# THE SOUND OF EVERYTHING

Rebecca Henry



*Published in the UK by Everything with Words Limited*
*Fifth Floor, 30–31 Furnival Street, London, EC4A 1JQ*

www.everythingwithwords.com

Text copyright © Rebecca Henry 2021
Cover design and illustration by
Holly Ovenden © Everything with Words

Rebecca Henry has asserted her right under the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the author of this work.

A catalogue record of this book is available
from the British Library.

ISBN 978–1–911427–15–5

This novel is entirely a work of fiction.
The names, characters, events are the work of the author's imagination.
Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead
is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

*Printed and bound in Great Britain by*
*CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CRO 4YY*

I live by the rules to protect myself – and everyone else.

It's simple:

1. Don't count on anyone.
2. Act. Always act.
3. Be prepared to lose everything.

Kadie

I'm nobody! Who are you?
Are you nobody too?
Then there's a pair of us! – don't tell!
They'd banish us, you know!

How dreary to be somebody!
How public, like a frog
To tell your name the livelong day
To an admiring Bog!

Emily Dickinson

# ONE

I can tell from the get-go when I'm not wanted. When you're just another foster kid, sometimes it seems like eventually everyone stops caring – except to get chatty patty about you before you've even walked in the door.

I'm one of those girls. People know about me before they meet me.

I'd like to think that Mr Tucker sat me at the front of his history class to make sure I'm doing okay. It's probably more like he was given a folder labelled *Kadie Hunte* which advised him to sit me under his nose where he could keep one eye trained on me.

At the moment I'm actually supposed to be a Lucas, but I've always kept my real name. I rock back in my chair and test it in my head. *Kadie Lucas*. It has a good ring. I could fit in. I've got standings. Aside from the whole rapper/singer thing, my fashion sense is on point and I live in the same house as Miss Popularity.

'Kadie!' An explosion on the desk in front of me jolts me back into perspective. I start, dropping my chair back into place, and ball my hands into tight fists. Mr Tucker has a

thing with whacking wooden board rubbers on the desks to get people's attention. I'm pretty sure I felt some reverb in my bones.

'Remind me when the Suffragette movement was.' He taps the board rubber insistently on the desk. I've only been at this school three weeks but I know he won't stop until I've given him my attention.

I grit my teeth. 'Stop banging that stupid piece of wood!'

Mr Tucker's eyebrows shoot up. He stops banging the board rubber. 'Lose the earphones and pay attention. Next time I see them you're staying after school – and that's me being ridiculously lenient. Open your ears and listen to me.'

I manage to resist the urge to roll my eyes. Listening is effort, and for the most part, I don't do effort.

'Look at me when I'm talking to you!' Mr Tucker leans closer. 'Do I need to repeat myself?'

I reluctantly pull the ear bud out of my left ear. Background noise leaks into my brain, squeezing my thoughts into the corners of my head. Feet shuffling; a whirring somewhere; the road outside the open window. I can push the noise out if I want, but it's less effort to slouch here and listen to the bits of the world that nobody else seems to hear. Instead, my free hand spins my pen around my thumb repeatedly without stopping. It's the only adept thing I can do with my fingers.

'So. The Suffragette movement?' Mr Tucker prompts. His voice still dominates the battlefield of noises, but it could easily get lost like a generic face in a crowd.

I shrug. 'Beats me.'

'Think about it.'

'I'm thinking hard.'

'Think harder.'

I suck my teeth. 'Aren't there twenty other kids you can ask?' I twist around in my seat. 'Does anyone else know when the Suffragette movement was?'

There's a shifting of bodies, a few snickers, and some murmurs. I catch a glimpse of Shadavia – the totally snazzy, straight-A-grades, head of the school council, Miss Popularity. I'm kinda honoured to be her foster sister. I mean, if it weren't for her I'd already have dropped to the negatives on the social scale. She's right there acting like some goody-two-shoes but she's trying to keep a straight face. A row forward from her, her mate Eisha is hiding a smirk behind the ends of her cane rows.

I smile sweetly at Mr Tucker. 'Let's take that as a yes. You can carry on now. Ask someone else.'

He's red in the face. 'Excuse me? Who's the teacher here?'

I curl my lip at him. 'You are. So teach.'

His eye twitches. 'Go and stand outside. You're obviously not mature enough to be in here.'

'Let's not talk about maturity,' I sigh, rolling my eyes – but really I'm proper glad for a reason to get out. Usually I'd just leave when I feel like it, go for a walk (this has been a major cause for trouble in my behaviour history), but the way the

desks are oriented, I can't get out without shoving past four other people.

I grab my bag and drop my pen in it. I never take out my whole pencil case, because I know I'll just spill everything everywhere.

Mr Tucker folds his arms. 'Kadie, if you walk out that's an automatic hour detention.'

'So? It's nearly the end of the lesson anyway and I've read this chapter of the text book.'

'I find that hard to believe.'

'Believe it. I'll quote you if you don't give me detention.' I shove my way out of the aisle, tripping over chair legs as I go. Smooth.

'An hour detention or fifteen minutes of lesson?' he asks, almost nicely.

I wish. But my hand's already on the door. 'How about a complete recital of chapter five instead of the detention?'

'It doesn't work that way.'

