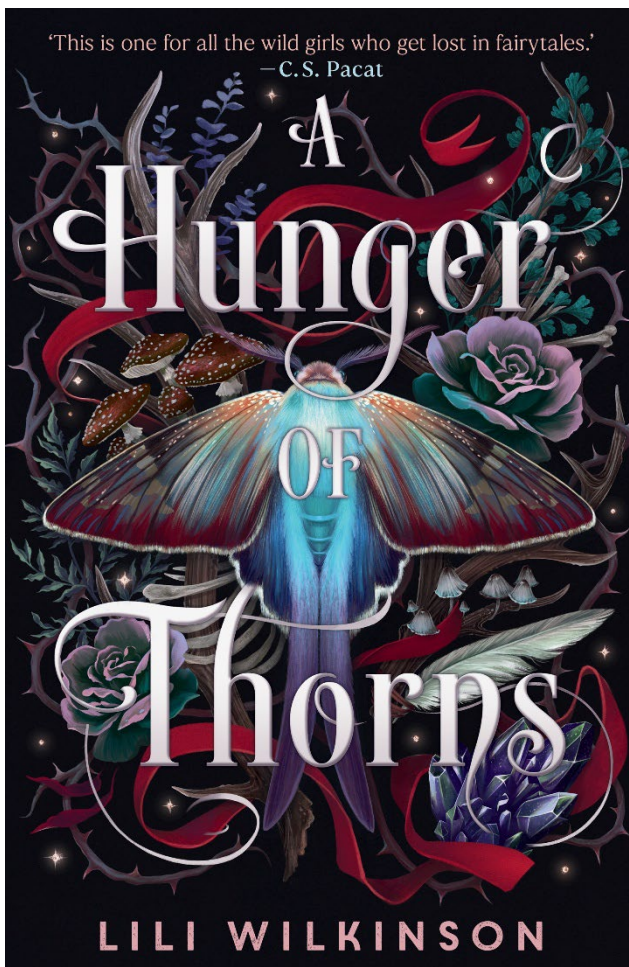


A Hunger of Thorns

By Lili Wilkinson



Be swept up in this brilliant witchy tale about forbidden magic and missing girls who don't need handsome princes to rescue them. Perfect for fans of the Serpent & Dove series.

RECOMMENDED FOR

13+, Years 8-12

THEMES

Fantasy, magic, friendship, feminism, society

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SYNOPSIS

Maude is the daughter of witches. She spent her childhood running wild with her best friend, Odette, weaving stories of girls who slayed dragons and saved princes. Then Maude grew up and lost her magic – and her best friend. Storytelling is her only gift that remains.

Odette always hungered for forbidden, dangerous magic, and two weeks ago she went searching for it. Now she's missing, and everyone believes she's dead. Everyone except Maude.

Maude is sure she can find Odette inside the ruins of Sicklehurst, an abandoned power plant built over an ancient magical forest –a place nobody else seems to remember is there. The danger is, nobody knows what remains *inside* Sicklehurst, either. And every good story is sure to have a monster ...

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

'I've been working on this book for nearly a decade, and it's changed so many times I'm not really sure where it started. Perhaps with Henry Darger, eccentric Chicago outsider artist. Or with my own childhood play, where I loved being lost – lost girls, lost princesses, lost magicians. I guess it's the culmination of my obsession with lost girls, and my love of fantasy. I've always wanted to write fantasy, from the very beginning. A *Hunger of Thorns* is my reworking of the classic Lost Girl in an Enchanted Forest trope.'



IN CLASS DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Pre Reading Discussion:

- Read the Define the term 'fairy tale' and name some of the most famous fairy tales. Discuss how and when you discovered these stories and why you think they were first told. Discuss the idea that fairy tales may have begun as a means of teaching children about the perils of a dangerous world, and that they have evolved over generations to paint pictures of 'ideal' heroes and heroines. Using examples from fairy tales already mentioned, make a list of characteristics that define the leading females and males. [Expect words for females such as: beautiful, kind, young, fragile, powerless, and for males: tall, handsome, 'princely', powerful]. Now talk about the role that modern technology, mass media and books have had in challenging fairy tale tropes.

