

A young man with curly hair is shown in profile, looking upwards with a focused expression. A hand is holding a basketball above his head, with his fingers reaching towards it. The background is a bright, textured white surface. The overall mood is one of aspiration and determination.

District 13

TAKING CONTROL

K. HENGEL



CHAPTER 1

T*wo years ago . . .*

The sun began to set on the city. Impatient drivers honked their horns in traffic. Music boomed from random apartment windows. A gentle breeze picked up.

On a basketball court at the corner of First Street and Pendo Avenue, Akil Davis and Patrice Wallace ran drills. The best friends were the only two there. Everyone else had gone home hours ago. Beneath the dim lamplight, they perfected layups and played one-on-one.

They also trashed-talked each other, smiling the entire time.

Akil missed a layup. He tripped over his feet and fell.

Patrice laughed uncontrollably. “What. Was. That?”

Akil tumbled out of his fall and laughed too. His face felt warm. Lying on his back, he stayed on the ground. Gazing at the darkening sky, Akil thought everything felt right.

Patrice stood over him. The ball was tucked in her arm. “You comfortable down there?”

He shrugged. “Just enjoying the view.”

Patrice scoffed. But she lay down next to him anyway. Then she threw the ball in the air twice. She caught it both times. “I love this city.”

Akil gave her a hopeful look. “So you’re staying then?”

Patrice sighed. “I would if I could. You know that, right? My mom found work outside the city.” Patrice threw the ball in the air again.

This time, Akil caught it. “I know.”

“We’ll keep in touch,” Patrice said. “Clearly, you need me.”

“What?” Akil asked in surprise. “Why do you say that?”

She snatched the ball from him. “Well, someone has to school you in basketball.” Patrice smiled and quickly got up.

Rising to his feet, Akil smiled back at her. “Oh, so it’s like that?”

Patrice raised her arms above her head. She shot the ball. Her form was perfect. The

ball slid through the net. “It’ll always be like that.”



CHAPTER 2

P*resent day . . .*

Akil had a headache. A noisy bus ride home didn't help. The conversation around him didn't either. Trey and Marcel were talking about the cutest girls in school.

Marcel nodded at Trey. "Okay, okay. But what about Keri? She's better looking than Vanessa."

Trey shook his head. "She has too much attitude."

Marcel shrugged. “I don’t disagree with that.”

Akil rubbed his temples. “Trey, aren’t you still with Dina?”

Punching Akil’s arm, Trey grinned. “Yes. And she also has too much attitude.”

Marcel and Trey laughed.

Akil rolled his eyes. Then he winced. He had forgotten about his pounding head.

“I heard there’s a new girl transferring here soon,” Trey said. “I hope she’s cute.”

Akil tried to keep up with the conversation. But he realized he didn’t have much to say. It was a painful reminder of why he really hung around Trey and Marcel: protection. They were much bigger and stronger than Akil. Trey and Marcel kept the bullies away from him.

Plus, there were other things on Akil’s

mind. His headache was growing. Luckily, his bus stop was next.

At home, Akil's mom sat at the small kitchen table. She was shuffling through a stack of envelopes. Most of them were bills.

Akil set his backpack down. He gave his mom a quick hug.

She squeezed him back. "How was school? What did you get on that history test?"

"A minus," he said. His headache was fading.

"I know that's right," Ms. Davis said proudly. "Keep those grades up, Akil." His mom swatted him playfully on the head with an envelope. Then she stood and pushed in her chair. "There are leftovers in the fridge. I'll be at church until seven. Keep the house clean. Remember, uncle will be here in a couple of days."

Akil groaned. His Uncle Vince was going to live with them.

For years, it had been just Akil and his mom. His dad's death was hard on them. But Ms. Davis did her best to make their home a happy one. A school counselor suggested Akil write his thoughts down in a journal. He'd been journaling ever since.

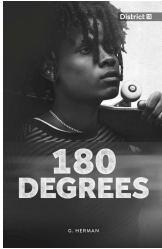
Akil wasn't looking forward to having anyone else live with them. But he couldn't control that.

Just then, his phone buzzed. He pulled it out and looked at the screen. It was a text from Trey. "I found out the new girl's name is Patrice Wallace. Do you know her?"

Akil's breath caught in his throat. "Used to," he replied. He hadn't spoken to Patrice in two years. Now she was back.

Without warning, his headache returned with a vengeance.

District 13



9781638895831



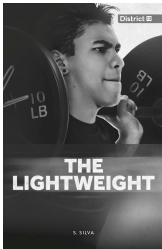
9781638895817



9781638895879



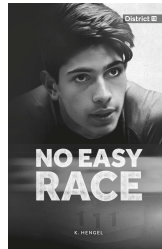
9781638895855



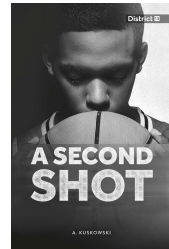
9781638895824



9781638895848



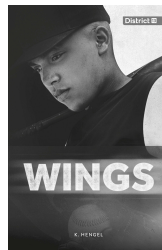
9781638895893



9781638895862



9781638895909



9781638895886

WWW.SDLBACK.COM/DISTRICT-13

District 13

TAKING CONTROL

Akil once loved playing basketball. But for the last two years, his heart hasn't been in the game. When an old friend shows up, she reignites his passion for hoops. Will Akil play it safe or get back on the court?

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

LEXILE HL250L

ISBN: 978-1-63889-590-9

