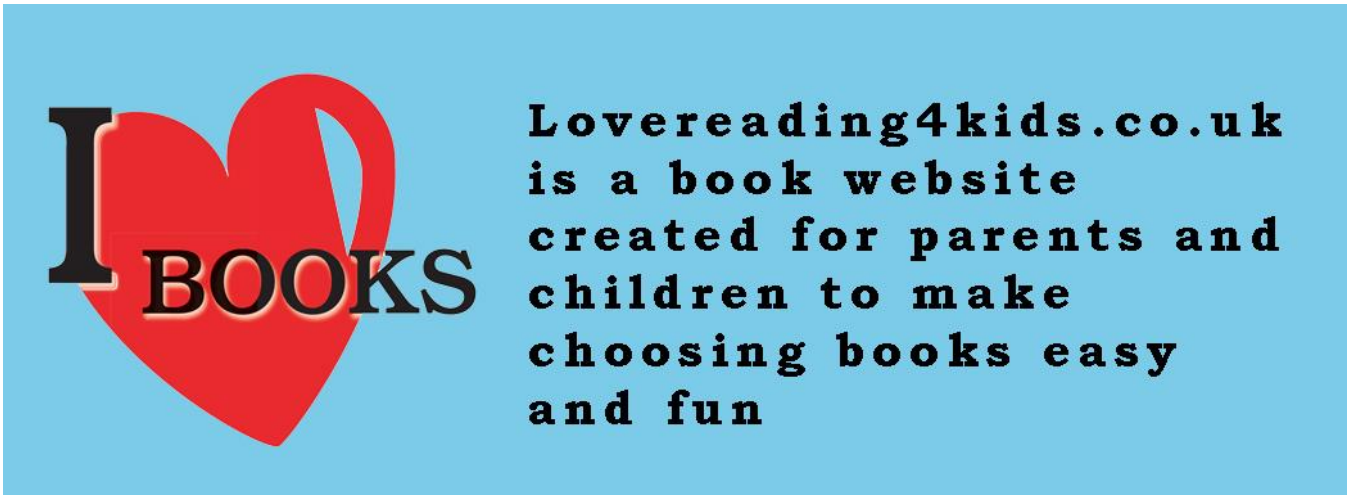


Opening extract from

Knife Edge

Written by

Robert Swindells

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KNIFE EDGE

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Barrington Stoke

For all who go unarmed

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Chapter 1
Self-defence

Hey. Sam's my name and I'm 14. I go to Orwell School in Gretley. It's not bad, but there's a gang called the Sharks. There are ten guys in the Sharks, all well hard. Cecil True is their leader. Kids laugh if you've got a name like Cecil, but no one laughs at Cecil True. If they did, they'd never laugh again. At anything.

We went to the same primary school when we were little, Cecil and me. *I* didn't know Cecil was going to be a gang leader, did I? I laughed at his name. Every day. "Want to wrestle, Cecil?" I'd say. I called him "Cess the Mess" as well. Hard to believe now.

But Cecil hasn't forgotten. He doesn't say anything, but I know he remembers by the way he looks at me. He hasn't got time to get me for it just now. He's too busy. He's got his gang stuff to do. But one day, when he has a spare minute, Cecil's going to get even. And I don't fancy that at all.

The Sharks carry knives. They don't go round stabbing people all the time. I'm not saying that. But everyone knows they carry knives, so everyone's scared of them.

I always walk home with my best mate, Tim. We both live in Prince Street. We don't hang about. We walk quickly, watching out for the Sharks. There's a little park on our way home. It's called Sparrow Park and it'd be nice to hang out in there, but we can't. We don't dare. Cecil says Sparrow Park is Shark territory. If the gang catches some kid in there, they beat him up and take his phone. If he's got one, they pinch his watch and nick his cash as well. The Sharks aren't in Sparrow Park all the time, but it's not worth the risk.

One day, Tim and I are passing Sparrow Park and Tim says, “I’ve got a knife.”

“Huh?” I stare at him.

“A knife,” he says. “Look.”

He lifts up his sweatshirt. There’s a great big knife stuck down the front of his trousers. He pulls it out so I can see the blade. It’s long and wide and curvy. One edge has a row of pointy little teeth, a bit like a saw.

“Wow!” I gasp. “Where’d you get it?”

“Sports shop.” He grins. “It’s a fisherman’s knife.”

“I thought you had to be 18 to buy a knife,” I say.

He nods. “You do. My cousin got it for me. He’s 19.”

“Let’s have a proper look,” I say.

He hands me the knife. It’s heavy and the blade glints in the sun. “Gonna start fishing then?” I say.

Tim grins again. "Sort of," he says. "Fishing for Sharks."

My mouth drops open. "You're not gonna go after Cecil and them?" I say.

He shakes his head. "Not go *after*. But I'll get it out if they hassle me." He smiles. "Self-defence."

I think about it later, at home. Self-defence. No one can blame you for defending yourself, can they? And if you've ever laughed at a guy like Cecil True, you'll *have* to defend yourself sooner or later. I think I need to get a knife of my own.

I shut myself in my room, go on the internet. I google the word *knives*. There are like, a *billion* sites! I look at the first ten. They sell every sort of knife. Even swords from Japan – Samurai swords. One snag – *none* of them will sell to me. You've got to be 18 to buy from them. I swear and turn my laptop off.

I don't have a cousin. Well I *do*, but she's only seven. No use sending *her* to the sports

shop to buy a knife for me. Have to think of some other way to get one.

I could pinch one of Mum's. A kitchen knife. She's got six, all different sizes. Trouble is, they hang in a row by the cooker. She'd notice in two seconds if one went missing.

I don't know what to do. As it happens, it'll be sorted soon by pure luck, but I don't know that yet. I lie awake half the night, trying to work something out.