch it.'

Me: 'You don't have a million.'

Jordan: 'One quid then.'

You wanted to touch it but you couldn't get close enough. There was a line in the way:

POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS

If you cross the line you'll turn to dust.

We weren't allowed to talk to the policeman, he had to concentrate for if the killer came back. I could see the chains hanging from his belt but I couldn't see the gun.

The dead boy's mamma was guarding the blood. She wanted it to stay, you could tell. The rain wanted to come and wash the blood away but she wouldn't let it. She wasn't even crying, she was just stiff and fierce like it was her job to scare the rain back up into the sky. A pigeon was looking for his chop. He walked right in the blood. He was even sad as well, you could tell where his eyes were all pink and dead.

\* \* \*

The flowers were already bent. There were pictures of the dead boy wearing his school uniform. His jumper was green.

My jumper's blue. My uniform's better. The only bad thing about it is the tie, it's too scratchy. I hate it when they're scratchy like that.

There were bottles of beer instead of candles and the dead boy's friends wrote messages to him. They all said he was a great friend. Some of the spelling was wrong but I didn't mind. His football boots were on the railings tied up by their laces. They were nearly new Nikes, the studs were proper metal and everything.

Jordan: 'Shall I t'ief them? He don't need 'em no more.'

I just pretended I didn't hear him. Jordan would never really steal them, they were a million times too big. They looked too empty just hanging there. I wanted to wear them but they'd never fit.

Me and the dead boy were only half friends, I didn't see him very much because he was older and he didn't go to my school. He could ride his bike with no hands and you never even wanted him to fall off. I said a prayer for him inside my head. It just said sorry. That's all I could remember. I pretended like if I kept looking hard enough I could make the blood move and go back in the shape of a boy. I could bring him back alive that way. It happened before, where I used to live there was a chief who brought his son back like that. It was a long time ago, before I was born. Asweh, it was a miracle. It didn't

work this time.

I gave him my bouncy ball. I don't need it anymore, I've got five more under my bed. Jordan only gave him a pebble he found on the floor.

Me: 'That doesn't count. It has to be something that belonged to you.'

Jordan: 'I ain't got nothing. I didn't know we had to bring a present.'

I gave Jordan a strawberry Chewit to give to the dead boy, then I showed him how to make a cross. Both the two of us made a cross. We were very quiet. It even felt important. We ran all the way home. I beat Jordan easily. I can beat everybody, I'm the fastest in Year 7. I just wanted to get away before the dying caught us.

The buildings are all mighty around here. My tower is as high as the lighthouse at Jamestown. There are three towers all in a row: Luxembourg House, Stockholm House and Copenhagen House. I live in Copenhagen House. My flat is on floor 9 out of 14. It's not even hutious, I can look from the window now and my belly doesn't even turn over. I love going in the lift, it's brutal, especially when you're the only one in there. Then you could be a spirit or a spy. You even forget the pissy smell because you're going so fast.

It's proper windy at the bottom like a whirlpool. If you stand at the bottom where the tower meets the ground and put your arms out, you can pretend like you're a bird. You can feel the wind try to pick you up, it's nearly like flying.

Me: 'Hold your arms out wider!'

Jordan: 'They're as wide as I can get 'em! This is so gay, I'm not doing it no more!'

Me: 'It's not gay, it's brilliant!'

Asweh, it's the best way to feel alive. You only don't want the wind to pick you up, because you don't know where it will drop you. It might drop you in the bushes or the sea.

In England there's a hell of different words for everything. It's for if you forget one, there's always another one left over. It's very helpful. Gay and dumb and lame mean all the same. Piss and slash and tinkle mean all the same (the same as greet the chief). There's a million words for a bulla. When I came to my new school, do you know what's the first thing Connor Green said to me?

Connor Green: 'Have you got happiness?'

Me: 'Yes.'

Connor Green: 'Are you sure you've got happiness?'

Me: 'Yes.'

Connor Green: 'But are you really sure?'

Me: 'I think so.'

He kept asking me if I had happiness. He wouldn't stop. In the end it just vexed me. Then I wasn't sure. Connor Green was laughing, I didn't even know why. Then Manik told me it was a trick.

Manik: 'He's not asking if you've got happiness, he's asking if you've got a penis. He says it to everyone. It's just a trick.'

It only sounds like happiness but really it means a penis. Ha-penis.

Connor Green: 'Got ya! Hook, line and sinker!'

Connor Green is always making tricks. He's just a confusionist. That's the first thing you learn about him. At least I didn't lose. I do have a penis. The trick doesn't work if it's true.

Some people use their balconies for hanging washing or growing plants. I only use mine for watching the helicopters. It's a bit dizzy. You can't stay out there for more than one minute or you'll turn into an icicle. I saw X-Fire painting his name on the wall of Stockholm House. He didn't know I could see him. He was proper quick and the words still came out dope-fine. I want to write my own name that big but the paint in a can is too dangerous, if you get it on yourself it never washes off, even forever.

The baby trees are in a cage. They put a cage around the tree to stop you stealing it. Asweh, it's very crazy. Who'd steal a tree anyway? Who'd chook a boy just to get his Chicken Joe's?

**Things to consider:**

How does the author use language to create a realistic sense of two eleven year olds are talking to each other?

Who is the narrator?

Who are they speaking to?

# **The Enemy – Charlie Higson**

**They'll chase you. They'll rip you open. They'll feed on you . . .**  
  
When the sickness came, every parent, policeman, politician - every adult - fell ill. The lucky ones died. The others are crazed, confused and hungry.

Only children under fourteen remain, and they're fighting to survive.

Now there are rumours of a safe place to hide. And so a gang of children begin their quest across London, where all through the city - down alleyways, in deserted houses, underground - the grown-ups lie in wait.

**But can they make it there - alive?**

image **1**

Small Sam was playing in the car park behind Waitrose when the grown-ups took him. He’d been with some of the little kids, having a battle with an odd assortment of action figures, when it happened. They weren’t supposed to play outside without a guard, but it was a lovely sunny day and the little kids got bored indoors. Sam wasn’t the youngest of the group, but he was the smallest. That’s why they called him Small Sam. There had originally been two other Sams, Big Sam and Curly Sam, who had curly hair. Big Sam had been killed a few months ago, but Small Sam was stuck with the name.

It was probably because of his size that the grown-ups went for him. They were like that – they picked out the youngsters, the weaklings, the little ones. In the panic of the attack the rest of Sam’s gang got back safely inside, but Sam was cut off and the roving pack of grown-ups trapped him in a corner.

They had come over the side wall, led by a big mother in a tracksuit that might once have been pink but was now so filthy and greasy it looked like grey plastic. She had a fat, egg-like body on top of long skinny legs. Her back was bent and she ran stooped over, but surprisingly fast, her arms held wide like a scorpion’s claws, her dirty blonde hair hanging straight down. Her face blank and stupid. Breathing through her mouth.

Small Sam was too scared even to scream or call for help, and the grown-ups made no noise, so the whole scene was played out in horrible silence. The mother blocked off the route back towards the building while two lanky fathers ran at him from either side. Sam dodged them for a few seconds, but he knew they’d get hold of him in the end. By the time help came from inside, the grown-ups were gone back over the wall, with Sam stuffed inside a sack.

Maxie led a group of bigger kids out into the car park. Even though they were armed with spears and clubs and good throwing rocks they moved cautiously, not knowing exactly what to expect.

‘We’re too late,’ said Callum, scanning the empty car park. ‘They’ve got him.’

‘Shame,’ said a stocky, dark-haired kid called Josh. ‘I liked him. He was funny.’

‘That’s the second attack this week,’ said Maxie angrily. ‘What’s going on? Either the grown-ups are closing in on us or they’re getting braver.’

‘They ain’t brave,’ said Josh, spitting on the ground. ‘If they was still here I’d show them brave. I’d mash their ugly faces. Nothing scares me.’

‘So why were they here?’ asked Maxie.

‘They’re just hungry,’ said Josh.

‘We’re all hungry,’ said Callum.

‘We should have been here,’ said Maxie. ‘We should have been watching over them.’

‘We can’t be everywhere at once,’ Callum pointed out. ‘There’s not enough of us, not with Arran out with the scavs. Our job’s to keep a look-out from the roof. The little kids knew they weren’t supposed to be out here. Nobody should be out here. We should all stay inside.’

‘We can’t stay inside all day,’ scoffed Josh. ‘We’d go crazy.’

‘It’s good inside,’ said Callum.

‘You’re just scared to come outside,’ said Josh with a smirk.

‘No I ain’t,’ said Callum. ‘No more scared than you.’

‘Nothing scares me,’ said Josh.

‘Then you’re just stupid,’ said Callum.

‘Nah,’ said Josh. ‘The thing about grown-ups is, some of them are strong, some of them can run fast and some of them are clever, but the strong ones are slow, the fast ones are stupid and the smart ones are weak.’

‘Tell that to Small Sam,’ said Maxie angrily, ‘and to Big Sam and Johnno, and Eve and Mohammed and all the other kids we’ve lost.’

‘Grown-ups won’t get me,’ said Josh.

‘What?’ said Callum. ‘So it was their fault they got taken? Is that what you’re saying?’

‘Yeah, I am,’ said Josh.

‘Shut up,’ Maxie snapped at the two of them. Then she said the thing that nobody wanted to admit. ‘We can’t go on like this.’ Her voice was heavy with bitterness. ‘Soon we’re all going to be dead. I can’t stand it any more.’

She threw down the spear she had been carrying and sat on the ground, resting her head in her hands.

It was her fault. That was all she could think. *It was all her fault*.

When Arran was away she was supposed to be in charge. She couldn’t remember when it had been decided – *Arran was the leader, she was second in command –* it must have happened early on, when most of the kids had been too frightened and confused to do anything for themselves. Arran and Maxie had just got on with it, organizing everyone, keeping their spirits up. Arran was clever and likeable. Right from the start he’d kept his head and not panicked. He’d been captain of the football team at William Ellis School and nothing ever seemed to freak him out.

The two of them had worked together. A team. Maxie had always been good at getting other children to help out. There were better fighters than her, true, but they were happy for her to tell them what to do. They didn’t want the responsibility. And when Arran wasn’t there, she was the leader.

So, it was all her fault. Another kid gone. She shut down part of her mind. She didn’t want to think about what the grown-ups would do to Small Sam.

She started to cry. She didn’t care who saw it.

Callum looked at Josh. They both felt awkward. In the end it was Josh who squatted down next to her and put an arm round her shoulders.

‘It’s all right, Max,’ he said quietly. ‘We’ll be all right. Something’ll happen, someone will come. Something’s gonna change. When Arran and the others get back we’ll talk about it maybe, yeah? Make a plan?’

‘What’s the point?’ said Maxie.

‘When Arran gets back, yeah?’

Maxie looked up into Josh’s concerned, grubby face.

‘Sorry,’ she said.

‘Come on,’ said Callum. ‘Let’s try and find out how they got over the wall. Then we should get back inside.’

‘Yeah.’ Maxie jumped up. It was OK as long as you were doing something, as long as you didn’t stop and think.

She wished Arran were here, though. She always felt safer when he was around.

It was just… What was he going to think?

Another kid gone.

All her fault.

image **2**

A burster was lying in the middle of the road. A father by the looks of it, though it was hard to tell. He had the familiar look of a vegetable, or a piece of fruit, left too long in the sun. The skin blackened, shrivelled and split, the overripe flesh inside squeezing out. His insides had turned to mush. This was what happened if any grown-up lived long enough to let the disease run its full course. They literally burst.

Arran prodded the body with his trainer. As he did so the skin popped, and a stream of pus oozed out followed by a bright pink blossom of soft fat.

Arran was leading the scavenger party. Tall, fair-haired and athletic. He had a knife in his belt and carried a pickaxe handle as a club.

‘Gross,’ sniggered the boy at his side, who had a shock of curly hair bleached almost white.

‘Come on. We don’t have time for this.’ Arran turned his back on the corpse and carried on up the Holloway Road. When the disaster first happened the kids had been appalled and fascinated by dead bodies. Now they were used to them. They hardly even noticed them. A burster, though, was still a little special.

The scavenger party took up their positions with Arran and trudged on. They hadn’t gone another hundred yards, however, before the bleach-haired boy, Deke, slowed down.

‘What’s that?’

They stopped and listened.

‘Dogs,’ said another boy and he moved to the front. He was shorter than Arran and not as strong. He had proved time and time again, though, that fighting was not all about strength. Arran was the leader, but Achilleus was the best fighter of them all, with a wiry build, dark eyes and olive skin. He spent most of his spare time shaving elaborate patterns into his short hair. He could be moody and sarcastic and quick to lose his temper, but nobody much minded because he’d saved them all many times with his combat skills. He moved fast, used his brain and was utterly ruthless in a fight.

