

THE **UNLISTED**

BOOK THREE – SABOTAGE

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 **LOTHIAN**
Children's Books

CHAPTER ONE

It was mid-morning in the Sharma house. Identical Indian–Australian twins Kal and Dru entered the kitchen, coming face to face with an old man, who looked a bit like their father. He was seated at the kitchen table, which was covered with brushes, powders and other make-up. Their older sister, Vidya, was picking up a make-up brush from a pouch when she turned and saw her brothers’ faces.

Using his best grandpa voice, Rahul asked, ‘How do you like your old man?’

Their confused expressions made their sister and father laugh.

Dru looked to Vidya. ‘You did this?’

‘Why are you so surprised?’ asked Vidya. ‘I’ve been studying stage make-up all year. And Dad’s being my model for my character assignment which is due tomorrow.’

Kal peered up close at Rahul. ‘It’s good how you’ve managed to make Dad look really ancient,’ he said, impressed.

‘Really ancient but also really handsome, no?’ said Rahul with a gleam in his eye.

Dadi bustled around the kitchen, filling a tiffin with prepared food. ‘Why waste your talent making my son look so old? Why not make your dadi look young?’

Vidya knew exactly what to say in a situation like this. ‘But Dadi – people already think you’re my sister!’

Dadi smiled at her granddaughter but then, just as quickly, frowned. ‘Can you believe they’re making my poor daughter work all weekend? Dru, I’ll need your help to take your bua’s lunch to her.’

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The twins' aunt, a doctor, had recently started working for the Global Child Initiative (GCI), which she had thought was a wonderful organisation created to help children receive the best health care available, all around the world. But the shady parent company Infinity Group was behind the Initiative, and rather than altruistic aims, something much more sinister had come into play. The GCI rolled out 'dental checks' to schools all over Australia – it wasn't a normal dental check though. Infinity Group had used the appointments to implant every child with a device that could be tracked, giving the company the ability to know where every implanted child was at any given time, and – even more frighteningly – to influence their thoughts and actions.

Dru and Kal were some of the only people aware of what was really going on, all because of Dru's terror of the dentist. He had convinced his brother to pretend to be him for the check-up, not realising that this meant Kal had been implanted twice.

When the students at Westbrook High started to behave strangely – group loss of consciousness,

increased strength and enhanced language skills – Dru and Kal had started to investigate what was really going on.

Because Dru hadn't been implanted, he was not being brainwashed like his brother and all the other kids in their class. Through their investigative work the twins had discovered other 'Unlisted' kids who had not gone to the dental check-up or received the implant. The twins had befriended four runaways – Kymara, Rose, Jacob and Gemma – who had been hiding out in the tunnels of St James train station, and had helped them as much as they could. But Rose had been captured and was now imprisoned at GCI headquarters, which was where the twins' dadi was suggesting they go for a nice Sunday outing to see their aunt.

'Oh, you hear that, Kal?' Dru said. 'A trip to Global Child Initiative headquarters.'

Kal shrugged, non-committal.

'Maybe we should both go,' suggested Dru with a meaningful look at his twin. Dru needed Kal near

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him at headquarters because otherwise they might find out he wasn't being tracked.

'Sure,' said Kal, unenthused.

'Both my wombats! What a treat,' said Dadi. 'Kal, please fetch the umbrellas.'

Kal looked out the window. The sun was shining. 'But there's not a cloud in the sky.'

'Believe your dadi,' she said in her wise-woman voice. 'A storm is coming.'

Dru swallowed hard at his grandmother's ominous words.

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Dadi drove the two boys into the city, and they were soon at the front entrance of GCI headquarters. The twins had been there a few days earlier with their school group, taking part in an organised scavenger hunt – but the results weren't exactly what the GCI official had planned, with another Unlisted boy, a Chinese exchange student named Jiao, being captured and taken away. These were not good memories, and the boys weren't happy to be back again so soon.

Dadi looked up, oblivious to the boys' discomfort. 'My, my, look at this impressive building, boys,' she said. 'If you work hard at school, you might be able to get a job in a place like this too.'

The boys shared a horrified look. This was literally the last place they would want to work. Ever.

Dadi, wearing a bright sari, bustled through the entrance towards the metal detector until she was stopped by a security guard. The tiffins were metal and had to be checked separately.

'What's this?' asked the security guard suspiciously.

Dadi pulled out the tiffin. 'Lunch for my daughter, of course,' she said indignantly. 'She's working. On a Sunday.'

'She's not the only one,' said the guard unsympathetically.

Kal and Dru passed through the metal detector together.

'Open the lunch, please,' instructed the guard.

The boys noticed a second security guard holding a handheld implant scanner, stationed near the stairs.

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Dadi opened the first compartment of the tiffin. A delicious aroma rose from the still-warm samosas.

The security guard sighed. ‘That smells sensational. I’m supposed to be on a diet, but –’

‘Take one,’ Dadi said graciously. ‘I have plenty.’

The guard did not need to be asked twice. He grabbed a samosa and bit into it, moaning in appreciation as Dadi opened a small container of raita. ‘And this is my special mint chutney.’

The guard dipped his samosa in the chutney before popping it in his mouth. ‘Oh, even better.’

He waved Dadi through the scanner, and she and the twins approached the reception desk, passing a small group of adults seated in the foyer.

