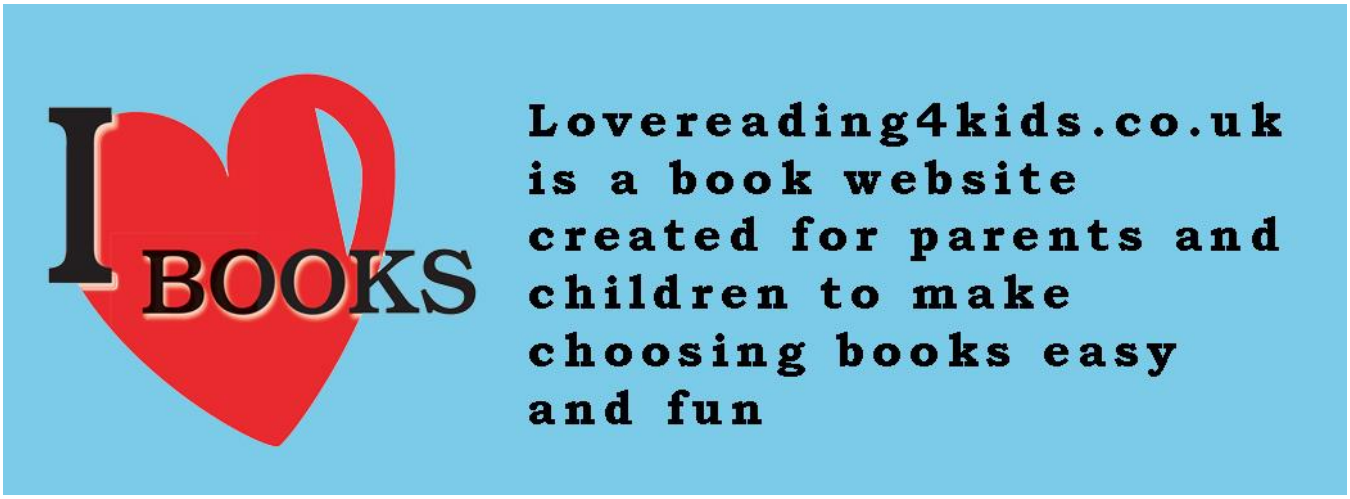


Opening extract from

Waiting for Callback: Take 2

Written by

Perdita Cargill & Honor Cargill

Published by

Simon & Schuster Children's Books

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First published in Great Britain in 2017 by Simon and Schuster UK Ltd
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1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Simon & Schuster UK Ltd
1st Floor, 222 Gray's Inn Road
London
WC1X 8HB

www.simonandschuster.co.uk

Simon & Schuster Australia, Sydney
Simon & Schuster India, New Delhi

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

PB ISBN 978-1-4711-4485-1
eBook ISBN 978-1-4711-4486-8

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Typeset in the UK by M Rules
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY



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Finally! The apocalypse is here!

That's not something even we at The Bizz, eternal pessimists that we are, saw coming. Remember *Straker*? Sorry, *Straker (working title)*? No? We don't blame you. There's been a *very* loud silence on this project over the last few months. So here's what you need to know:

Straker is a post-apocalyptic drama that sees two tribes battle it out for survival and the power to shape a new civilisation. One tribe wants to rely on tech (think 'gimme all the iPhones') and the other on nature (think 'back to mother Earth, duuuude'). We'd been promised natural disasters, tons of violence, breathtaking CGI and 'love stories to rival *Romeo and Juliet*' (credit to the Panda Productions publicity department for that subtle and humble turn of phrase). So naturally we were pretty bummed when it dropped off our radar. BUT, drumroll please . . . we finally have news!

Panda Productions have nabbed master-money-maker, director Sergei Havelski, fresh off the top-grossing *Terror Island* franchise. Even more excitingly we have ourselves a male lead! A-lister Sam Gross (aka our favourite bar-room-brawl hottie) will play Raw, the leader of one of the tribes. We're expecting lots of action on- *and* off- screen. The actress who will play

Winona, the leader of the other tribe, is yet to be announced. Our informant is torturing us by hinting that the casting decision is proving controversial but won't tell us any more. We're no longer speaking.

This production is also rocking a bit of a *Hunger Games* vibe with two juicy teenage roles for the children of the tribe leaders. Sam's son will be played by seventeen-year-old Carlo Winn. And – defibrillators at the ready – *here* is his Instagram. He's a relative newcomer with only a few TV credits to his name.

