



[Buy this book here.](#)

Copies are available from the library to loan.  
library@whitleybayhighschool.org

## Round 1

The bell rings and my paws are up. I'm on my toes, dancing under the lights, ball of foot to ball of foot, edging backwards, letting him come to me. I've seen him training – heck, I've even sparred with him a bit, so I know he's always on the front foot, no defence, so I figure I just have to let him come, absorb what blows I can and concentrate on the counterpunch. Here we are, in front of our witnesses, a long way from the gym, and the road and the shadow-boxing in front of the floor-length mirror. Under these lights, it's just Keir and me.

Neither of us thought it would come to this.

I wipe sweat off my forehead with both my gloves and bang them together, baring my teeth at my opponent. My mouthguard tastes stale and salty. It feels alien in my mouth.

He winks at me as he comes closer, moving with confidence.

It feels like an age ago that Shobu clasped my hands together, winked and told me I could do this. It's been less than ten minutes in reality, but all time has slowed

down. The lights whirring around us are so bright that I squint. I don't notice Keir stepping in quickly and snapping a jab in my face. I'm turning away as fast as I can so I manage to dodge the majority of the blow. But he's on me now. His gloves touch mine and he's driving his entire body into me, pushing me back towards the ropes. I can hear Shobu screaming for me to duck and weave, keep moving. I can hear the crowd crying out for Keir. It's my first proper match and I know he's more experienced than me. I just have to summon up the confidence from somewhere.

Shobu shouts, 'Sunny, just keep moving. Stop waiting for it to happen . . .'

I flick my eyes back towards her, in my corner.

My hesitation costs me, as Keir lands a cross on my cheek, knocking me off balance.

It's my fault.

## 1.1

It all started six months ago, when Mum told me she was going to teach me to cook.

She had agreed to take on a third night shift at a hotel in town, adding to her main job working at Tesco.

'I'm so worried about you eating properly,' she told me, 'but I don't have time to do anything.'

'I can make us food. I can clean too . . .'

 I told her.

'Beta, it is kind of you.'

'I know.' I smirked. 'Number one son, that's me.'

'Who can't cook.'

I laughed. 'How hard can it be? Look,' I said, grabbing her hand. 'I can keep things going here. You do what you need to do.'

'Listen, my number one son . . . my only son,' she said. 'Thank you, Sunny. But don't let it distract you from your studies . . .'

The next night she came home with a hundred frozen samosas and a big jar of tamarind sauce from Sweet Mart. She found room for the samosas in the icebox, while I put the jar in amongst the tins that had migrated with us from London. She showed me how to operate the oven so I could heat up enough samosas a day for snacks for us both and she wrote down a recipe for chana masala that, she said, was the

first thing she ever learned to cook. I wondered if Mum felt the same pang I did at that moment – the pang of passing along something precious. The moment came and went and she told me to stand up on a chair and reach for a plastic bag from the top of the kitchen cabinets. She had one foot on my chair to steady me and her hands up, ready to receive. I pulled the bag off the shelf. It was surprisingly heavy. And the inside was filled with dust. Like the bag hadn't been opened in years. I coughed as a sprinkle of tiny particles descended on the room like a mist. Mum told me to be careful. I thrust the bag at her and coughed into the crease of my elbow – the vampire cough – like I'd been taught by the Macmillan nurse. That way, I avoided spreading germs to Dad.

I got down off the chair and looked at Mum. I waited.

'What's in there?' I asked, wiping more dust off the surface of the bag with my index finger.

She smiled. 'On my wedding day, your ba decided to give me a rice cooker as a present. That was how I knew she did not like me.'

She pulled a white plastic machine out of the bag. It looked unused but a bit old-fashioned. She set it down on the table and stared at it.

'How do you mean?' I asked.

'Who the hell doesn't know how to cook rice? It was her way of telling me that I couldn't cook at all, and that I would never be good enough for your dad. Anyway, I'm glad I kept it. It finally has some use.'

'I don't know how to cook rice,' I said, shooting her a look.

'Darling,' Mum said, placing a hand on my cheek. 'Rice is very easy. This will just save you time. You're already doing a lot.'

## Further recommendations:

