

*Please enjoy this “Main Characters” bonus scene! This scene doesn’t have any spoilers- it’s the novel’s first scene written from a different perspective.*

## The reader

It takes a lot to distract her from a good book. These two manage it.

The reader sits in a square somewhere between Oxford Street and Piccadilly Circus, her mind somewhere else entirely, caught between the office and the words on this page. She’s been trying to drift away from her workday, from one specific meeting in the calendar after lunch, something difficult and disciplinary. She’s been trying to read. And yet, she’s seen them. And once she’s seen them, she can see little else.

The reader scans a sentence, then scans it again. It doesn’t sink in. So she scans the benches beside her instead. Upon one, a photographer, fiddling with a beaten-up, brick-like camera. On another, a young mother, speaking in hushed tones to a toddler more interested in causing havoc among the pigeons. And, on the third, the girl, one half of the source of the reader’s distraction. Her hair, white-blonde. Her expression, standoffish. Her ears, plugged with the cabled headphones of a first-gen iPod and her eyes, ice-blue and blacked-out with eyeliner, trained intently on the boy across the square. The boy she is drawing. Could you call him a boy? The young man in question is tall and muscular, tattoos poking out from under his black band T-shirt. He sits silently at the base of the statue in the middle of the square, sharing a sandwich with his dog. He seems intent on drifting away, too. His dark eyes are looking at nothing in particular. His head, itself sandwiched between a heavy black pair of wrap-around headphones, seems to be somewhere far away. The dog exists only in the here and now. It is thinking about the sandwich, and very little else.

The reader looks back at the young woman. That peculiar expression, the one which caught the reader’s attention in the first place. Intense. Intoxicated. Inspired, or at least inspired enough to commit him to paper. Her version of him. Black lines swirl in a tattered sketchbook. The photographer is watching the young woman, and now the reader is watching the photographer, and it occurs to the reader that this is all there is, all there



should be. People watching and being watched. She returns her eyes to her book, wondering idly if anyone is watching her, then shaking the thought away. She tried to read.

And, yet. The young woman with the sketchpad is standing now. And yet, she's acting strangely, staring from sketch to model, model to sketch. Tapping her fingers. Clenching her jaw. She's steeling herself. It occurs to the reader, with some surprise, that the young woman is going to approach the young man and give him the sketch. To say, I drew you. The reader can't think of anything more personal, more provocative. She dog-ears her page. She has to see this.

The young woman takes a deep breath. Then, she takes a step forward. Two steps. An entire square, an entire city, melts away beneath her battered Converse, and suddenly she and this young man are as if entirely alone. They are too far away, talking too quietly, for the reader to hear their conversation. But the reader is a reader. She has imagination. She is good at filling in the gaps.

'Excuse me,' the young woman might say. 'I hope I'm not intruding. I'm not a creep, I promise.'

And she'll hand the young man the picture, and the young man will take it. In doing so, he'll still her trembling hand.

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‘I love it,’ the young man might reply. ‘And to match your boldness, perhaps at risk of being too bold, there’s a pub just over there. Might we—’ Wait. No. He wouldn’t talk like an Austen character. And besides, he hasn’t had the chance, because the young woman has turned on her heels and walked away before he’s had the chance to say anything at all. She’s fleeing, already dissolving back into the city beyond the square, and the man is looking dumbly after her, holding out his own portrait. He looks down at his dog, and the dog stares sternly back at from beneath bushy eyebrows as if to say, go after her, you idiot.

But it’s too late. She’s gone, and the reader finds herself wrong-footed.

Who knows how this particular story will end.