



THE FANDOM RISING ANNA DAY

Chicken
House

2 Palmer Street, Frome, Somerset BA11 1DS
www.chickenhousebooks.com

Text © Anna Day 2019
From an original idea by Angela McCann
© The Big Idea Competition Limited

First published in Great Britain in 2019
Chicken House
2 Palmer Street
Frome, Somerset BA11 1DS
United Kingdom
www.chickenhousebooks.com

Anna Day has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and
Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the author of this work.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted or utilized in
any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or
otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, organizations, places,
events and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or
used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons,
living or dead, events or locales is purely coincidental.

Cover design and interior design by Helen Crawford-White
Barbed wire image © Karina Vegas/Arcangel
Typeset by Dorchester Typesetting Group Ltd
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

The paper used in this Chicken House book is made
from wood grown in sustainable forests.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data available.

ISBN 978-1-911490-08-1
eISBN 978-1-911490-76-0

For Mum and Dad



PROLOGUE



In less than a week, my brother will die. I've said these words to myself over and over, yet somehow they don't seem real. Because while Nate lies in that hospital bed, laced up with tubes, chest rising and falling, there's still hope I can save him. Even if it means doing the thing I fear the most: returning to that God-awful place.



V I O L E T

Alice looks at the list on my desk. ‘I can’t believe you wrote a list, it’s ages until uni. You’re such a planner.’

I swipe the sheet of paper from beneath her nose, annoyed at myself for leaving it in plain sight, especially with the words ‘Jumbo tampons’ scrawled at the bottom. ‘Lists stop me worrying so much, you know that.’ I’m starting university in September and I’m bricking it. This is the twenty-fifth list I’ve made, and it’s only July.

‘What’s there to worry about?’ Alice says. ‘We’ll know each other and we’re totally going to hit freshers’ week.’ Her mouth slides into a half-smile. ‘Especially armed with those jumbo tampons.’

But I can tell she’s bricking it too. The skin around her eyes tightens and she fiddles with her hair.

Katie lounges on my bed, clutching her iPad and scrolling through *NME*. ‘I hope it’s more than jumbo tampons you’ll be introducing to your vagina this year, Violet.’

‘Will you stop with all this virgin crap,’ I say. ‘It’s like being back at school.’ I tug the curtains shut, hiding the remnants of dusk, hoping my friends will take the hint and leave so I can go to bed. Since the weird dreams stopped – the ones featuring the strange old woman with apple-green eyes – I’ve been binge

sleeping. It's been so good, not feeling tired all the time.

Katie laughs, the freckles on her nose widening with her smile. 'I'm only teasing. I know you're saving yourself.'

'*Some day my prince will come,*' Alice sings in a high-pitched Snow White warble.

'I don't want a prince,' I say. 'I want the exact opposite, an anti-prince, someone real and honest . . .' I tail off before those familiar images worm their way into my brain again, images which confuse the hell out of me, stirring up my insides with a muddle of excitement, fear and longing. Images of feathers bursting into the air, eyes the colour of winter, black hair against translucent skin.

Alice spins in my swivel chair, clearly bored now *Queer Eye* has finished. 'Well, freshers' fair will be awash with teenage boys lacking in personal hygiene and social graces. You'll find your anti-prince there.' Her phone pings. She pulls it from her pocket and starts tapping and swiping, her nails clacking against the screen.

'Do you think it will be weird?' Katie asks. 'What with us being a year older than everyone else.'

'Nah.' I perch on the foot of my bed. 'There'll be loads of students who took gap years.'

'Can we call it a gap year?' Katie asks.

'We can call it what we want,' I reply.

'Fred,' she says. 'Can we call it Fred?'

I laugh. 'You're bonkers. No wonder you're in therapy.' It jumps out of my mouth before my brain can stop it. But fortunately, Katie doesn't take offence. I would hate her to think I'm mocking her for seeing a therapist. She has nightmares and flashbacks, that's all she's told us. Though we all know why, we just try not

to talk about the super-sized elephant slumbering in the corner.