PDF TO COME

Oh, and a completely unknown fifteen-year-old London girl will play female teenage lead Straker!

We think this is going to be one sweet, sweet apocalypse. Especially for one London schoolgirl . . .



CHAPTER 1

'He's the director. He's the writer. I'm only the actor, so what do I know?'

Chloë Sevigny

I was under a tree in my garden with the guy of my dreams and there was a Hollywood director on the phone. For me.

Hello?' I squeaked.

'So?' There was a long and worrying pause. Mr Havelski was waiting for an answer. But what exactly was the *question*? 'So?' Another scary pause.

My mum – she was there too and there was literally no way to ignore her because she was doing some sort of weird panicky dance in front of me – mouthed, '*What? What?*' Our genetic link was at its most obvious.

'So . . . Is that my Straker I'm speaking to?'

'It's Elektra,' I squeaked, starting to stress that he'd got the wrong number.

'And . . . is Elektra my Straker?'

'I . . . I don't know . . .' This suspense was killing me. I was better with statements from adults than questions. Ask any of my teachers. Was Havelski offering me the part? Was he just really confused? Was this an elaborate form of psychological torture? Maybe this was the final and defining test of my suitability for the role – what would Straker do?

'I mean . . . I . . . I think so . . .' I stuttered. I'm pretty sure that this is not what Straker, world-saving action heroine, would have done.

'You *think* so?' Mr Havelski sounded confused.

My inner seven-year-old wanted to hand the phone to my mum. 'No. I mean . . . yes. I mean, if you mean . . .' If this went on any longer he was going to call one of the other girls on the shortlist and ask if *she* was his Straker. I pulled myself together. 'I'd *love* to be your Straker if you'll have me.'

'I would like that very much.'.I could tell Mr Havelski was smiling all the way from LA. 'I'll see you soon.' He hung up before I could say goodbye; he was a very busy man.

I let the phone slip out of my very sweaty hand and threw myself into Archie's arms. He laughed

and picked me up and spun me around. This had been my very favourite fantasy through months of near tragic crushing.

'Elektra, help!'

'How did you end up in the bush?' I asked my mum, as Archie and I each gave her a hand and hauled her upright. This hadn't featured in my fantasy. Obviously.

''I was sort of . . . . . dancing and the path must be uneven.' She glared at the innocent little paving stones and untangled a hydrangea leaf from her hair.

'Sure,' I said. 'Are you happy?' It's fair to say that my mum had been conflicted about the idea of me taking a big film role.

'Of course I am. I'm beyond excited for you!'

A vision of Kris Jenner style momaging flashed before my eyes. 'Is Dad home?'

'He went to get another newspaper because Digby vomited on the sports section. He should be back any minute. Let's go inside and have celebratory tea and wait for him.'

'I should go,' said Archie, but he was still holding on to my hand. '

I wanted him to stay for obvious reasons but the thought of him sitting around the kitchen table with my mum and dad was too weird. Especially because Mum was now trying to persuade him to

stay like he was her very favourite person in the world. I think he was scared she was going to hug him. As a) he'd never met her before, b) all he'd seen her do was 'dance' and fall in a bush and c) it was less than twenty-four hours since he'd got with me for the first time, this was possibly too much, too soon.

'No really, Mrs James, I should get home. I'll text you, Elektra. Er . . . bye then.'

And we both just sort of stood there. Neither of us knew how to say goodbye. Mum was standing in between us, smiling amiably. Hopeless. There was a very real threat of awkward waves.

'Why don't you show Archie out, Elektra?' said Mum finally.

That took quite a long time in the end. There are some things that shouldn't be hurried.

'I'm just very proud of you,' said Dad later.

'Mum told you? I wanted to tell you!' I'd been dispatched to buy cake but she might have waited ten minutes for me to get home.

'Sorry, I couldn't keep it in.' Mum cut me a huge slice of the lemon cake by way of apology. 'And I told Digby.'

I was good with that. Digby might be an elderly Dalmatian but he was very much part of the family and it was right and proper that he should

be one of the first to know. He came over and licked my hand. It might have been the crumbs but I was taking it as congratulations. 'Have you seen my phone? I need to call Eulalie.' Eulalie was my *fabulous* Coco Chanel/Dolly Parton mash-up of a step-grandmother.