They waited. They could hear the dogs long before they saw them. A cacophony of howling, yelping and barking. All jumbled together it sounded like a single mad beast.

Achilleus levelled his spear, pointing it towards the noise. It was made from a metal spike he’d found on a building site. It had a heavy lump at one end and he’d sharpened the other into a vicious point. It was perfect for keeping grownups at bay. He could stab with the front, and use the back end to batter them. It was definitely *not* for throwing. Too precious for that.

Arran took up a defensive position behind him, next to Freak and Deke. Freak and Deke were a team, best mates. Before the disaster they’d taken to the streets armed only with spray-cans. Their tag was ‘Freaky-Deaky’ and it could be seen all over Tufnell Park and Camden Town, sprayed on walls and shutters, stencilled on to the pavements, scratched on the glass in bus shelters. They knew all the back ways, all the alleys and short cuts. Freak, whose real name was David, had close-cropped hair and a thin, pinched face. He was always sniffing. Deke was the bigger of the two. He was good-looking and would have been popular with the girls if he hadn’t spent all his time with Freak. The two were inseparable, always finishing each other’s sentences and laughing at each other’s jokes. Freak carried an axe and Deke a sledgehammer. They were mainly for knocking down doors and opening windows, although, if needed, they could be used as weapons.

The last in the group was Ollie. Small and red-haired, the cleverest of them all. He had sharp eyes and could think quickly. He kept himself to himself and most of the time he kept quiet. But, when he *did* speak, people listened. Arran would often ask Ollie for advice, and it was never seen as a weakness. Ollie always knew the best thing to do.

As the barking of the dogs grew louder Ollie stepped back and to one side, keeping a clear line of sight. His weapon was a slingshot that he had taken from a sports shop. It was a powerful hunter’s model, with a pistol grip and a metal brace that fitted over his forearm. He drew the elastic back and tucked a heavy steel ball into the worn leather pouch.

Whenever the kids were out of camp they travelled in a group of at least four. One to look ahead and lead the way, two to check the sides, and one to watch their backs. But, as Freak and Deke always worked together, there were five of them today. They had learnt early on to move down the middle of the roads, rather than to stay out of sight among the buildings along the sides. Grown-ups could hide in the shadows and grab you from the darkness. They weren’t such a threat in the open, because on the whole they didn’t move fast enough. The biggest danger was if you got surrounded. In a mass the grown-ups were a real threat, bigger and heavier than the kids, and diseased. Grown-ups were rarely organized enough to plan any real strategy, though, and for the most part they came lumbering out in a pack from the side. Then the best thing to do was run.

Anything to avoid a fight.

Dogs were different, however. Unpredictable. Dangerous.

‘Are they coming our way?’ said Freak, scratching his stubbly head.

‘Think so,’ said Ollie, his slingshot creaking.

‘Let them,’ said Achilleus. ‘I’m ready.’

‘It gets more dangerous every time we come out,’ said Arran.

‘Tell me about it,’ said Deke, nervously twisting his sledgehammer in his hand.

Then the first of the dogs appeared, a skinny mongrel with one eye. It bowled out into the street, fell over, wriggled on the ground then lay on its back in surrender. A second dog was hard on its tail, a dirty Staffordshire terrier. It had evidently been chasing the mongrel, because it came at him with teeth bared and hackles raised.

There was an almost comical moment when the two dogs realized that they had an audience. They both did a double take and looked at the boys in surprise. The rest of the pack came into view at almost the same time, howling and barking. They skidded to a halt and a couple of them knocked into the Staff, who turned and snapped at them.

The little mongrel saw its moment and scurried off. The Staff stood there, sniffing the air. The other dogs were a mismatched mob, with missing fur and diseased eyes caked with pus. Some were limping, some wounded. One sat down in the road and vigorously scratched its ear, until another dog bit it and it scampered away.

The Staff strutted forward, growling, then it started to bark at the boys and the rest of the pack joined in. Instantly the street was filled with their racket.

‘Will they attack, do you think?’ asked Freak.

‘Depends how hungry they are,’ said Arran.

‘They look pretty hungry to me,’ said Deke and he gripped his sledgehammer tighter.

‘Try and scare them off,’ said Arran and the boys now made a racket of their own, yelling and screaming and waving their arms. The dogs backed off but the bolder ones were soon inching closer.

The big Staff shook his head and nosed ahead, his claws scratching on the tarmac.

‘Take him out,’ said Arran. ‘He’s the boss. Maybe the others will get the message.’

Ollie loosed his shot. The steel ball hit the dog squarely in the forehead, his legs crumpled and he went down without a sound. The other dogs sniffed him and one or two set up howling. Then a big Alsatian ran from the back of the pack, leading three other hounds with him. Achilleus went down on one knee and as the dog pounced he stuck him through the chest with his spear, the followers veered off to the side and Ollie hit one more with a steel ball, breaking its leg. It yelped and turned tail, dragging its leg behind.

With a great war-cry the boys charged and the rest of the dogs scattered.

Ollie quickly searched the area for his ammunition. He found his second ball lying in the gutter. The first one was stuck in the Staff’s head in a neat crease of broken bone.

The five of them knelt by the dead body.

‘Can we risk eating it?’ said Freak. ‘What’s that parasite Maeve’s always going on about? That worm thing you can catch from eating dog? Tricky something.’

‘Trichinosis,’ said Arran. ‘He’ll be all right if he’s well cooked.’

‘Yeah,’ said Deke. ‘We’ll deep-fry him in batter with some chips and a nice glass of wine. Delicious.’

Freak giggled. ‘I know a Jamie Oliver recipe for fried dog.’

‘We can’t waste any food,’ said Arran. ‘Some of the kids are getting really thin. Leave the Alsatian, though. He’s too big to carry and his carcass might keep the pack busy.’

Achilleus took out his knife and gutted the dead animal, leaving the purple-grey entrails in the road to further distract the other dogs.

He then tied the dog’s legs together with some nylon cord and slung it over Arran’s shoulder.

‘Should we go back?’ said Freak.

‘We need to find as much food as we can,’ said Arran. ‘It’s always a risk leaving camp, and it gets riskier every time. The dog’s not enough for twenty of us.’

Every day a scavenging party left the camp to look for supplies. They searched among the empty houses and flats for any abandoned cans, packets and bottles. Each time they had to start their search further from Waitrose. All the buildings close by had long since been picked clean. Most days they found nothing, but a lucky discovery could last them a long time.