All three of us sat our A levels late, somehow passed, and took a year out. Alice and I were approached by a publisher right after we woke from our comas – the combination of her fan-fiction popularity and the media attention surrounding the incident at Comic-Con, I suppose. We co-wrote and published *The Gallows Song*, sequel to *The Gallows Dance*, in record time. It gave us the excuse we needed to hide in our rooms and dream about Nate, alive and well.

I glance at our novel's jacket, framed and hanging on the wall behind a frowning Alice so that it looks like a rectangular thought bubble sprouting from her head. The book's cover always reminds me of Nate, or more precisely, the *loss* of Nate. Not that he's dead. But it sometimes feels like he's in some halfway house, stopped at the motorway services between destinations. Life . . . over-priced refreshment break . . . death. And it reminds me how stupid I was, actually believing that creating a character in his likeness would somehow breathe life into his waxy, half-dead body. So every time I look at that jacket, I get a double whammy. Nate's loss. My stupidity. I only leave it up because it was a gift from my parents.

'Do you think people will know who we are?' I ask Katie.

'Of course they will,' she says. 'You both wrote a bestseller, and Anime Alice here has shagged Russell Jones.'

'I bloody wish,' Alice mutters, still scowling at her phone.

Katie laughs, sweeping her red hair over a shoulder. She's grown her bob out and it really suits her. 'We know that. But the rest of the world doesn't.'

Alice looks up, fixing us with her inky-blue eyes. ‘I stood next to him at Comic-Con. Once. Unless he has a super-stealthy, bendy knob, I can’t quite see how that would work.’ She returns to her screen.

‘Now there’s a headline,’ I say. *‘His knob was so stealthy, it didn’t even rustle.’*

‘Ha!’ Katie says. ‘Good one. You’re going to walk this creative writing degree, both of you. I don’t know why you’re bothering, you’ve already written a best-seller.’

‘To feel normal, I guess,’ I say.

We fall quiet. My words nudge a little too close to the strangeness we went through last year.

Alice sighs, shoving her phone in her back pocket. She looks like she’d quite happily punch someone.

‘What was that about?’ I ask her.

She forces a smile. ‘Nothing.’

I immediately know it’s a bad review. She always tries to hide them from me, ever since I burst into tears at our first one-star rating. But I’ve grown immune to them now. ‘It’s OK, I can cope.’

‘It kind of sucks,’ Alice says. ‘I mean, they tagged me in it, who even does that?’

I hold out my hand, determined to show how strong I am now.

She stands her ground. ‘Seriously, Violet, I don’t think you should read this one. It’s kind of . . . personal.’

I keep my hand where it is, hovering before her, demonstrating my grit.

She sighs, reluctance weighing down her movements as she unlocks her phone and finds the page for me.

My eyes scan the screen. ‘Daily Dystopian,’ I mutter. ‘They reviewed *The Gallows Song* when it was first

released.’ They’re one of these big fan-based websites. They have followers in the six figures, and their shining review really helped our sequel fly.

Alice shrugs. ‘I told you it sucked. They’ve changed us from five stars to one star.’

‘Can they do that?’ Katie asks, standing beside me so she can read the screen.

‘They can do what they want,’ Alice replies.

I scan the lines; the grit I so clearly felt rapidly dissolves, turning my insides to slush.

As you know, we adored Sally King’s novel, *The Gallows Dance*, a book in which genetically-enhanced man (the Gems) subjugate non-genetically-enhanced people like you and me (the Imperfects, or the Imps.) We reviewed the sequel, *The Gallows Song* by Alice Childs and Violet Miller, when it was first released and, if you remember, we gave it a big thumbs up. Well, we’ve since had a reshuffle here at the Daily Dystopia and wanted to update our review. Sadly, it isn’t good, folks. *The Gallows Song* is completely off-key and out of tune.

‘Oh, you leave music out of this, you two-faced nipple-ache,’ Katie says, reading over my shoulder.

Following the tragic death of Rose, Willow joins forces with some of the other characters from Sally King’s much adored novel: Ash, Baba and, of course, Thorn. Well, the tensions within this group run high, resulting in what can only be compared to chain-watching Jeremy Kyle episodes. But somehow, they manage to lead a revolution and overthrow the dastardly Gem President, imprisoning him somewhere hi-tech and Gem-like. The government is reformed with new players, such as

Willow's dad, and each major city is given an alliance to oversee Imp emancipation. The London alliance is formed by Ash, Willow, Baba and Thorn, which I can only assume paves the way for more Jeremy Kyle magic.

