

# FATED

Title Page artwork to follow

ORCHARD BOOKS

First published in Great Britain in 2019 by The Watts Publishing Group

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

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

ISBN 978 1 40835 066 9

Typeset in American Garamond by Avon DataSet Ltd,  
Bidford-on-Avon, Warwickshire

Printed and bound in Great Britain by [TBC TBC TBC]

The paper and board used in this book are made from wood from responsible sources.



Orchard Books

An imprint of Hachette Children's Group  
Part of The Watts Publishing Group Limited

Carmelite House  
50 Victoria Embankment  
London EC4Y 0DZ

An Hachette UK Company  
[www.hachette.co.uk](http://www.hachette.co.uk)

[www.hachettechildrens.co.uk](http://www.hachettechildrens.co.uk)

To *Slated* fans everywhere,  
who read, hope and dream of a better world:  
it is yours. Make it so.

# Part 1: Chaos

*Order is artificial, imposed by government:  
nature strains for chaos!  
Who do you trust?*

A4A,  
Public manifesto

*It is human nature to both create and destroy.  
But let your enemies knock things down, and then  
step in to save the day when they are done – they get  
the blame, you get the credit.  
Besides, it saves energy.*

Opposition MP Astrid Connor,  
private diary

# 1.

## Sam

We're trapped. Thin glass and steel are all that separates us from hate and fury, and fear grips my guts inside, crushes breath from my lungs.

Dad is saying something, harsh instructions to our driver to get us away, but there is nothing he can do – we're surrounded.

Faces twist with rage and scream obscenities. A hand smashes a brick against the window by my seat and a scream of my own works its way up from inside me, but the glass holds – it's bulletproof; they can't break it, can they? But what if they strike at it again and again?

Now our car is rocking. They're pushing on all sides, and it's rocking.

Sirens are closing in; people around us start to pull away and run. Riot police rush forwards and form a wall of shields and batons that strike out. There is a blur of people and blood.

A girl falls by my car window and people just keep coming – she'll be trampled, hurt. I'm up against the glass but lose sight of her ...

'Get *down*, Samantha,' Dad says.

Our tyres screech. Somehow our driver spins us around, half on the pavement, pushing through the screaming mob.

Once back on the road we go fast; as fast as we can when everyone is trying to rush down crowded London streets the same way – away from what happened.

Dad is on his phone, demanding to know how we could be ambushed like this without warning.

He ends the call. ‘Samantha?’ he says. ‘I need to go straight in. You’ll have to come with me for now.’

We get green lights all the way – do they make that happen just for us? When we near Westminster, guards open the new gates in the high fences that surround the buildings, and we drive into the courtyard. The doors are opened and we’re rushed out of the car with guards all around – it’s an alert thing, I remember now; when it’s high enough they do this – and up the steps to inside.

Dad is hurried off and I’m left standing there, blinking, mind curiously blank and still – it’s an odd feeling, like time is moving *wrong*, or I’m outside it, watching the scene spin fast around me but not taking part. Like I am still in the car in the middle of a riot.

A cool hand touches my shoulder. It’s Astrid Connor – an opposition MP and shadow minister for something or other. I know her through her daughter, who goes to my school.

‘Samantha, dear. Are you all right? That must have been frightening.’ Her lips curve into what is probably supposed to be a reassuring smile, but somehow misses the mark.

I swallow, not sure what to say. ‘Can I go home?’

I finally ask, hating how my voice sounds – small and weak.

‘I don’t know. We’ll have to check the cordon and see if someone can take you.’ She looks around and then gestures to an aide, who hurries over. ‘Go and have some tea, and I’ll make sure someone comes for you when they can.’

The aide takes me to the café, has me sit down at a table and brings me a cup of tea. I reach out, hold it, using both hands so I don’t spill it: my hands are shaking.

There’s a TV up on the wall. The BBC is showing scenes from where we were – they’re calling it an *incident*. They like that word. Seeing it on the screen now – the surging mob, our car almost lost in the midst of it – I feel like I’m back there, like it is happening over again now. It’s weird, like I’m watching from outside my own body.

Then they add that the car of Deputy Prime Minister Gregory was caught up in the protest, that his daughter was with him. An image of us appears on the screen. It’s an old shot, from just after the election about a year ago – I was fourteen – I hated the dress they made me wear. It was blue to go with my eyes, Mum had said, but between that dress and the way they’d done my pale blonde hair, in *ringlelets*, I looked much younger. Dad had his serious politician face on. Then it seemed to be something that he could put on and take off, but now it seems more like it is always there – just like his short dark hair has more grey creeping up the sides with every *incident*.

I count slowly in my head from when we were named.

*One – two – three – four ... and it begins. My phone vibrates with texts.*

*R U OK Sam?*

*Yes.*

*What happened?*

*Watch the news! Just like that but louder*

*Where R U?*

*Hauled to WM to drink tea*

*Did u get any vid?*

*No, actually that wasn't first on my list*

*U OK babes? School is closed today – fingers crossed for tomorrow, too*

*Yes. Yes!!!*

*What did you see? Were you scared?*

I hesitate. One minute we'd been driving up the road to drop me at school, and the next minute – well ... All hell broke loose. Jumbled images – hate-filled faces, the screaming, the brick against my window, then the police and the blood – fight in my mind. The terrified face of that girl who disappeared under the feet of the crowd by my window.

And then, I lie:

*I couldn't see anything.*

Texts continue to come: from friends at school, my art teacher, my cousins, even Sandy, the opposition leader's little daughter – the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker. Most are variations of *Are you OK? Are you all right?* I answer *Yes, Yes, and Yes*, and I guess I am. At least, I'm ... intact; the glass didn't break. What if it had? But it didn't. Yet I'm *not* all right at the same time.

As I answer the ones I want to and the replies that come back again after, I watch for the call or text that doesn't come, until finally I can't stop myself from sending one of my own: *Hi Mum, I'm just fine, thanks for not asking.*

There's no answer.

## 2.

### Ava

I sink gratefully on to my favourite place – this one bench, in Kensington Gardens. The new security fences around the palace mar the view the other way, but they can't be seen from here, and it is far enough from the fading late summer flowers and main paths that it is rarely invaded by others.

Late September sun warms my arms; the grass is that perfect shade of green that only comes with care. The breeze is soft, the sirens distant. I can almost pretend they don't exist, though if it wasn't for them I'd be in school right now.

In London there is always this backdrop to beauty. An edge, one that is becoming sharper. One that has pierced my heart before, but I shy away from thinking of that now. It is time to block out the world and open my books. To lose myself in words – my other favourite place.

But when I try they are dancing on the page, and it isn't pain – old or new – distracting me now; it's something else completely. Finally I give up, close the books. Lie back on the bench with my knees up, liking the feel of the warm wood through my thin dress, against

my back and arms. I close my eyes against the sun, but still I shiver.

Why does it have to be her?

I couldn't say no. Even with the full scholarship I have, there are always all these extra costs of going to that school. My dad can't do more shifts than he does already. I must tutor this girl; there is no choice to be made.

But why does it have to be *her*?