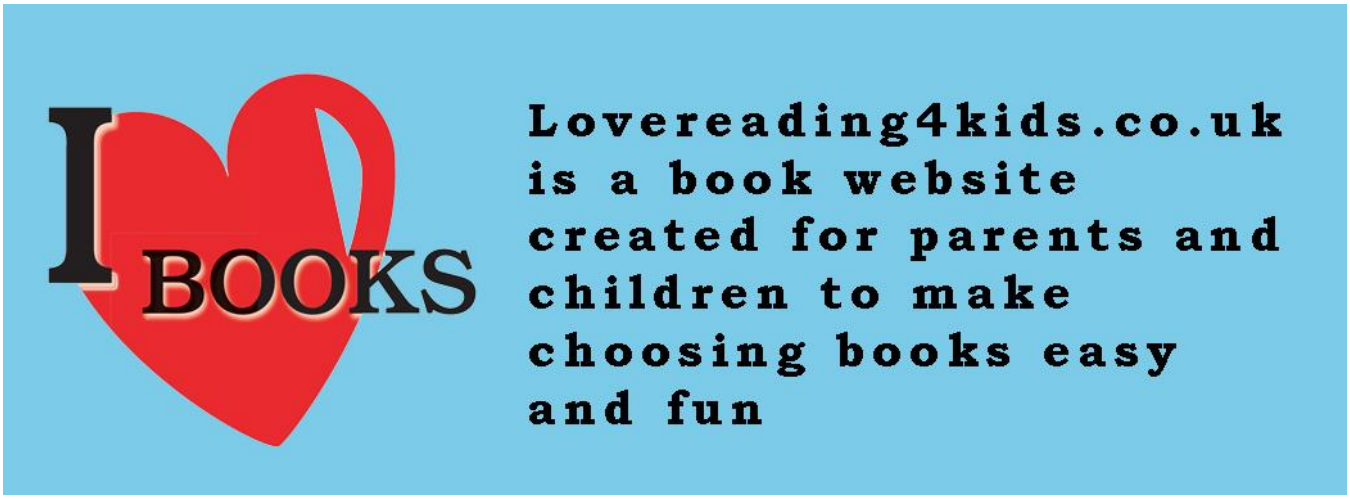


Opening extract from

Thicker Than Water

Written by

Anne Cassidy

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Lovereading4kids.co.uk

To my mum, Alice Cassidy, who loves this story as much as I do

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1
LAST DAY IN BRIGHTON

George didn't know it was going to be his last day in Brighton.

He was standing next to Lennie on the seafront while Lennie stared at George's phone. Lennie's red baseball cap cast a shadow over his face as he prodded and jabbed at the screen. He made noises, little grunts and sighs – *Oh! Ah! Got it!*

They weren't due back at work until five, which meant that Lennie had two hours to go on the rides at the fun fair. His favourite was the Waltzer. He'd spend all day on it if he could, twisting and turning at breakneck speed. George had to keep an eye on him in case he got too excited. Lennie

was 22 years old and nearly two metres tall, but he acted like a big kid.

"Give me my phone back now," George said. "Keep out of trouble. Don't stare at anyone."

"I won't," Lennie said.

As Lennie walked away, George kept his eye on the red baseball cap. There were hundreds of other people around, but George could see Lennie no matter where he went. That's why George liked the fun fair. He could relax. He bought a can of Fanta and sat down on a wall to check out a few sites selling rare vinyl on his phone.

A sudden loud shout made George turn his head to see where it had come from. The Dodgems. There was another squeal and George spotted Lennie. He was standing far too close to a girl with long blonde hair.

"He keeps touching my dress!" the girl shouted. Her face was blotchy and twisted with distress.

"I like the colour ..." Lennie said. "I just wanted to feel it."

The girl had on a silky red dress with a pattern of white birds. Lennie had grabbed the skirt and

he was holding the bunched up fabric in his hand. As the girl backed away from him, the dress was pulled between them.

Lennie's eyes darted from the girl and back to George, but still he held onto the dress. George could see that the thin fabric was about to tear. He could see, too, the fear in Lennie's eyes. He put his hand over Lennie's and pulled at his fingers, but they were tight like a knot.

"Let it go, Lennie," George said. "Come on, mate. We need to get out of here."

George saw three guys run over from the other side of the fun fair. He knew who they were. They came in the pub where George and Lennie worked all the time and one of them had a nasty habit of punching people he didn't like.

At last George felt Lennie's fingers uncurl and let go of the girl's dress. George shoved him along and they ran out of the fair, raced along the seafront and turned off into a side street.

"Hurry up," George shouted.

But Lennie was too slow to keep up and he was well behind. George stopped and waited, all

the time looking back down the road to see who was coming. Then he saw the other guys turn the corner. Their faces were red and angry and there were four of them now.

"This way," George said. He grabbed Lennie's arm and dragged him down an alley. There was a skip by a back gate, full of wood and bricks and old tiles.

George's breath was ragged and his heart was thumping. "Get in the skip," he panted.

Lennie moved some big bits of wood and climbed in. George pulled a sheet of wood over the top of him and made sure he was covered up. Then George scrambled in too and hid under an old kitchen cupboard.

From their hiding place inside the skip, George could hear footsteps and voices. He stretched his hand out and touched Lennie's arm so that Lennie knew to be quiet. When George was there Lennie did what he was told. George closed his mouth tight against the taste of cement dust.

The footsteps came closer and George heard voices clearly now.

I'll kill that moron!

He's a big bloke. More like he'd kill you.

There're four of us. We can break his legs.

We can give him a proper kicking.

Where are they?

They must have run back to the beach. We'll get them there.

And then George heard their footsteps moving away.

After a while Lennie whispered, "Have they gone?"

Yes, they had gone, but George didn't answer. The rubbish in the skip pressed down on him, the dust made him feel as if he couldn't breathe. How many times had Lennie got him into a mess like this?

They'd been in Brighton for six weeks without any trouble. He'd thought they might stay there.

Now they would have to move on and find somewhere new to live.