They knew it couldn’t last, though. They had already been through every accessible building within a mile of Waitrose, except around Crouch End, which had been destroyed in a fire, and up around the Arsenal football stadium, where there was a large nest of grown-ups.

Sooner or later they would have to move camp.

But where would they go?

Arran pushed his hair out of his eyes. His guts hurt. He didn’t really feel hungry any more, just sick and tired. He’d grown to hate these streets. The smell of them, the filth everywhere, the grass and weeds pushing out of every crack, the constant fear chewing away at him. He had been happy at first when they made him leader, but then it slowly dawned on him that he was responsible for everyone else. If anything went wrong he had to take the blame. That was why someone like Achilleus, who could easily beat him in a fight, was happy not to be in charge. He could show off and suck up the praise, but when a tough decision had to be made he would sit back, hold up his hands and let Arran sweat it out.

It was a warm and sunny spring day. There was a real sense that summer wasn’t far off. Normally Arran would have enjoyed the sunshine and warmth. In the past he had always loved seeing the first green leaves come out on the trees, as if the world was waking up. Now it just meant that the grown-ups were getting bolder. In the winter they’d been too cold and feeble to be much danger, but the change in the weather seemed to give them new courage and strength. Their attacks were becoming more frequent.

They were hungrier than ever.

The kids trudged up the Holloway Road. It was full of memories for Arran – eating at McDonald’s, shopping with his mum, going to the cinema…

He tried to shut the memories out. They only made him feel worse.

When they came to Archway they moved more cautiously. There was a tube station here, a perfect hiding-place for grown-ups.

‘Which way?’ said Deke.

‘Highgate Road,’ said Arran. ‘We’ll work our way towards the Whittington.’

‘Ain’t going in no hospital,’ said Achilleus.

‘What’s the problem?’

‘There won’t be nothing in there,’ said Achilleus.

‘Maybe drugs?’ said Ollie. ‘Paracetamol and antibiotics and that.’

‘Doubt it,’ said Deke. ‘When everything kicked off it would have been the first place to be looted.’

‘We’ll take a look anyway,’ said Arran. ‘Just in case. But let’s try the houses round here first.’

‘Ain’t going in no hospital,’ Achilleus repeated.

‘What about the swimming pool then?’ said Freak.

‘What about it?’ said Achilleus.

‘Worth a look, eh?’

‘Why?’ said Achilleus. ‘You fancy a swim?’

‘Nah,’ said Freak, ‘but there was always a vending machine in there.’

‘Never worked,’ said Achilleus. ‘Always stole your money.’

‘Worth a look,’ said Freak. ‘Think about it… Mars bars, crisps, chewing gum…’

‘Won’t be nothing in there,’ said Achilleus. ‘Not after all this time.’

‘Listen,’ Freak insisted. ‘Far as we know, us and the Morrisons crew are the only kids around. And they never come up here. All I’m saying is we should look. OK? If we’re looking in the Whittington we should look in the pool as well. We search everywhere, in’t that right, Arran?’

‘Suppose so,’ said Arran.

‘Waste of time,’ said Ollie. ‘When have we ever found a vending machine with anything in it?’

‘You agree with me, don’t you, Deke?’ said Freak.

‘He agrees with everything you say,’ Achilleus scoffed.

‘Try me,’ said Deke.

‘The world is flat,’ said Freak.

‘Yes it is,’ said Deke.

‘Penguins can fly,’ said Freak.

‘Yes they can,’ said Deke.

‘I am the greatest kid that ever walked the earth,’ said Freak.

‘Yes you are,’ said Deke.

‘Ha, ha, very funny,’ said Achilleus.

‘Akkie is a twat,’ said Freak.

‘Yes he is,’ said Deke.

‘I think you’ve made your point,’ said Arran, trying not to smile. ‘We’ll take a look.’

Ollie sighed. This was a waste of time. What they needed was proper food, not sweets. But Arran had spoken, and he was their leader.

Ollie shoved a hand into his jacket and rolled the heavy steel shot between his fingers. The cold hardness comforted him.

He didn’t like the idea of exploring the swimming pool. He was always scared on these hunts, and going into the unknown like this just made his heart race faster.

‘Come on,’ said Arran. ‘Let’s go.’

‘Searching the swimming pool is a genius idea,’ said Freak.

‘Yes it is,’ said Deke.

# **The Lie Tree: Illustrated Edition by [Hardinge, Frances]The Lie Tree**

Faith's father has been found dead under mysterious circumstances, and as she is searching through his belongings for clues she discovers a strange tree. The tree only grows healthy and bears fruit if you whisper a lie to it. The fruit of the tree, when eaten, will deliver a hidden truth to the person who consumes it. The bigger the lie, the more people who believe it, the bigger the truth that is uncovered.

The girl realizes that she is good at lying and that the tree might hold the key to her father's murder, so she begins to spread untruths far and wide across her small island community. But as her tales spiral out of control, she discovers that where lies seduce, truths shatter . . .

**CHAPTER 1:**

EXILES

The boat moved with a nauseous, relentless rhythm, like someone chewing on a rotten tooth. The islands just visible through the mist also looked like teeth, Faith decided. Not fine, clean Dover teeth, but jaded, broken teeth, jutting crookedly amid the wash of the choppy grey sea. The mailboat chugged its dogged way through the waves, greasing the sky with smoke.

‘Osprey,’ said Faith through chattering teeth, and pointed.

Her six-year-old brother Howard twisted round, too slow to see the great bird, as its pale body and dark-fringed wings vanished into the mist. Faith winced as he shifted his weight on her lap. At least he had stopped demanding his nursemaid.

‘Is that where we are going?’ Howard squinted at the ghostly islands ahead.

‘Yes, How.’ Rain thudded against the thin wooden roof above their heads. The cold wind blew in from the deck, stinging Faith’s face.

In spite of the noise around her, Faith was sure that she could hear faint sounds coming from the crate on which she sat. Rasps of movement, breathy slithers of scale on scale. It pained Faith to think of her father’s little Chinese snake inside, weak with the cold, coiling and uncoiling itself in panic with every tilt of the deck.

Behind her, raised voices competed with the keening of the gulls and the *phud-phud-phud* of the boat’s great paddles. Now that the rain was setting in, everybody on board was squabbling over the small sheltered area towards the stern. There was room for the passengers, but not for all of the trunks. Faith’s mother Myrtle was doing her best to claim a large share for her family’s luggage, with considerable success.