'Obviously.' I slam the door behind me.

The corridor is blissfully peaceful compared to the classroom. I slump against the wall for a second and close my eyes. There's never a moment's rest for my brain. If it's not the endless pushing of background noise, or the crushing presence of other people, I'm smoking off all the anxiety or bingeing on Red Bull. Thankfully, there's just enough time left of last period for me to have a zoot before I go home and pretend I don't smoke at all.

At the other end of the hall, a boy bursts through the double doors. As usual, he's an absolute mess. His trousers are almost below his bum – don't know how he gets away with that – but get this: he has a belt. This means he's bussing them low like that for pure style – which is just sad, and only gets sadder when you add in his weird walk that's like a cross between a lumbering child and a roadman swagger. He does have nice lips – hence his nickname, Lips, by which people refer to him more often than his real name – but I can't even take his lips seriously because they seem to be stuck in this annoying half-smile which he wears all the time.

I glare. 'What?'

The half-smile drops right off his face. He shoots back, 'What are you looking at?'

'Your face.'

'You are as cocky as they say.' Lips circles round me, inspecting, his half-smile now quirking the opposite way. 'Are you a sket, like they say?' His eyes pause at my chest and my cheeks burn – I unbuttoned my shirt at the beginning of last period and I unbuttoned it kind of wide. Not because I'm a sket. There are moments when I just need a little space from seams and buttons. I didn't think much of it at the time.

'Believe what you want.' I shrug. 'I did beat up a girl at my last school, like they say.'

He snorts. 'So you're a *vindictive* sket. Rah. Bet you feel really good about yourself.'

'You're a klutz,' I retort. 'You need to decide whether you want to walk like a roadman or a toddler.'

'Ooh. An *unkind*, vindictive sket. I'm really scared.'

I stomp past, giving him a deliberate barge.

'Bet you didn't really beat on anyone!' he calls after me. 'Not with hair that neat!'

I smile and slide my hand into the zipped pocket of my jacket, where Emerson sits, cold and heavy. I'd get kicked out even if they just found him, let alone if I backed the blade in public. But he makes me feel strong. Invincible.

*

They're leaving without me. I can see them through the crowds which I'm trying to navigate without touching anyone. None of them look behind. Nobody stops to wait for me.

I catch them up somehow just outside the school gate, where the throng of blue blazers is spilling out along the path and crossing the road in waves. Shadavia and the girls are just beyond the bus stop – it's easy to spot them since Kelly's dark red hair sticks out and I know that she'll be directly next to Shadavia. Sure enough, Shadavia's at the front with Kelly, Raquel and Eisha bringing up the rear, and they're clearly not missing me.

It's Raquel who turns first, in time to see some younger girl kicking off because I accidently bumped into her really hard on my way past. I ignore her. My mind's going at a hundred

miles per hour – a Red Bull and zoot can do that to you – and I crash into the two of them a bit faster than I meant to. 'You lot tryna leave without me?'

Raquel acts dumb. 'What? Nah!'

'Yes! You think I'm blind?'

Eisha makes a face. 'Shadavia said you texted to say you'd catch us up.'

'Riiight.' I pop a stick of bubblegum in my mouth and offer some to the girls. Eisha happily takes. Raquel does too, but she's watching me like I'm up to something. I'm not.

Up front, Kelly and Shadavia are chatting about Kelly's sweet sixteen party at the weekend. It takes me about twelve taps on Shadavia's shoulder before she turns around. 'What?'

'You want gum?'

Her face softens. 'Yeah, sure.' She takes some and so does Kelly, but Kelly does so almost like it's an obligation. Why would she bother taking any if she's going to look so sullen about it? She gets that look whenever she's within three feet of me, like I smell or something. I noticed that right from the start, and I also clocked that behind that sprinkling of freckles and set of angelic eyes, she can pull a seriously sarcastic lip-curl sort of expression. She might be slightly petite, but her presence certainly isn't.

As soon as we're out of the crowds I start singing. Can't help it. I'm on a high – my energy's soaring like I've regained what I lost during the lesson. Kelly is playing music out loud from her phone and I roll with the vibe. I know all the latest

tracks and the lyrics just spill out of me. Knowing lyrics isn't nothing new, especially not to me – there are always those artists that everyone's listening to – but I'm on a different level and it's a wonder anyone sings along with me. Don't know how I do it – somehow, after a little while Eisha is joining in, and then Raquel, until next thing I know Shadavia's like, 'Spit sixteen bars!'

So I do.

Then I take a break to breathe and Kelly stops the music.

Everyone looks at her.

'What are you doing?' I pretend to flick her.

'Way to kill a good vibe,' complains Raquel.

Kelly shrugs. 'My battery's low.'

That's a lie. She was charging it in fourth period.

'Spoilsport alert!' I call out.

Kelly snorts. 'Calm yourself. You're high.'

She's right about that. I'm feeling a vibe that's hardly really there. There's this underlying tension that's got me wondering how many months – maybe even weeks – these girls will be my friends for. And I really don't want to feel it but it's still poking a hole in my bubble, cos I can see the way Kelly's clocking me and that's when I really know for sure – the same way I can tell when I'm really not wanted – that she and I are going to have a whole heap of trouble.