

Passages

Real Detail

I'LL GIVE YOU THE SUN by Jandy Nelson (pp 1-3)

Noah's been caught and being bullied, wrestled to the ground by two surfers, Zephyr and Fry. He's 13, they're, as Noah describes them, "fifteen-foot-tall, tenth-grade asshats who toss living, breathing, thirteen-year-old people like me over cliffs for kicks." They're the cool surfers, chasing him. They steal his art pad of drawings.

Noah's an artist, and his sexual orientation is gay, but he's not out.

The story opens with this compelling description. *What makes these details real?*

This is how it all begins.

With Zephyr and Fry—reigning neighborhood sociopaths—torpedoing after me and the whole forest floor shaking under my feet as I blast through air, trees, this white-hot panic.

In this next passage, which details and technique stand out to make this real for you and to see Noah's artistic lens?

I try to break free of the lock Zephyr has me in so I can snatch the pad out of Fry's hands, but it only tightens Zephyr's hold. Zephyr, who's freaking Thor. One of his arms is choked around my neck, the other braced across my torso like a seat belt. He's bare-chested, straight off the beach, and the heat of him is seeping through my T-shirt. His coconut suntan lotion's filling my nose, my whole head—the strong smell of the ocean, too, like he's carrying it on his back...Zephyr dragging the tide along like a blanket behind him...That would be good, that would be *it* (PORTRAIT: *The Boy Who Walked Off with the Sea*)—but not now, Noah, so not the time to mind-paint this cretin. I snap back, taste the salt on my lips, remind myself I'm about to die—

Zephyr's long seaweedy hair is wet and dripping down my neck and shoulders. I notice we're breathing in synch, heavy, bulky breaths. I try to unsynch with him. I try to unsynch with the law of gravity and float up. Can't do either.

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Real Talk

THE HATE U GIVE (pp 17-19)

Starr and Khalil are from the Garden Heights neighborhood and have been friends for a long time but have grown apart. He gives her a ride home from a party after shots are fired. Starr, who's the daughter of an ex-convict who owns a corner store and no longer in gangs, goes to a private school outside the neighborhood. Khalil is rumored to be "busy": "When you grow up in Garden Heights, you know what 'busy' really means."

What makes this dialogue real?

Khalil drops the brush in the door and cranks up his stereo, blasting any 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 been really 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

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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 thin 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 the 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."