Sneaking a quick glance over her shoulder, Faith saw Myrtle waving her arms like a conductor while two deckhands moved the Sunderly trunks and crates into place. Today Myrtle was waxen with tiredness and shrouded to the chin with shawls, but as usual she talked through and over everybody else, warm, bland and unabashed, with a pretty woman’s faith in others’ helpless chivalry.

‘Thank you, there, right there – well, I am heartily sorry to hear that, but it cannot be helped – on its side, if you do not mind – well, your case looks very durable to me – I am afraid my husband’s papers and projects will not endure the weather so – the Reverend Erasmus Sunderly, the renowned naturalist – how very kind! I am so glad that you do not mind . . .’

Beyond her, round-faced Uncle Miles was napping in his seat, blithely and easily as a puppy on a rug. Faith’s gaze slipped past him, to the tall, silent figure beyond. Faith’s father in his black priestly coat, his broad-brimmed hat overshadowing his high brow and hooked nose.

He always filled Faith with awe. Even now he stared out towards the grey horizons with his unyielding basilisk stare, distancing himself from the chilly downpour, the reek of bilge and coal-smoke and the ignominious arguing and jostling. Most weeks she saw more of him in the pulpit than she did in the house, so it was peculiar to look across and see him sitting there. Today she felt a prickle of pained sympathy. He was out of his element, a lion in a rain-lashed sideshow.

On Myrtle’s orders, Faith was sitting on the family’s largest crate, to stop anybody dragging it out again. Usually she managed to fade into the background, since nobody had attention to spare for a fourteen-year-old girl with wooden features and a mud-brown plait. Now she winced under resentful glares, seared by all the embarrassment that Myrtle never felt.

Myrtle’s petite figure was positioned to impede anybody else trying to insert their own luggage under cover. A tall, broad man with a knuckly nose seemed about to push past her with his trunk, but she cut him short by turning to smile.

Myrtle blinked twice, and her big, blue eyes widened, taking on an earnest shine as if she had only just noticed the person before her with clarity. Despite her pink-nipped nose and weary pallor, her smile still managed to be sweet and confiding.

‘Thank you for being so understanding,’ she said. There was the tiniest, tired break in her voice.

It was one of Myrtle’s tricks for handling men, a little coquetry she summoned as easily and reflexively as opening her fan. Every time it worked, Faith’s stomach twisted. It worked now. The gentleman flushed, gave a curt bow and withdrew, but Faith could see he was still carrying his resentment with him. In fact, Faith suspected that her family had antagonized nearly everybody on the boat.

Howard shyly adored their mother, and when she was younger Faith had seen her in the same honeyed light. Myrtle’s rare visits to the nursery had been almost unbearably exciting, and Faith had even loved the ritual of being groomed, dressed and fussed over to make her presentable for each encounter. Myrtle had seemed like a being from another world, warm, merry, beautiful and untouchable, a sun-nymph with a keen sense of fashion.

However, over the last year Myrtle had decided to start ‘taking Faith in hand’, which appeared to involve interrupting Faith’s lessons without warning, and dragging her away on impulse for visits or trips to town, before abandoning her to the nursery and schoolroom once more. Over this year, familiarity had done its usual work, picking off the gilded paint one scratch at a time. Faith had started to feel like a rag doll, snatched up and cast down according the whims of an impatient child with an uncertain temper.

Right now the crowds were receding. Myrtle settled herself down on a stack of three trunks next to Faith’s crate, with an air of deep self-satisfaction.

‘I do hope the place that Mr Lambent has arranged for us has a decent drawing room,’ she remarked, ‘and that the servants will do. The cook simply cannot be *French*. I can scarcely run a household if my cook can choose to misunderstand me whenever she pleases ...’

Myrtle’s voice was not unpleasant, but it trickled on, and on, and on. For the last day her chatter had been the family’s constant companion, as she shared it with the hackney-carriage driver who had taken them to the station, the guards who had stowed the family’s luggage in the trains to London and then Poole, the surly custodian of the chilly inn where they had spent the night, and the captain of this smoky mailboat.

‘*Why* are we going there?’ interrupted Howard. His eyes were glassy with tiredness. He was at the fork. Ahead lay either compulsive napping or helpless tantrums.

‘You know that, darling.’ Myrtle leaned across to stroke wet hair out of Howard’s eyes with a careful, gloved finger. ‘There are some very important caves on that island over there, where gentlemen have been discovering dozens of clever fossils. Nobody knows more about fossils than your father, so they asked him to come and look at them.’

‘But why did *we* come?’ Howard persisted. ‘He did not take us to China. Or India. Or Africa. Or Mongia.’ The last was his best attempt at Mongolia.

It was a good question, and one that a lot of people were probably asking. Yesterday a flurry of cards carrying excuses and last-minute cancellations would have turned up in households all over the Sunderlys’ home parish like apologetic, rectangular snowflakes. By today, word of the family’s unscheduled departure would be spreading like wildfire.

In truth, Faith herself would have liked to know the answer to Howard’s question.

‘Oh, we could never have gone to those places!’ Myrtle declared vaguely. ‘Snakes, and fevers, and people who eat dogs. This is different. It will be a little holiday.’

‘Did we have to go because of the Beetle Man?’ asked Howard, screwing up his face in concentration.

The Reverend, who had shown no sign of listening to the conversation, suddenly drew in his breath through his nose and let it out in a disapproving hiss. He rose to his feet.

‘The rain is easing, and this saloon is too crowded,’ he declared, and strode out on to the deck.

Myrtle winced and looked over at Uncle Miles, who was rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

‘Perhaps I should, ah, take a little constitutional as well.’ Uncle Miles glanced at his sister with a small, wry lift of the eyebrows. He smoothed down his moustache at the corners of his smile, then followed his brother-in-law out of the saloon.

‘Where did Father go?’ asked Howard in piercing tones, craning his neck round to peer out towards the deck. ‘Can I go too? Can I have my gun?’

Myrtle closed her eyes briefly and let her lips flutter in what looked like a small, exasperated prayer for patience. She opened her eyes again, and smiled at Faith.

‘Oh, Faith, what a rock you are.’ It was the smile she always gave Faith, fond but with a hint of weary acceptance. ‘You may not be the liveliest company . . . but at least you never ask questions.’

Faith managed a flat, chilled smile. She knew who Howard meant by ‘the Beetle Man’, and suspected that his question had been dangerously close to the mark.

For the last month the family had been living in a frozen fog of the unsaid. Looks, whispers, subtle changes in manner and gently withdrawn contact. Faith had noticed the alteration, but had been unable to guess the reason for it.