The only breath of fresh air is a new character, Nate. A young Imp with exceptional wit and intelligence, who becomes part of the London alliance. His lack of family is a bit of a well-worn trope, but we loved his fresh take on everything. Sadly, even Nate couldn't save this sequel. And frankly, Miller's attempt to milk her brother's long-term condition left a bad taste in our mouths.

A hurt little noise catches in the back of my throat. Katie squeezes my shoulder, obviously reaching the same bit.

The book ends on a strange open note, a failed attempt at developing a utopia. The sole concrete change is the removal of the Gallows Dance, which was probably the most entertaining part of King's original novel.

In summary, Childs and Miller got rid of all the good bits of dystopia. They essentially took the diss out of dystopia, and left us with soggy nothing. I bet Sally King is turning in her grave right now.

I feel sick, really sick. Alice and I put everything into *The Gallows Song*, we built ourselves back up from our comas word by word. This review feels like I'm standing naked in a huge room and everyone is pointing and laughing. And what they said about Nate, about milking his accident, it makes this black anger rise inside me. 'How could they say that about Nate?' I manage to say,

tears brimming in my eyes.

Alice takes the phone from my hand and hugs me. ‘Oh balls, I knew this would upset you. Ignore them, Vi. They’re just trying to generate conversation, up their views, it’ll be someone else they’re bashing tomorrow.’

Katie hands me a tissue, and I feel a flush of embarrassment that I’m crying over a crappy review *again*. But Alice was right, this one felt personal.

‘It’s OK to feel upset,’ Katie says. ‘Sit with the emotion, go through it, not round it.’

This makes me smile, I love how she comes out with her therapist’s lines sometimes. It’s like I’m getting second-hand counselling.

‘I better get home,’ Katie says, gathering up her things and shrugging on her cardigan. ‘I’ll see you after my cello lesson tomorrow though, yeah?’ She pulls me into a hug. ‘Review is another word for opinion, you remember that.’ An extra squeeze and she’s gone, leaving Alice and I alone with the hateful words hanging between us.

Alice’s phone pings again. I’d forgotten I was still holding it. I hand it back to her with sweaty, trembling hands.

‘Text from Timothy,’ she says.

Timothy’s our editor. Alice holds up the screen so I can read it too.

Meet me at my office tomorrow,
2 p.m. Very important. I will provide
biscuits. T x

I check my phone, even though I already know he hasn’t texted me too. I briefly wonder if he means for me to go as well, but Alice and I come as a pair, so if he’s trying to squeeze me out, he can sod right off. ‘Do you think he read the review?’

‘Maybe,’ she replies.

‘Does he really think biscuits will sway us? I swear sometimes he thinks we’re five-year-olds.’

She laughs. ‘Are you in or out?’ Her finger hovers over the screen, itching to tap out a reply.

I can’t help noticing that she didn’t say, *Are we in or out?* which makes me think she’s going regardless, so I say, ‘In.’

She flashes her beautiful smile. ‘It was the biscuits that did it, wasn’t it?’

‘Every time.’

Her nails frantically click out a sentence.

Agreed. But only if they’re bourbons.

A x

‘Shall I just meet you there?’ she asks. The publisher’s office is near the Natural History Museum, and she knows I like the excuse to drift around it, sipping on a latte and pretending I’m with Nate. It was his favourite outing when we were little. He’d stuff his sandy head full of random facts, hoarding them carefully away, only to spout them off at inopportune moments, like when Aunt Maud came for tea and learnt all about the mating rituals of Pigmy hippos. *Pigmy hippos*. Funny how the airy ceilings and cool walls of that museum fill me with warmth, yet my own book, *The Gallows Song*, leaves me hollow on the inside and cold all over. One day I’ll figure it out.

I nod. ‘Yeah, I’ll meet you outside. Don’t go up without me though, the receptionist hates me.’

‘Don’t sweat it, that bitch hates everyone.’ She blows me a kiss and says, ‘Sleep tight, and promise me you won’t read that poisonous gobshite again.’

I blow her one back. ‘I promise.’