'In the drawer, you left it in the garden. But, er . . .' Mum looked shamefaced. 'I told Eulalie too. I know I shouldn't have, but you were taking ages and I was all excited and I just had to tell someone.'

Someone? It sounded like she'd told everyone. 'Was she pleased?'

Mum laughed. 'She said lots of things in very fast French that I didn't understand but yes, she was definitely pleased.'

MOSS! If I didn't text my best friend straight away there was a risk that Mum would do it for me. **MOSSSSSS!!**

What's up? Did Archie come over? ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

Yes and SOMETHING JUST HAPPENED

With Archie? WHAT WHAT? I'm panicking here. Something good or something bad?

Something good. Very good. Like, THE DREAM

You had The Conversation?! You're exclusive with Archie? In LESS THAN 24 HOURS. 🐝 🐝 🐝 🐝 🐝 I am literally in awe. You guys are PERFECT together.

Are you mad?

Own it, Elektra. You're irresistible

That is true but we did not have The Conversation. Obviously.

I am so confused

It's nothing to do with Archie I considered getting into an in-depth analysis of what was wrong with the assumption that my every communication was about Archie – but only very briefly.

Then WHAT? JUST TELL ME

Havelski phoned me . . .

Oh. My. God. Yo

'Yo?' That was not the response I'd been hoping for. There was a long pause.

Sorry, I fell off my chair when I was typing. *You* are going to be a FILM STAR ★★★★

Hahahahaha

Dad stood right in front of me and waved until he got my attention. 'Talk to me, I want to know every last detail.' He sounded like Mum. 'What did Mr Havelski say? What did you say?'

'Mum's probably already told you everything. Although I bet she didn't tell you she fell in a bush.'

He didn't look surprised. 'But I want *you* to tell me.'

'I didn't tell him about . . . Archie,' said Mum. The pause was fake, she knew his name well enough. She probably also knew his date of birth and predicted GCSE grades. 'Don't miss out those bits.'

'Who's Archie?'

'*He's the boy from the party last night*,' Mum mouthed at Dad over my head.

Great. Not only had my mad mum stayed up to interrogate me on what had in fact been a very good night (thank you, Stephanie, random party-throwing girl who I barely knew) but she'd immediately briefed my dad. This was how things worked in my family. It was quite trying being an only child.

'I am right here,' I said.

'But what's he got to do with Mr Havelski?' asked Dad, looking confused.

'Absolutely nothing,' I replied firmly and rerouted the conversation back to business. And after an hour of me recounting (re-enacting) the two-minute phone call (and nothing else) I'd exhausted them both so much that I was left in peace to get down to the serious business of checking whether Archie had messaged me since he left.

'Elektra, is there any chance you could get off the phone for two minutes. I appreciate that you are now a very important person but I have asked you to get the door twice already.' Ah, Mum was beginning to sound more like herself.

I couldn't even see the person behind the petals when I opened the door.

'Miss Elektra Ophelia James?' he said, in a

tone that suggested he'd never had to deliver to somebody with a stupid name before.

I was living the dream. I nodded.

'Sign here.'

The delivery man thrust a little machine at me and I did a sort of squiggle that didn't look like it could be anyone's name, but he shoved the flowers at me anyway. I would need to work on my autograph now I was going to be a film star. I staggered giddily back into the kitchen. I'd never known that flowers could be this heavy.

'Oh, my!' sighed Mum happily. 'Who sent me flowers? Today is just getting better and better.'

Maybe I should have been worried that she didn't even look at Dad, just made a frankly undignified lunge for MY flowers. 'Noooo, you don't. They're for me.' I pulled them back.

'Who's sending you flowers? Are they from your director? Is this what life is going to be like now? Film offers and flowers every five minutes?' Dad sounded a bit troubled.

'No,' I said, reading the note pinned to the cellophane. 'They're not from Mr Havelski.' That would have been amazing, but this was even better.

'Your *boyfriend* sent you those! That was quick,' said Mum.

'He's not my boyfriend,' I said, adding a silent, hopeful 'yet' in my head.

'He was certainly behaving like he was your boyfriend in the garden.' I cringed. 'And he must be keen,' she went on. 'Look at these roses. I'm jealous.' Now she did look at Dad (accusingly).

'They're not from Archie. *Obviously*,' I said.

