

A young girl with dark skin is shown in profile, looking upwards. A soccer ball is balanced on top of her head. The background is a light, textured wall. The overall mood is one of aspiration and focus.

District 13

CHANGING GOALS

S. SILVA



CHAPTER 1

Jay Reed was cutting school again to hang out with friends. The group of teens roamed the town and blared music. People crossed the street to keep away. At a bus stop, Jay tagged his initials onto the plastic siding. A woman had been waiting at the stop. But she changed her mind and made a hasty exit.

Dark clouds moved in. Lightning split the sky. The teens rushed into a store as plump raindrops pelted their faces. Mr. Adams, the store owner, followed them as they browsed

the aisles. One of Jay's friends pocketed some candy bars. Another knocked items off the shelves. Mr. Adams chased them out. The boys laughed and mocked him as they left.

It was still raining when Jay got home. The apartment door shut with an echo. His mom was at work. She'd left a note on the fridge.

Jay, please take out the trash. I'll be home soon. Love, Mom

His mom always bugged him about chores. It was annoying. The teen crumpled the paper and went to his room. He peeled off his wet hoodie and tossed it on the floor. For the next two hours, Jay played video games in the living room. As he led his character through a dense jungle, Jay's thumbs worked fast. Meanwhile, his phone vibrated with notifications he easily ignored.

Then the front door opened and slammed shut. “Jay!” his mom shouted.

“Yeah,” he answered. “In here.”

Ms. Reed entered the living room. Empty soda cans and food wrappers lay on the couch. Jay was leaning back with his dirty high-tops propped on the coffee table. His mom swiped his feet down.

A vein bulged in the center of Ms. Reed’s forehead. “I’ve been texting for hours. Where were you today? I know you didn’t go to school.”

Jay rolled his eyes. “I took a mental health day. It’s not a big deal, Mom.”

“It is a big deal. We’ve talked about this. It’s not just about you skipping school. Last month, you were suspended. I can’t get your help around here. And your friends are nothing but trouble. You’re better than this, Jay.”

“Chill out, Mom. You don’t even know my friends. You’re too busy judging everyone, especially me. I’m tired of it.”

His mom turned off the TV and sat on the couch. She took a deep breath. “I’ve tried over and over. But this isn’t working, Jay.”

He shrugged. “Maybe if you were around more. But that’s not *my* fault.”

“That’s it. Pack your clothes,” his mom said evenly. “We leave in the morning.”

Jay raised his eyebrows. “What? Where?”

Ms. Reed gave her son a serious look. “You’re going to stay with Uncle Ron in the city. He’s strict. You’ll have no choice but to shape up.”

“That’s not fair,” Jay said, shaking his head. “I barely know him. Please don’t do this.”

Ms. Reed stood up. “It’s done.” Then she left the room.

Jay tossed his video game controller on the table. Feeling helpless, he put his head in his hands. *Things couldn’t get any worse*, he thought.



CHAPTER 2

It was a long ride to the city. Jay slumped in the passenger seat. He wore sunglasses and put his hood up.

“Did you pack your jacket?” his mom asked.

Jay ignored her and stared out the window. She gave up and turned the radio to a jazz station. He loved jazz. But Jay didn’t want his mom to see him enjoying it. Their town faded like a memory. Soon open highways stretched ahead.

Later, Jay and his mom reached the city. Traffic slowed. Car horns blasted in a chaotic symphony. Jay opened his window and craned his neck. Tall buildings hid the afternoon sky.

Ms. Reed gripped the steering wheel. “I know you’re angry. But it’s for the best. Trust me.”

“It’s not fair,” Jay mumbled.

His mom nodded. “No, it isn’t. I get that. But you have to change for real, Jay. I’m concerned something bad will happen. What if you get into trouble? What if you get hurt? I’m out of choices, and you’re out of chances.”

He sighed. “You can’t stand me. That’s why you’re dumping me with your brother.”

“That’s not true. I love you so much. You don’t understand yet. But this is a gift. I know my brother. He’s a good person.”

Jay rolled his eyes. “Whatever.”

They parked in front of a tall apartment building. Uncle Ron met them at the car. He wore pressed jeans, a button-down shirt, and spotless sneakers. Ms. Reed got out and greeted him. Jay watched but couldn’t hear. Finally, Uncle Ron went around to the passenger side. Jay got out and dropped his bag on the sidewalk.

“Hey. Good to see you, Jay. It’s been years.” His uncle held out his hand. Jay waited three beats then shook it.

“This is a big mistake,” Jay said. “You’ll see.”

“Noted,” Uncle Ron replied.

“I hate you both,” Jay grumbled.

“Oh, Jay,” his mom said. Tears trailed down her cheeks. Jay turned away. He refused

to say goodbye. Soon, she gave up and left.

“That was bad. You were very disrespectful,” Uncle Ron said. “Don’t pull that here. I have rules, and you’ll follow them. Step up, and it’ll go easy. Act out, and it won’t. Understand?”

Jay shrugged. “Yeah.”

They walked up to the third floor. Uncle Ron’s apartment was a small one-bedroom unit. Jay would sleep on the pull-out couch. They’d share a bathroom and closet.

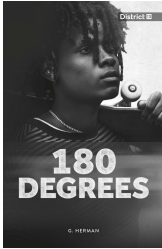
Later that week, Jay enrolled in his new school. He got lost in the huge building. It felt more like a prison than a school. Metal detectors hugged the entrance. Guards roamed the halls. The vibe was tense. City kids seemed louder and tougher. All the teachers and students ignored Jay. That made the days pass

painfully slow for him.

Jay's home routine with his uncle was tough too. Homework and chores came first. There were no video games or computers. The apartment had only one TV, and Uncle Ron controlled the remote. Soccer or the news was always on in the background.

Sometimes Jay cried in the stairwell. It was the only place he could be alone.

District 13



9781638895831



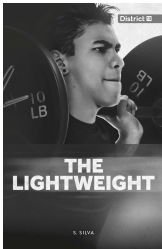
9781638895817



9781638895879



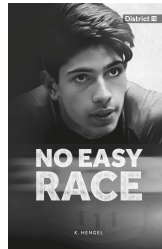
9781638895855



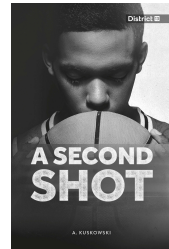
9781638895824



9781638895848



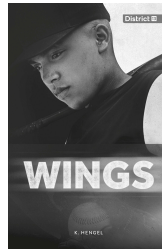
9781638895893



9781638895862



9781638895909



9781638895886

WWW.SDLBACK.COM/DISTRICT-13

District 13

CHANGING GOALS

Jay Reed is headed down the wrong path. The teen often skips school to hang out with his troublemaking friends. Concerned, Jay's mom sends him to live with his strict Uncle Ron in the city. There, Jay takes up soccer and learns about teamwork, grit, and making good choices in life.

 **SADDLEBACK**
EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHING
www.sdlback.com

LEXILE HL250L

ISBN: 978-1-63889-581-7