And then, one Sunday while the family were walking back from church, a man in a brown homburg hat had approached to introduce himself, with much bobbing and bowing and a smile that never reached his eyes. He had written a paper on beetles, and would the respected Reverend Erasmus Sunderly consider writing a foreword? The respected Reverend would not consider it, and became ever more coldly irate at the visitor’s persistence. The stranger was ‘scraping an acquaintance’ in breach of all good manners, and at last the Reverend flatly told him so.

The beetle enthusiast’s smile had drooped into something less pleasant. Faith still remembered the quiet venom of his reply.

‘Forgive me for imagining that your civility would be the equal of your intellect. The way rumour is spreading, Reverend, I would have thought that you would be *glad* to find a fellow man of science who is still willing to shake you by the hand.’

Remembering those words, Faith’s blood ran cold again. She had never dreamed that she would see her father insulted to his face. Worse still, the Reverend had turned away from the stranger in furious silence, without demanding an explanation. The chill haze of Faith’s suspicions began to crystallize. There were rumours abroad, and her father knew what they were, even if she did not.

Myrtle was wrong. Faith was full of questions, coiling and writhing like the snake in the crate.

*Oh, but I cannot. I must not give way to* that.

In Faith’s mind, it was always *that*. She never gave it another name, for fear of yielding it yet more power over her. *That* was an addiction, she knew that much. *That* was something she was always giving up, except that she never did. *That* was the very opposite of Faith as the world knew her. Faith the good girl, the rock. Reliable, dull, trustworthy Faith.

It was the unexpected opportunities that she found hardest to resist. An unattended envelope with the letter peeping out, clean and tantalizing. An unlocked door. A careless conversation, unheeding of eavesdroppers.

There was a hunger in her, and girls were not supposed to be hungry. They were supposed to nibble sparingly when at table, and their minds were supposed to be satisfied with a slim diet too. A few stale lessons from tired governesses, dull walks, unthinking pastimes. But it was *not* enough. All knowledge – any knowledge – called to Faith, and there was a delicious, poisonous pleasure in stealing it unseen.

Right now, however, her curiosity had a focus and an urgent edge. At that very moment, her father and Uncle Miles might be talking about the Beetle Man, and the reasons for the family’s sudden exodus.

‘Mother . . . may I walk on the deck a little while? My stomach . . .’ Faith almost made herself believe her own words. Her insides were indeed churning, but with excitement, not the boat’s jarring lurches.

‘Very well – but do not answer anyone who talks to you. Take the umbrella, be careful not to fall overboard, and come back before you catch a chill.’

As Faith paced slowly alongside the rail, the faltering drizzle drumming on her umbrella, she admitted to herself that she was giving in to *that* again. Excitement pumped dark wine through her veins and sharpened all her senses to painful edges. She wandered slowly out of sight of Myrtle and Howard, then dawdled, acutely aware of each glance directed her way. One by one these gazes wearied of her and slid off once more.

Her moment came. Nobody was looking. She sidled quickly across the deck and lost herself among the crates that clustered at the base of the boat’s shuddering, discoloured funnel. The air tasted of salt and guilt, and she felt alive.

She slipped from one hiding place to another, keeping her skirts gathered close so that they did not flare in the wind and betray her location. Her broad, square feet, so clumsy when anybody tried to fit them for fashionable shoes, settled silently on the boards with practised deftness.

Between two crates she found a hiding place from which she could see her father and uncle a mere three yards away. Seeing her father without being seen felt like a special sacrilege.

‘To flee my own home!’ exclaimed the Reverend. ‘It smacks of cowardice, Miles. I should never have let you persuade me to leave Kent. And what good will our departure do? Rumours are like dogs. Flee from them and they give chase.’

‘Rumours are dogs indeed, Erasmus.’ Uncle Miles squinted through his pince-nez. ‘And they hunt in packs, and on sight. You needed to leave society for a while. Now that you are gone, they will find something else to chase.’

‘By creeping away under cover of darkness, Miles, I have *fed* these dogs. My departure will be used in evidence against me.’

‘Perhaps it will, Erasmus,’ answered Uncle Miles with unusual seriousness, ‘but would you rather be judged here on a remote island by a couple of sheep farmers, or in England among persons of consequence? The Vane Island excavation was the best excuse I could find for your departure, and I remain glad that you chose to accept my arguments.

‘Yesterday morning that article in the *Intelligencer* was read out at breakfast tables all over the country. If you had stayed, you would have forced your entire circle to decide whether they would support or snub you, and the way rumour has been spreading you might not have liked the decisions they would have made.

‘Erasmus, one of the most widely read and respected newspapers in the nation has decried you as a fraud and a cheat. Unless you want to subject Myrtle and the children to all the barbs and trials of scandal, you cannot return to Kent. Until your name is clear, nothing good awaits any of you there.’

**CHAPTER 2:**

VANE

*A fraud and a cheat.*

The words buzzed in Faith’s head as she continued her damp promenade, staring distractedly at the passing islands. How could anybody suspect *her father* of fraud? His bleak and terrible honesty were the plague and pride of the family. You knew where you stood with him, even if where you stood was within the blizzard of his disapproval. And what did Uncle Miles mean by ‘fraud’ anyway?

By the time she returned to the shelter of the saloon, Uncle Miles and her father were back in their seats. Faith sat down on the snake crate again, unable to meet anyone’s eye.

Uncle Miles squinted at a rain-spotted almanac through his pince-nez, for all the world as if the family really were on holiday, then peered out across the seascape.

‘There!’ He pointed. ‘*That* is Vane.’

The approaching island did not look large enough at first, but Faith soon realized that it was drawing up to them end on, like a boat with a tapering prow. Only as the ferry navigated around the island and began travelling down its longer flank could Faith see how much larger it was than the rest of the shoal. Great black waves shattered themselves against the deep brown cliffs, throwing up wild arcs of foam.

*Nobody lives here*, was her first thought. *Nobody could ever live here by choice. It must be where the outcasts live. Criminals, like the convicts in Australia. And people running away, like us.*

*We are exiles. Perhaps we will have to live out here forever.*

They passed pitted headlands and deep coves where solitary buildings skulked along the shoreline. Then the ferry slowed, turning laboriously with a churn of water to enter a deeper bay with a harbour ringed about by a high wall, and beyond that ascending rows of blank-eyed houses, slate roofs slicked with rain. Dozens of little fishing boats tilted and shrugged, their cat’s cradles of ropes ghostly in the mist. The gulls became deafening, all squabbling with the same broken note. There was motion on the ferry, a communal letting out of breath and readying of luggage.

