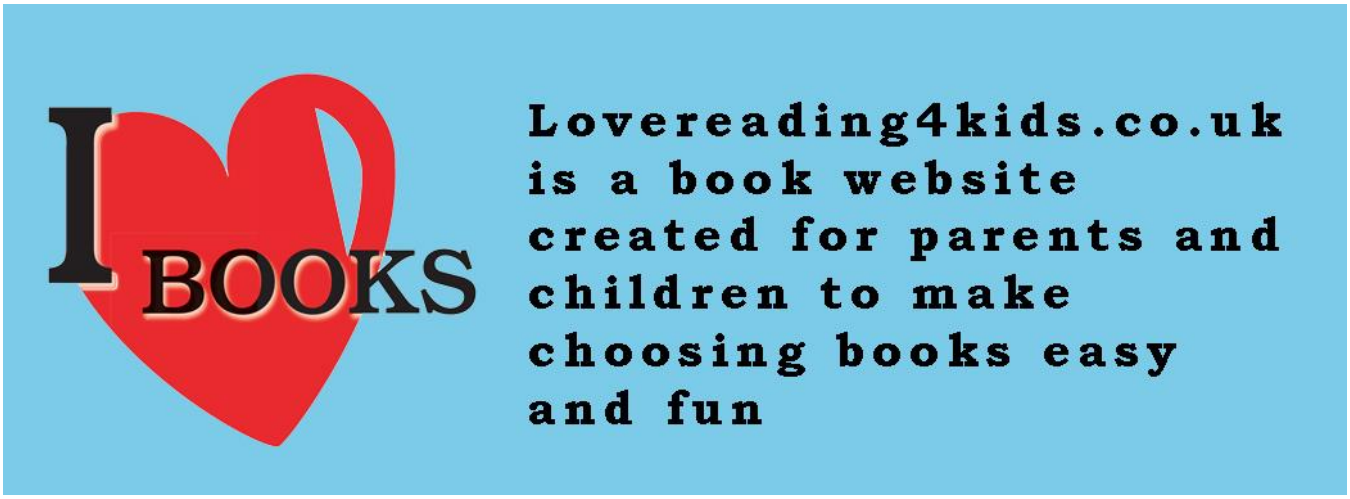


Opening extract from

The Hate u Give

Written by

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Lovereading4kids.co.uk

For Grandma, who showed me there can be light in the darkness.

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PART 1

WHEN IT HAPPENS

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. Either 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'd known following her to this party meant she'd be on some *Extreme Makeover: Starr Edition* mess, I would've stayed home and watched *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 go 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 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 an idiot?" 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 streetlight. 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'd grown 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 has played 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 silly 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.