'Then who sent them?' Mum looked at me suspiciously as if I might have a clutch of undisclosed millionaire boyfriends.

'Eulalie. How could you not guess that? Over-the-top? Super expensive? Pink? Beautiful? Got here quicker than the speed of sound?' I buried my nose in them; they smelled good. Once I stopped sneezing I read the note again and again.

Cherie, I am so very, very proud of you. Many people will give you flowers in all the exciting years to come but I wanted to be the first. I love you. xxxx

It made me want to cry. But in a good way.

To Do This Summer

PDF TO COME

I wrote this list last night in a fit of post-being-cast-in-a-Hollywood-blockbuster-excitement. I had to annotate it quite extensively this morning.

1. Share an ice cream with Archie. I just put that one on so I had something to cross out.
2. Get cast in a film. Also make a film. I'm on fire.
3. Get a tan. Or at least a combination of sunburn and freckles that looks kind of like a tan.
4. Avoid family holiday in Scotland. Achievable. Go on a girls' holiday with Moss, preferably at a time when Archie is also on holiday. (Possibly to a destination quite close to his??) Would have to get rid of both mums for this to happen . . . Definitely not achievable.
5. Go to A Pool Party. First I need to meet the kind of person who just happens to have an actual pool in their house/garden and make friends with them, which will probably involve convincing them that a) I am a perfectly seasoned pool party guest and b) not someone

who just wants to use and abuse their prime real estate.

6. Learn Italian. A noble intention but deeply unrealistic.
7. Lie in a meadow with Archie picking wild flowers and having deep conversations about our relationship. Must Google 'deserted wild meadows on the Circle line' asap Also the deep conversations do sort of assume the relationship is a thing. Also our 'relationship' might go better if we avoid deep conversations?? Also it is less than forty-eight hours since we first got with each other – I might slightly be losing my mind.
8. Write a poem. ??????????????????
9. Roll down a grassy hill. I'm so up for this. This is my kind of life goal.

PDF TO COME

It was going to be a spectacular summer.

From: Stella at the Haden Agency
Date: 29 June 23:25
To: Elektra James; Julia James
Cc: Charlotte at the Haden Agency
Subject: GREAT NEWS!
Attachments: Performance Licence Application Form.doc; Chaperone Security & Clearance Forms.doc

Dear Both,

Charlie and I wanted to be among the first to say CONGRATULATIONS!! You'll be a perfect Straker, Elektra. We're very proud of you – and it's lovely having a Haden Agency actor landing such a big role, we've been doing little happy jigs in the office all morning!

I'm sure that even though it's Monday morning you're all still busy celebrating (or is Elektra at school?!) but can I just flag up some important housekeeping that we need to get sorted out *as soon as possible*. This is all going to happen really fast now.

I've made a list with everything that needs to be dealt with.

1. Elektra needs a performance licence. I'm attaching the application form and you need to get this submitted to your local authority *asap*.

2. The licence application needs an up-to-date medical certificate too, so if Elektra could be seen by her doctor *asap* that would be perfect!

3. We also need a letter from Elektra's headmistress authorizing her to be absent from school for the production dates. As you know, everyone is confident that everything is running *ahead of*

schedule and that Elektra's scenes will be completed during the summer holidays, but they have added on a fortnight just to be on the safe side. I'm sure that her school will share her excitement and be happy to help!

4. The production locations are now listed as **London and (unconfirmed) Hungary** so can you also let me have two passport photos and a copy of the 'magic page' of her passport.

5. Julia, if you are still keen to act as Elektra's chaperone then I'm afraid there are a lot of forms to fill in for you too (attached). I appreciate that this seems a little crazy but Panda Productions insists on every minor having an allocated, licenced chaperone.

6. Mr Havelski wants another meeting with Elektra and Carlo Winn (Jan) as soon as possible. His assistant is suggesting **Wednesday 1 July at 5 p.m. at Claridges Hotel** where he will be staying (Charlie and I are very jealous). It's short notice but Mr Havelski is *a very busy man*. It's important, Julia, that you (and/or Elektra's father) also attend as this is a good opportunity to raise any questions you might have with Mr Havelski and his team.

I will be getting draft contracts out to you within the next few days and don't hesitate to call me to talk them through. I know that this probably seems rather daunting but do all try to enjoy it every step of the way!

With renewed felicitations to all!

Stella x