



District 13

DOWN AND OUT

K. HENGEL



CHAPTER 1

Terrance Wright eyed the clock. It was almost closing time. No one was in the small convenience store. He sighed.

Why can't I close early? he wondered.

Just then, the door swung open. The bell above it chimed.

“Think fast, fool!” Someone threw a football at Terrance.

Though the pass was a surprise, Terrance caught it. He glared at the other person. It

was Dustin. Bullying Terrance seemed to be Dustin's favorite activity.

“What do you want?” Terrance asked.

Dustin grabbed a handful of candy bars. “Didn't think you'd catch the football. I heard you were slow. Maybe it's just in math.”

Terrance's face got hot. Mr. Fisher had called on him in class earlier. Terrance hadn't known the answer to the problem.

He was failing math. Well, he wasn't failing quite yet. But he would be soon. Terrance hated that everyone knew, especially Jasmine. He really liked her. She probably thought he wasn't smart.

Dustin tossed some cash and coins on the counter. “Better double-check the change since you can't add. Later, loser.” He took the football and left.

Terrance swore. Then he counted the money. That made him swear a second time. Dustin hadn't paid enough.

The bell chimed again. Another customer entered.

"What a jerk," Terrance said. He slammed the register shut.

"Who's a jerk?" someone asked.

Terrance looked up. This time he smiled.

It was Naveed. He had a soccer ball tucked under his arm. Terrance and Naveed fist-bumped once Naveed reached the counter.

The bell sounded yet again. Jade and Athena entered the store. They were Terrance's younger sisters. Their mom had dropped the girls off before she headed to work.

They went around the front counter and hugged Terrance. Then they ran around the

narrow aisles. The girls liked to play tag in the store. Terrance didn't think his sisters would ever stay still.

“Don't knock over anything!” he said.

Naveed leaned against the counter. “I saw Dustin leaving the store. Was he bothering you again?”

“No more than usual,” Terrance replied. “But it's nothing I can't handle.”

Naveed nodded. “You let me know if I can help.”

Terrance shrugged.

“You up for some soccer after this?” Naveed was a soccer star. Terrance wasn't very good at the game. He was better at football.

“How about we toss around the football instead?” Terrance suggested.

“Sounds good. Call me when you're done here.” Naveed headed out.

Suddenly, Terrance heard something tip over in one of the aisles.

“Girls!” he growled playfully.

“It wasn’t us,” Athena said.

“But it kind of was.” Jade had a habit of telling the truth.

Both girls started giggling.

Terrance left the counter to see what his sisters were up to. But something outside stopped him. It was a white van parked across the street. He had seen it earlier at the beginning of his shift. The van left after a while. But now it was back. A group of rough-looking guys surrounded the vehicle. Some leaned against the van. Others were smoking cigarettes. They watched the store.

An hour passed. Finally, Terrance could close the store. He looked across the street.

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The van was gone. Terrance decided he wouldn't worry about it.



CHAPTER 2

The next day, Terrance stared at the problem in math class. He didn't know the answer. *Was it $a + b$ or $a \times b$?* he asked himself.

His mind wandered back to throwing the football with Naveed last night. That was fun. Naveed was easy to talk to. He was also impressed with Terrence's skills. Terrance wished he could play football more.

Mr. Fisher called on Terrance. "Do you want to try solving the problem, Mr. Wright?"

Terrance shook his head.

He heard Dustin whisper behind him.
“Mr. Wright? He’s more like Mr. Wrong.”

Some students laughed. Terrance ignored them. But he didn’t know the answer.

Dustin chuckled. “Big and clueless. What a combo.”

Terrance clenched his fists.

Say one more word, Dustin. I’m going to bust your grill, Terrance thought.

Dustin whispered again. “I bet Jasmine likes me because I know how to add.”

Terrance stood up. He turned around. His plan was to hit Dustin this time.

Mr. Fisher got between the two boys. “Okay. That’s enough. No need to get worked up. It’s just math.”

The bell rang. Students filed out of the classroom. Terrance grabbed his bag. He couldn’t wait to get out of there.

“Not you, Terrance,” Mr. Fisher said.

Terrance sighed and sat back down. He was in trouble.

“I know I’m just the football coach. I’ll only be teaching math until Ms. Rooney gets back. But Terrance, I know you’re smarter than this.”

Terrance was confused. He wasn’t in trouble. But Mr. Fisher seemed to be leading somewhere. What did the teacher want?

Mr. Fisher continued. “Terrance, I know you can do better. Maybe a tutor . . .”

“A tutor? So you think I can’t handle it myself?” Terrance stood up. “Whatever, Mr. Fisher. I’m out.” Then he started to leave.

“Terrance, wait.” Mr. Fisher sighed. “Just give it a try.”

But Terrance kept walking.

At lunch, Terrance sat next to Naveed. He told Naveed what Mr. Fisher had said.

Naveed nodded. "A tutor isn't a bad idea."

Terrance shrugged and opened his lunch bag.

"Don't you know who your tutor would be?" Naveed grinned.

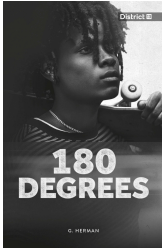
"You?" Terrance asked. Naveed got good grades. They were certainly better than Terrance's. Maybe getting help from Naveed wouldn't be so bad.

"Not me," Naveed said. "It would be Jasmine. She's the math tutor here."

Terrance bit into his sandwich but forgot to chew. He could study with Jasmine. It would be a perfect excuse to talk to her.

He'd give tutoring a shot.

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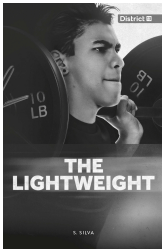
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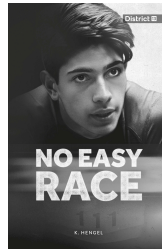
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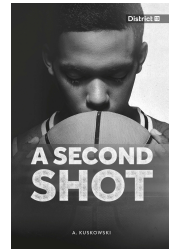
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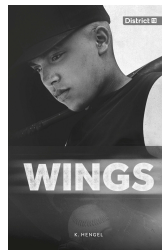
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Terrance Wright is struggling. Between being bullied and having a hard time with his schoolwork, Terrance is feeling low. But when he's asked to join the football team, his outlook begins to brighten. Will this opportunity give Terrance the confidence to make some changes in his life?

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

LEXILE HL250L

ISBN: 978-1-63889-587-9



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