The rain became fierce again just as the ferry came to rest beside the quay. Amid the shouting, rope-throwing and manoeuvring of gangplanks, Uncle Miles dropped coins into a couple of palms, and the Sunderly luggage was manhandled ashore.

‘The Reverend Erasmus Sunderly and family?’ A thin man in a black coat stood drenched on the quay, water spilling off the broad brim of his hat. He was clean-shaven, with a pleasant, worried sort of face, currently a little blue from the cold. ‘Mr Anthony Lambent sends his compliments.’ He bowed formally and handed over a rather damp letter. As he did so, Faith noticed the tight-fitting white stock round his neck and realized that he was a priest like her father.

Faith’s father read the letter, then gave a nod of approval and extended his hand.

‘Mr . . . Tiberius Clay?’

‘Indeed, sir.’ Clay shook him respectfully by the hand. ‘I am the curate on Vane.’ Faith knew that a curate was a sort of under-priest, hired to help out a rector or vicar that had too many parishes or too much work. ‘Mr Lambent asked me to apologize on his behalf. He wished to meet you himself, but the sudden rain . . .’ Clay grimaced up at the leaden clouds. ‘The new holes are in danger of filling up with water, so he is making sure that everything is covered. Please, sir – will you permit me to have some men assist with your luggage? Mr Lambent has sent his carriage to take you and your family and belongings to Bull Cove.’

The Reverend did not smile, but his murmured acquiescence was not without warmth. The curate’s formality of manner had clearly won his approval.

The family were drawing looks, Faith was sure of it. Had the mysterious scandal reached Vane already? No, it was probably just the fact that they were strangers, loaded down with absurd amounts of luggage. Subdued murmurs around them caught her ear, but she could make no sense of them. They seemed to be a mere soup of sound with no consonants.

With difficulty, the Sunderly luggage was arranged into an ungainly and alarming tower on the roof of the large but weathered carriage and strapped into place. There was just enough room for the curate to squeeze inside with the Sunderly family. The carriage set off, jouncing over the cobbles and making Faith’s teeth vibrate.

‘Are you a natural scientist, Mr Clay?’ asked Myrtle, gamely ignoring the growl of the wheels.

‘In present company, I can but claim to be a dabbler.’ Clay gave the Reverend a small, damp bow. ‘However, my tutors at Cambridge did succeed in hammering a little geology and natural history into my thick skull.’

Faith heard this without surprise. Many of her father’s friends were clergymen who had stumbled into natural science in the same way. Gentlemen’s sons destined for the Church were sent to a good university, where they were given a respectable, gentlemanly education – the classics, Greek, Latin and a little taste of the sciences. Sometimes that taste was enough to leave them hooked.

‘My chief contribution to the excavation is as a photographer – it is a pursuit of mine.’ The curate’s voice brightened at the mention of his hobby. ‘Alas, Mr Lambent’s draughtsman had the misfortune to break his wrist on the first day, so my son and I have been recording the discoveries with my camera.’

The carriage headed out of the little ‘town’, which to Faith’s eyes looked more like a village, and climbed a rugged, zigzag lane. Every time the carriage jolted, Myrtle clutched nervously at the window frame, making everyone tense.

‘That edifice out on the headland is the telegraph tower,’ remarked Clay. Faith could just make out a broad, dingy brown cylinder. Shortly afterwards a small church with a tapering spire passed on the left. ‘The parsonage is just behind the church. I do hope that you will do me the honour of calling in for tea while you are on Vane.’

The carriage seemed to be struggling with the hill, creaking and rattling so badly Faith expected a wheel to fall off. At last it juddered to a stop and there was a sharp double rap on the roof.

‘Excuse me.’ Clay opened the door and climbed out. An animated conversation ensued above, in a blend of English and French that Faith’s untrained ear could not disentangle.

Clay’s face appeared in the doorway again, his face drawn with distress and concern.

‘My most profuse apologies. It seems that we have a dilemma. The house you have leased is in Bull Cove, which can only be reached by a low road that follows the shoreline, or by the high track that passes over the ridge and down the other side. I have just learned that the low road is flooded. There is a breakwater, but when the tide is high and the breakers fierce . . .’ He crinkled his forehead and cast an apologetic glance towards the lowering sky.

‘I assume that the high road is a longer and more wearisome journey?’ Myrtle asked briskly, with one eye on the morose Howard.

Clay winced. ‘It is . . . a very steep road. Indeed, the driver informs me that the horse would not be equal to it with this carriage in its, ah, current state of burden.’

‘Are you suggesting that we will have to get out and *walk*?’ Myrtle stiffened, and her small, pretty chin set.

‘Mother,’ whispered Faith, sensing an impasse, ‘I have my umbrella, and I do not mind walking a little—’

‘No!’ snapped Myrtle, just loud enough to make Faith’s face redden. ‘If I am to become mistress of a new household, I will not make my first appearance looking like a drowned rat. And neither will you!’

Faith felt a rising tide of frustration and anger twisting her innards. She wanted to shout, *What does it matter? The newspapers are tearing us to pieces right now – do you really think people will despise us more if we are wet?*

The curate looked harassed. ‘Then I fear the carriage will need to make two journeys. There is an old cabin nearby – a lookout point for spotting sardine shoals. Perhaps your boxes could be left there until the carriage can return for them? I would be happy to stay and watch over them.’

Myrtle’s face brightened gratefully, but her answer was cut off by her husband.

‘Unacceptable,’ Faith’s father declared. ‘Your pardon, but some of these boxes contain irreplaceable flora and fauna that I *must* see installed at the house as soon as possible, lest they perish.’

‘Well, I am quite happy to wait in this cabin and spare the horse *my* weight,’ declared Uncle Miles.

Clay and Uncle Miles dismounted, and the family’s personal trunks and chests were unloaded one by one, leaving only the specimen crates and boxes on the roof. Even then the driver stared at the way the carriage hung down, grimacing and gesturing to indicate it was still too low.

Faith’s father made no move to step out and join the other men.

‘Erasmus—’ began Uncle Miles.

‘I must remain with my specimens,’ the Reverend interrupted him sharply.

‘Perhaps we could leave just one of your crates behind?’ enquired Clay. ‘There is a box labelled “miscellaneous cuttings” which is much heavier than the rest—’

‘*No*, Mr Clay.’ The Reverend’s answer was swift and snow-cold. ‘That box is of *particular* importance.’