During Reading Discussion:

- *'I looked up at Odette. She was beautiful the way princesses in stories are beautiful – big eyes, pixie nose, cascading silvery hair. But there was always something behind her beauty. A raging fire, seething with heat. People were drawn to her, like moths to a candle. But her fire could burn a person right up.'* (page 9)

'...A monster that stared out through Odette's eyes and just wanted to destroy. A part of me always knew it would come – rage was Odette's gift. She had always demanded our games go deeper and darker, hunting out every malevolent presence or sinister detail that lurked in the corners of my stories.' (page 39)

How does the character of Odette 'subvert' the stereotype of the lost princess who needs saving? What about her alter ego, Ginger? Why do you think Lili Wilkinson created Ginger and how much does she return to or move away from a classic fairy tale character? By the end of the story, which of these two characters – Odette or Ginger – do you prefer and why?

- *'Plants aren't good or bad. They just are. We're the ones who make them good or bad.'* (page 46)

What do you think Nan means here? Consider how good characters in traditional fairy tales always do good things – and bad characters vice versa – and compare this with the actions of Nan, Mam and Maude in the story. In what way are each of these characters nuanced?

- *'Each stem is smothered with fat blooms, tightly packed with petals, red as blood. Long canes snake out from the bush, bristling with thorns, like talons reaching towards me.'* (page 132)

Roses and thorns play a significant role in *A Hunger of Thorns*. Make a list of times they appear in the novel and consider what symbolic importance they convey in both traditional fairy tales and this particular novel.

Witches, birds, towers and woods are common tropes in classic fairy tales. Choose one and compare and contrast its traditional symbolism with how it is portrayed in *A Hunger of Thorns*.

- *'...It's Qilin Lazuli showing off their tail at some red-carpet event. It's a real tail – not just a glamour – covered in gold fur, with a tuft at the end like a lion's....I'm not sure how I feel. Qilin is beautiful – so beautiful. But I keep thinking about how much time and money it must take to put a look like that together, without glamour. How much mettle.'* (pages 78–79)

Do you think fantasy novels can help us make sense of our own world? If so, what do you think Lili Wilkinson wanted to say about our world by creating another world where glammers exist and magic can be used to change physical appearances? Are there other elements of Maude's world that might shine a light on our own? Consider the conversation between Rufus and Maude about magic, prohibition and science on page 319.

- In Maude's world trees and plants communicate via a network of mycelium. Did you know the same thing happens in our world and scientists are only just starting to understand the process? In *A Hunger of Thorns* the mycelium helps cleanse the corrupted mettle. What benefits might a greater knowledge of mycelium deliver to our world?
- *'I cry out for every girl who was told to comb her hair and wash the mud from her face. To keep herself contained. To be ashamed of her voice, her hair, her flesh. To be quiet and good and nice. Girls are not nice. Girls are wild and fierce and powerful and I will not let anyone take that away.'* (page 393)

Compare the Maude of the early chapters of *A Hunger of Thorns* with the one in the closing scenes. How much has she changed and what key event or events caused the change?

'Rage doesn't have to destroy. It can create things too. Great things. Rage can be a fire that inspires. That motivates.' (page 342)

Do you agree with this statement? In what way is Odette and Maude's rage different? What do you think a Maude filled with 'rage' might go on to do in a future sequel?

- According to Wikipedia, fantasy novels share five key tropes (commonly recurring literary devices, motifs or cliches). These tropes are good vs evil, quest, magic, medievalism and the existence of unusual races or species. Find examples of each trope in *A Hunger of Thorns*.
- Lili Wilkinson says that her fascination for Henry Darger, an eccentric Chicago outsider artist, may have inspired her to write *A Hunger of Thorns*. Research the life and artworks of Darger and see if you can find links with the novel.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lili Wilkinson is the award-winning author of eighteen books for children and teenagers, including *After the Lights Go Out*, *The Erasure Initiative* and *How To Make A Pet Monster*. Lili established the Inky Awards at the Centre for Youth Literature, State Library of Victoria. She has a PhD in Creative Writing, and lives in Melbourne with her husband, son, dog and three chickens.