

Noughts & Crosses  
By Malorie Blackman  
Pages 101-103

## **twenty-three. Sephy**

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One of these days, Callum's going to forget himself and actually look pleased to see me.

I just won't hold my breath whilst I'm waiting, that's all.

'There's your ticket.' I handed it over to Callum. I'd raided my bank account to get enough to buy two first-class tickets. I could've asked Mother for the money, or Sarah, but then they would've wanted to know exactly why I wanted it. No, this was much better. It made the day 'ours' somehow, because the money was mine and nothing to do with my mother or anyone else. I smiled. 'This day is going to be perfect.'

I could feel it in my water.

## **twenty-four. Callum**

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The train journey from hell, that's what it was. A journey which ruined the rest of the day as far as I was concerned. We were on our way to Celebration Park. There were

only three more stops to go – when they got on. Police officers on a routine inspection. Two of them, boredom plastered over their faces.

‘ID passes please. ID passes please.’

Sephy looked surprised. I wasn’t. We both dug out our ID cards as they made their way up the first-class train carriage. I watched the cursory glances they gave the ID passes of all the Crosses in the carriage. I was the only nought. Would they stop and ask me lots of questions? Huh! Is pig poo smelly?

An officer of trim build and sporting a pencil-thin moustache stood right in front of me. He looked at me then took my ID pass without a word.

‘Name?’ he snapped out.

*What’s the matter? Can’t you read?*

‘Callum McGregor.’

‘Age?’

‘Fifteen.’

*Can’t read numbers either, huh? That’s too bad.*

‘Where are you going?’

*None of your business.*

‘Celebration Park.’

‘Why?’

*To cut my toenails.*

‘Picnic.’

‘Where d’you live?’

*On the moon.*

‘Meadowview.’ Meadowview by euphemistic name only. Rubbishshackview would’ve been more appropriate. The officer looked from my ID card to my face and back again. My thumbprint was on the card. Was he going

to break out a magnifying glass and ask me to hold out my right hand so he could compare the imprint on the card to my print? It wouldn't've surprised me.

'You're a long way from home, boy.'

I bit down on the inside of my bottom lip, not trusting myself to speak. Both officious officials stood in front of me now. There was barely enough room to get a paperclip between their legs and my knees. I sighed.

*Ladies and gentlemen, for your delectation and delight, another performance of 'You're a nought and don't you ever forget it, blanker boy.'*

'Let me see your ticket.'

I handed it over.

'Where did you get the money to buy this kind of ticket?'

I looked up at them, but didn't speak. What was there to say? They had the scent of blood in their nostrils and I didn't stand a chance, no matter what I said or did. So why bother?

'I asked you a question,' Moustaches reminded me.

As if I'd forgotten.

'Did you buy this ticket?' Moustaches' accomplice asked.

The truth or prevarication? What was Sephy thinking? I couldn't see her. The no-brain brothers were in the way. If only I could see her face.

'I asked you a question, boy. Did you buy this ticket?'

'No, I didn't,' I replied.

'Come with us, please.'

Time to get my posterior pummelled. Time to get my derrière dealt with. Time to get my bum bounced right off the train.

Orangeboy

By Patrice Lawrence

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*Behind a load of rolled up wire and bars, with a landing full of D-Ices hyping their rep.*

This was what Mum had worked so hard to keep me away from, extra hard after she lost Andre. But I hadn't chosen this world. A portal had gaped open and sucked me in. If I didn't do something, it was going to swallow me up. Mum too.

In the kitchen, I opened the drawer, looking for the long knife right at the back. I ran my fingers along the narrow blade. It was completely blunt, but that didn't matter. It was how I styled it off. All I needed was a sly flash, just like D-Ice.

But was that enough? What if they were coming at me? What if it was me or them? What if I had to use it? I needed more than style. That knife, right there, jammed between two wooden spoons, metal handle, metal blade, made in one piece. I held it. It was cold in my palm and didn't quite nestle. It wasn't designed for that – it was meant to be used. I let it clank back in and slammed the drawer shut.

Mum called around six. She was going out for a meal with Jonathan and was thinking of staying at his place. If I didn't want to be home by myself, she'd definitely come back, no problem. If she heard the relief in my voice, she didn't mention it. The story I'd concocted about her mattress made *Inception* look easy. *I went into your*