



headlights

# CHILD'S PLAY



• Claire Craig

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# characters

Steph Park: a 25-year-old English woman who works for a publishing company in London

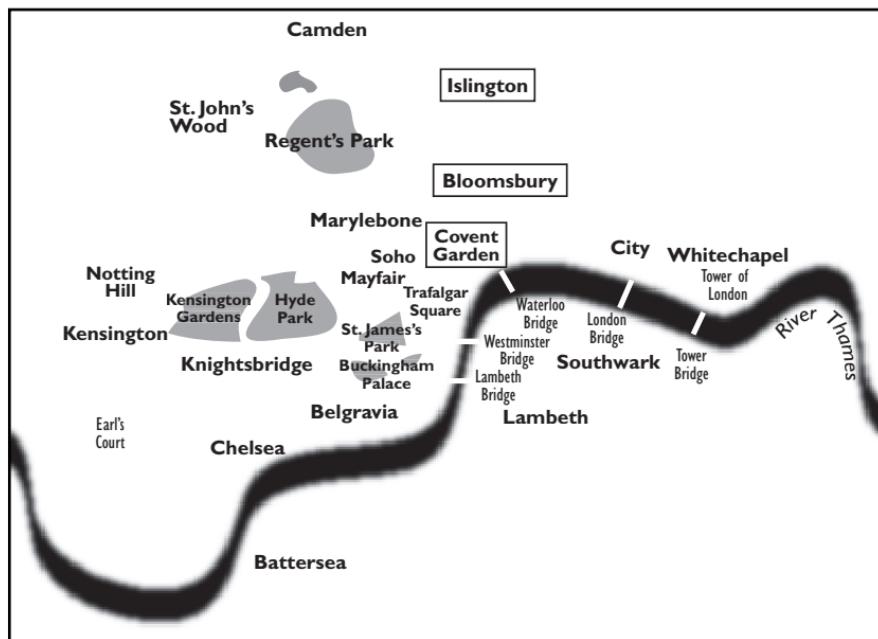
Sheila: Steph's assistant at the publishing company

John: one of Steph's authors

Frankie Leech: he lived across the road from Steph when they were children

William Leech: Frankie's little brother

## Central London



## chapter 1

# I see his name

I leave the house quickly this morning. I am late. Again. No time for breakfast. No time for coffee. My hair is wet. I don't have time to dry it. I walk to the train station at Islington quickly.

I have a meeting at 9 o'clock with an author. He is a difficult author. I work for a publishing company in Bloomsbury. We publish books on how to do things. There are books that tell people how to change their lives, how to grow flowers, or how to meet the love of their lives.

The author I am meeting writes books about making money. Everyone wants to know how to make money. This author makes lots of money for us. He likes to hear how important he is, and it is my job to tell him. Again and again.

I buy a newspaper at the station. There is a photograph of me on page six. Below the

photograph is a report about how many books I sell. I like to read about myself. I like to know that I am good at my job. I like other people to know it too.

I watch the train come into the station. It is a cold, clear day.

I see a man on the other side of the platform. He sees me too. Then, he walks away quickly. I watch him go. He looks back at me, just once.

He is too far away. I don't see his face.

I pull my coat around me. A cold wind blows through the station.

I think I know that man. He looks familiar. Too familiar.

No. It isn't him. It can't be!

The doors of the train open.

I get on the train. I take a big breath. I look around. It is alright. Everything is the same.

There are lots of people on the train. People going to work. Children going to school. I smell clean clothes and expensive perfume. Some people smile at each other.

I see the same people every day. They are happy in the morning and tired at night. I sit at the back of the train. Next to a woman with a large bag and a young girl who writes in a book. She draws big fat words on the page.

I read the newspaper.

PUBLISHER OF BEST SELLERS says the headline. The piece about me is short. It says I am a big star in the publishing world. I smile. I hope my boss reads it.

I turn the pages of the newspaper.

Then, I see his name. The name of the man at the train station.

It is eight o'clock in the morning.

I like to know what the time is when important things happen. Then, when I think about them I can say, "this happened at . . ."

I always remember important moments like this. I think that life is like music. There are some loud notes and some soft notes. Loud notes are important things. Soft notes are things that happen every day.

This is a loud note. The loudest note in my life for 15 years.

It is just a few words in the newspaper. It is among births, deaths, and marriages. I don't read them often. But today I do.

There it is. His name. In black words.

After all these years.

It makes me feel cold.

FRANCIS GORDON LEECH.