

1c1- Back to school

Starr has witness a white policeman killing her best friend during a police check up for mistaking a brush for gun. She goes back to her school which is located in a wealthy white environment.

Daddy pulls me into a hug. “You gon’ be a’ight?”

I nod into his chest. “Yeah.” I could stay like this all day—it’s one of the few places where **OneFifteen** doesn’t exist and where I can forget about talking to detectives—but Momma says we need to leave before rush hour.

It takes forty-five minutes to get to school on a good day, and an hour on a slow one. We get off the freeway into Riverton Hills and pass all these gated neighborhoods. Uncle Carlos lives in one of them. To me, it’s so weird to have a gate around a neighborhood. Seriously, are they trying to keep people out or keep people in? If somebody puts a gate around **Garden Heights**, it’ll be a little bit of both.

Our school is gated too, and the campus has new, modern buildings with lots of windows and marigolds blooming along the walkways.

Momma gets in the carpool lane for the lower school. “Sekani, you remembered your Ipad? Lunch card? Gym shorts? And you better have gotten the clean ones too.”

“Yes, Momma. I’m almost nine. Can’t you give me a little credit?”

She smiles. “All right, big man. Think you can give me some sugar?”

Sekani leans over the front seat and kisses her cheek.

“Love you.”

“Love you too. Okay. Call me if you don’t think you can make it the whole day at school.”

“Why are you making me come in the first place?”

“Cause you need to get out the house. Out that neighborhood. I want you to at least try, Starr. This will sound mean, but just because Khalil’s not living doesn’t mean you stop living. You understand, baby?” “Yeah.” I know she’s right, but it feels wrong. I get out the car.

For at least seven hours I don’t have to talk about OneFifteen. I don’t have to think about Khalil. I just have to be normal Starr at normal Williamson and have a normal day. That means flipping the switch in my brain so I’m Williamson Starr. Williamson Starr doesn’t use slang—if a rapper would say it, she doesn’t say it, even if her white friends do. Slang makes them cool. Slang makes her “hood.” Williamson Starr holds her tongue when people piss her off so nobody will think she’s the “angry black girl.” Williamson Starr is approachable. No stank-eyes, side-eyes, none of that. Williamson Starr is non confrontational. Basically, Williamson Starr doesn’t give anyone a reason to call her ghetto

I can’t stand myself for doing it, but I do it anyway. I sling my backpack over my shoulder. As usual it matches my J’s, the blue-and-black Elevens like Jordan wore in Space Jam. I worked at the store a month to buy them. I hate dressing like everybody else, but The Fresh Prince taught me something. See, Will always wore his school uniform jacket inside out so he could be different. I can’t wear my uniform inside out, but I can make sure my sneakers are always dope and my backpack always matches them. I go inside and scan the atrium for Maya, Hailey, or Chris. I don’t see them, but I see that half the kids have tans from spring break. Luckily I was born with one.

The Hate You Give, Angie Thomas, chapter 5; 2018

One fifteen is the name of the policeman who shot Starr's best Friend, Khalil.

Garden Heights is the area where Starr lives, a poor black neighbourhood.