UNSTOPPABLE

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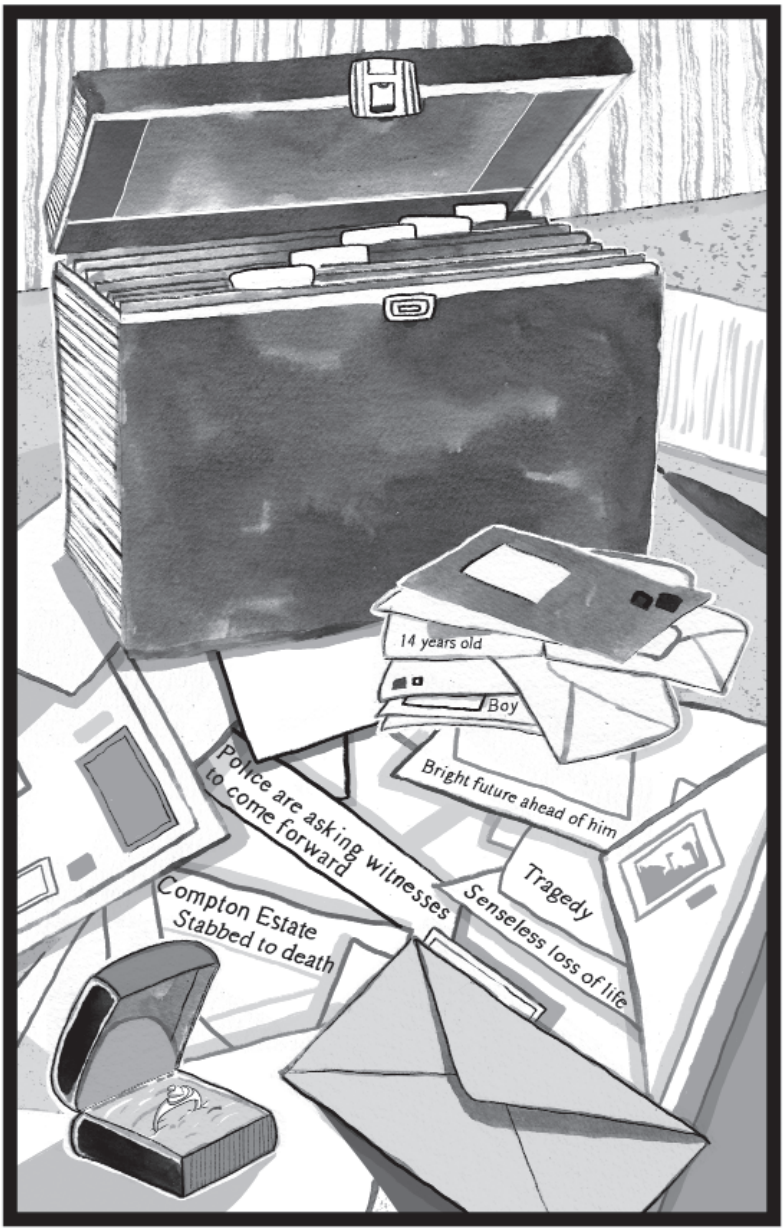
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This book is dedicated to:
My dad, Brian Freedman
My teacher, Dave Baldwin
My friend, Ugo Ehiogu


14 years old
Boy
Police are asking witnesses to come forward
Bright future ahead of him
Tragedy
Senseless loss of life
Compton Estate
Stabbed to death

14 YEARS AGO

Two newborn babies are lying, side by side, in a cot.
They are twins, but they are different.
A girl and a boy.
The girl was born first, late into the night.
The boy followed soon after.
The girl has light skin and is punching out her arms.
The boy has darker skin. He is quiet and calm.
They clasp one another's hands.
They are one.


Compton Estate
High Street
Chicken Shop
COMPTON AREA


Compton Academy
Park Avenue Estate
Barber
Park

INSPIRED BY TRUE EVENTS

PART 1
FIRST CUT

PRESENT DAY

SUNDAY

Roxy Campbell looked at her watch. The hairdresser would be arriving any minute, but there was still time.

She stared out of the window. From her brother Kaine's room she could look out across the whole of the Compton Estate and down the five floors to the tarmac sports court where he was playing football.

She could see that, as usual, he was showing off. He had just kicked the ball between his opponent's legs and was now taunting that same opponent for not having been able to stop him. Why did he have to be such an idiot? He brought trouble upon himself.

Navigating her way through the strewn mess of

trousers, shorts and socks on the floor, she picked up his right football boot and, using her mum's sharpest scissors, started to make two small incisions on either side of the tongue. They wouldn't be seen, but they would do the damage that she required.

Guilt stabbed her from the inside. But she carried on, picking up the left boot to replicate the damage.

The doorbell went, and Roxy heard her mum answer it and welcome Simone inside. She carefully placed Kaine's boots back where she had found them and left the room.

Kaine had already taken the ball past Rufus Blackstock once, but he went back and did it again, just to show how easy it was.

'You think you can make me look stupid?' Rufus said, pushing Kaine hard in the chest. 'Try it one more time and I'll break your legs.'

'Who do you think you're pushing?' Kaine responded, shoving his rival back with such force that he nearly fell over.

'Leave it, Kaine!' said Alonso Jackson, trying to pull Kaine away.

'He started it!' said Kaine, spitting on the ground and pulling AJ's arm off him as they walked back into their own half. He was still muttering to himself as the game quickly kicked off again.