Dadi said to the receptionist, ‘Could you please tell Dr Sharma her mother and nephews are here with her lunch?’

The receptionist nodded and called Maya Sharma’s extension. While they were waiting, a middle-aged woman with a blonde bob, wearing a white shirt and black trousers approached the reception desk. ‘Hello. I’m here for the Super Recogniser training day.’

The receptionist gestured to the other seated adults. ‘Wait over there with the others,’ she instructed.

Dru’s attention was caught by a screen that displayed images of missing children along with the text: *Have you seen these children? Every child deserves a better future.*

Dru looked at Kal and nodded to the screen. Kal shrugged. ‘We’re here to find out about Rose. Don’t lose focus.’

Maya appeared in the foyer, looking weary and drawn.

‘Oh my girl,’ said Dadi sympathetically. ‘You look so tired. Luckily, I’ve brought you a nutritious lunch.’

‘Thank you, Mum,’ said Maya, giving her a hug. ‘Hello boys.’ She gave them a lingering, pointed look, and Kal immediately took the hint.

‘Dadi,’ he said, ‘I think that guard looks like he’d really like another samosa. You should give him one.’

‘Good idea, my wombat,’ said Dadi with a grin. She picked up one with a serviette and walked with Kal over to the guard, who greeted Dadi like a long-lost relative when he saw what she was bringing him.

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Maya quietly relayed the information she knew Dru would be desperate to hear. ‘Your friends tried to escape last night. But Emma Ainsworth brought them back in.’

‘What? Where are they keeping them?’ asked Dru.

‘Level one,’ answered Maya before frowning. ‘Don’t even think about it, Dru. I’ll figure something out. But there’s something else I need to . . .’ She lost her train of thought as she noticed the Super Recognisers. Concern flashed across her face.

Dru followed her gaze. ‘What’s the matter, Bua? Who are they?’

‘They’re called Super Recognisers. They’re people who’ve been tested and found to have a natural ability to recall any face in an instant. The Initiative plans to hire hundreds of them.’

‘Why?’ asked Dru.

‘They’re determined to find every child who missed the dental check – these Super Recognisers will help track them down.’

Dru was horrified, but there was no time to say anything else as Dadi returned with Kal. ‘Let’s go, boys. I can feel that storm getting closer.’

After saying goodbye to Maya, Dru, Kal and Dadi headed back outside in the direction of their car. They passed an electrical substation with hazard and general construction signs erected outside.

‘Why do you hate storms so much, Dadi?’ asked Kal.

Dadi shook her head. ‘No, no, Kal. I love storms. They are a message from Indra, the king of heaven, promising to lend his power to protect those who cry out for his help. This is all good. What I don’t love so much is getting wet,’ she concluded wisely.

As the family passed the substation they saw a workman outside. Dadi looked at him, concerned. ‘Sir, you should be careful. An almighty thunderstorm is coming.’

The workman looked at the sky just at the moment they all heard a distant rumble of thunder. ‘Thanks for the heads-up. You don’t want to be anywhere near here if that substation gets hit by lightning. It’ll take out the whole grid.’

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Dru looked at the substation, an idea forming. He turned to the workman. ‘Could you show us what you’re doing? My brother would be really interested. He wants to become an electrical engineer.’

Dadi turned to Kal in surprise. ‘Is this true?’

Kal wasn’t sure what Dru was up to but knew he had to play along. ‘Um, yes . . .’

Dadi looked thoughtful. ‘Well, then. You’ll need to study much harder.’

The workman shook his head. ‘Sorry, I can’t really let the public in.’

Now that Dadi realised this was an educational opportunity for her grandson, she was not going to take no for an answer. ‘Oh, come on, sir. A quick peek for a budding electrical engineer?’ Dadi flashed her winning smile.

The workman relented and let them in. ‘Okay. But just for a second.’ He stepped into the cramped substation, which was full of cables, switches and transformers. The twins joined him while Dadi stayed outside, looking up at the sky with a frown.

Inside, the workman pointed to some cables. ‘Over there are some pretty standard high-voltage transmission lines.’

Kal shot a bewildered look to Dru but played along, nodding enthusiastically as Dru slipped away and looked around.

‘Wow, that’s amazing,’ said Kal.

The workman was so delighted by Kal’s interest he continued to talk nonstop. ‘It all operates with a three-phase alternating current through a synchronised grid.’

‘So interesting,’ said Kal, looking as though he’d rather hang washing on the line than listen to this guy talk about electricity a moment longer.

While the workman continued educating Kal, Dru took a casual walk around the substation. He scanned the mass of cables and wires.

‘The power runs into the substation at a transmission-level voltage, but then of course it’s stepped down to distribution-level voltage so it can go out to the distribution wiring. Now, as I’m sure you will have ascertained, each service location on the grid has its own required service voltage.’

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Dru grabbed a document labelled GRID SERVICE MANUAL and flicked quickly through it. There were instructions on the substation and a map of the facilities. Perfect! Dru hid the manual under his T-shirt and moved back out to join his brother near the entrance.

Another rumble of thunder sounded.

‘Wow, that was all *so* interesting, but we have to go now,’ said Dru as he quickly pulled his brother away.

Dadi smiled at the workman. ‘Thank you so much. And don’t forget the storm. It’s on its way.’