Faith’s father glanced at his family, his eyes cool and distant. His gaze slid over Myrtle and Howard, then settled on Faith. She flushed, knowing that she was being assessed for weight and importance. There was a dipping sensation in her stomach, as if she had been placed in a great set of scales.

Faith felt sick. She could not wait for the mortification of hearing her father voice his decision.

She did not look at her parents as she stood up unsteadily. This time Myrtle said nothing to stop her. Like Faith, she had heard the Reverend’s silent decision and had turned meekly to toe the invisible line.

‘Miss Sunderly?’ Clay was clearly surprised to see Faith climbing out of the carriage, her boots splashing down into a waiting puddle.

‘I have an umbrella,’ she said quickly, ‘and I was hoping for some fresh air.’ The little lie left her with a scrap of dignity.

The driver examined the level of his vehicle again and this time nodded. As the carriage rattled away, Faith avoided her companions’ eyes, her cheeks hot with humiliation despite the chill wind. She had always known that she was rated less than Howard, the treasured son. Now, however, she knew that she was ranked somewhere below ‘miscellaneous cuttings’.

The cabin was set into the hillside facing out to sea, and was rough-hewn from the dark, glossy local rock, with a slanting slate roof and small, glassless windows. The floor inside was scattered with earth-coloured puddles. Overhead, the rain’s drumroll was slowing.

Uncle Miles and Clay dragged in the family’s trunks and boxes one by one, while Faith shook out her dripping bonnet, feeling numb and useless. Only when her father’s strongbox landed with a thump at her feet did Faith’s heart skip. The key had been left in the lock.

The box contained all her father’s private papers. His journals, his research notes and his correspondence. Perhaps it held some clue to the mysterious scandal that had driven them here.

She cleared her throat.

‘Uncle – Mr Clay – my . . . my kerchief and clothing are very wet. Could I have a little while to . . .’ She trailed off, gesturing towards her sodden collar.

‘Ah – of course!’ Clay looked a little alarmed, as gentlemen often did when something mysterious involving female clothing was in danger of happening.

‘It looks as if the rain is letting up again,’ observed Uncle Miles. ‘Mr Clay, shall we take a little turn on the cliff, so that you can tell me more about the excavation?’ The two men stepped outside, and after a while their voices receded.

Faith dropped to her knees next to the strongbox. Its leather was slick under her fingers, and she considered peeling off her wet, skintight kid gloves, but she knew that would take too long. The buckles were stiff, but yielded to her hasty tugging. The key turned. The lid opened, and she saw creamy papers covered in various different hands. Faith was no longer cold. Her face burned and her hands tingled.

She began opening letters, teasing them out of their envelopes and holding them by their edges so as not to smudge or crumple them. Communications from scientific journals. Letters from the publisher of his pamphlets. Invitations from museums.

It was a slow, painstaking task, and she lost track of time. At last she came upon a letter whose wording seized her attention.

‘. . . challenging the authenticity of not one but all the fossils which you have brought to the eye of the scientific community and upon which your reputation is based. They claim that they are at best deliberately altered, and at worst out-and-out fakes. The New Falton find, they say, is two fossils artfully combined, and report traces of glue in the wing joints . . .’

A knock sounded at the door, and Faith jumped.

‘Faith!’ It was her uncle’s voice. ‘The carriage has returned!’

‘One moment!’ she called back, hastily folding the letter.

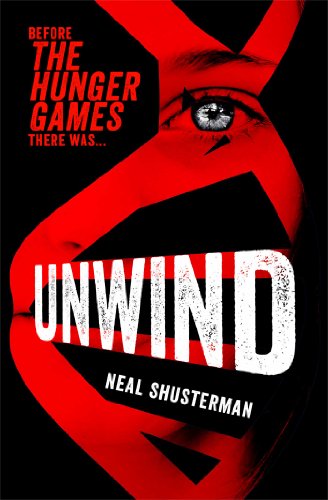
As she did so, she realized that there was a large, blue stain on her wet, white gloves. With horror she realized that she had smudged the letter, leaving a thumb-shaped smear.

Consider the book synopsis given at the start of this extract – is there any hint of what is to come in the first two chapters?

Why do you think the author has started the book slowly?

What does this do to the story?

# **Other books to consider:**

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## **Unwind by Neal Shusterman**

**Connor, Risa and Lev are running for their lives.**  
  
Unwinding: the process by which a child is both terminated and yet kept alive. Unwinding is now a common, and accepted, practice in society.  
  
**Connor's** parents want to be rid of him because he's a troublemaker.  
**Risa** has no parents and is being unwound to cut orphanage costs.  
**Lev's** unwinding has been planned since his birth as part of his family's strict religion.  
  
Brought together by chance, and kept together by desperation, these unlikely companions make a harrowing cross-country journey, knowing their lives hang in the balance.  
  
If they can survive until their 18th birthday, they can't be harmed - but when every piece of them, from their hands to their hearts, is wanted by a world gone mad, eighteen seems far, far away...

## **Lost Boy by [Henry, Christina]Lost Boy By Christina Henry**

There is one version of my story that everyone knows. And then there is the truth.

Once I loved a boy called Peter Pan.

Peter brought me to his island because there were no rules and no grownups to make us mind. He brought boys from the Other Place to join in the fun, but Peter's idea of fun is sharper than a pirate's sword.

He wants always to be that shining sun that we all revolve around. He'll do anything to be that sun. Peter promised we would all be young and happy forever.

Peter will say I'm a villain, that I wronged him, that I never was his friend. Peter Lies.



**More than this – Patrick Ness**

**An enthralling and provocative new novel**   
**chronicling the life – or perhaps afterlife – of a teen trapped in a crumbling, abandoned world.**

A boy called Seth drowns, desperate and alone in his final moments, losing his life as the pounding sea claims him. But then he wakes. He is naked, thirsty, starving. But alive. How is that possible? He remembers dying, his bones breaking, his skull dashed upon the rocks. So how is he is here? And where is this place? It looks like the suburban English town where he lived as a child, before an unthinkable tragedy happened and his family moved to America. But the neighbourhood around his old house is overgrown, covered in dust and completely abandoned. What's going on? And why is it that whenever he closes his eyes, he falls prey to vivid, agonizing memories that seem more real than the world around him? Seth begins a search for answers, hoping that he might not be alone, that this might not be the hell he fears it to be, that there might be more than just this...