Kaine immediately called for the ball and watched as the goalkeeper bowled a high throw straight out to him. Sensing Rufus rampaging towards him from behind, Kaine both controlled the ball and turned in one touch before lashing a strike towards the goal with such ferocity that the goalkeeper couldn't get out of the way quick enough.

'How d'you like me now?' Kaine shouted, going right up to Rufus's face to celebrate. 'You're just upset cos you're even uglier than your mum!'

‘What did you say about my mum?’

‘You heard me!’

‘I’m gonna kill you,’ said Rufus. ‘You’re dead. I promise you. You’re dead.’

He drew his finger across his neck in a throat-slitting gesture, but Kaine just laughed. He knew if someone said something like that about his own mum, he would go ballistic at them too. He decided to carry on and wind Rufus up a bit more.

‘Yeah, mate, I’m really scared,’ Kaine said. ‘Your mum’s more scary than you are. Especially when she tries to kiss me!’

'There,' said Simone, using her own small mirror to show Roxy what her hair looked like from behind. 'What do you think?'

They were sitting on the bed in Roxy's small, but well ordered, room. Roxy nodded at Simone and took hold of the mirror herself to make a closer inspection from different angles. Finally, she smiled.

'It's perfect,' she said, getting up and marching into the living room. 'Mum, Dad, look! What do you think?'

'You look beautiful,' said Samantha Campbell, giving Roxy a kiss. 'I'm just sorry it took so long to give you your present . . . it's just, well, you know . . . Anyway,' she said, looking at Roxy's dad, 'with any luck things will get a bit easier soon.'

It had been three weeks since the twins had turned fourteen, but with only their mum's income to support the whole family, their presents had been delayed. The front door burst open and in walked Kaine and AJ. Roxy immediately felt her body tense up.

'Ha!' said Kaine, seeing everyone gathered by the mirror in the living room. 'Trying to get people to look at your hair so they don't concentrate on the rest of you, Roxy?'

Roxy looked at Kaine. No matter how many times

he was cruel to her, it always hurt. And when it was in front of AJ, it cut like a dagger.

'Go away, Kaine!' she said. 'You can talk! When are you going to get *your* hair cut? You don't look cool, you know!'

'Yeah,' he said, elbowing AJ in the ribs. 'Like she knows anything about cool! Anyway, Mum, when am I going to get my trainers? How come she's got her birthday present, but I haven't got mine?'

'We told you, soon, Kaine!' Daryll Campbell said.

'I'm asking Mum, not you!' said Kaine. 'We all know she's the one paying for it.'

Roxy could see the vein in the side of her dad's neck starting to bulge. She knew it was only the presence of Simone in the room that was stopping things from getting ugly between him and Kaine.

But Kaine was already going, stomping across the hallway to his room. 'Come on, AJ,' he called. 'FIFA. Now. I'm gonna smash you up, boy.'

'Well, I think you look great,' AJ quietly said to Roxy, giving her his cheeky smile before dashing after Kaine.

Roxy could feel herself blushing but did her best to quell it. Especially in front of her dad.

Later that evening, Roxy stared into the bathroom mirror at her own reflection. She wondered what the girls at school would make of her new look on Monday morning.

She missed Jasmine. They had been so close from Year 7 onwards but, since Tochi had come on the scene, they had drifted apart, and the last few times Jasmine had asked her to come to the chicken shop or to have pizza, Roxy had said she couldn't – there was no way her dad would let her eat junk food.

Now Jasmine and most of the other girls had boyfriends, and when they did hang out together as just the girls, they'd stopped inviting Roxy. It made Roxy jealous to see them all together in school, and the fact that they all had boyfriends somehow made them feel older than her, even though they were all in the same year. The only way she knew what was happening in their lives was by following their accounts and looking at their photos.

She consoled herself with the fact that AJ had said that she looked good. But what did he really mean? Was he trying to give her some kind of message?

'What are you doing in there, Roxy?' said her mum, banging impatiently on the bathroom door. 'You know

your dad needs to shave his head before tomorrow. There won't be time in the morning.'

Roxy unlocked the door and her dad pushed his big frame straight past her. Sometimes, when she wasn't on the tennis court, she felt as though he barely noticed her. She could see the nervousness in his eyes and sense the tension that was already in his body. Everyone in the family knew that if he didn't get that job the next day, their lives would get even harder.

As he arrived home and put the previous night's dinner into the microwave, Noel Kerrigan, Deputy Principal at Compton Academy, found himself still thinking about Kaine Campbell.

He'd been doing some marking at school, and on his way home had stopped by the Compton Estate to see what was happening. The boys had been playing football and he'd stayed to watch for a few minutes. It wasn't Kaine's goal that he couldn't get out of his mind. And it wasn't the fact that the game had nearly descended into a brawl that he was thinking about right now either – though he would need to mention it to Mrs Buckland.

It was that one touch: Kaine's exquisite, arrogant piece of skill from the keeper's long throw. With each passing day, he was becoming more and more convinced that Kaine Campbell – his Year 9 pupil at Compton Academy – was a natural-born footballer.

He took a swig of his beer and checked the time. It was late, nearly 11 p.m., but he picked up his phone and made the call anyway. It rang out, so he left a message.

'Brian? Noel Kerrigan here, mate. Listen, are you still scouting for Southampton? There's a kid, Brian. He's fourteen. We've got a school match on Wednesday. I think you should come and have a look at him.'