

“Brilliant.” — WALTER MOSLEY

BY *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# BARRY LYGA AND MORGAN BADEN



**GOING VIRAL JUST GOT DEADLY.**

THE HIVE

Cassie Mckinney has always believed in the Hive.

Social media used to be out of control. People were torn apart by trolls and doxxers. Even hackers — like Cassie’s dad — were powerless against it.

But then came the Hive. A better way to sanction people for what they do online. Cause trouble, get too many “condemns,” and a crowd can come after you to teach you a lesson in real life. It’s safer, fairer and perfectly legal.

Entering her senior year of high school filled with grief over an unexpected loss, Cassie is primed to lash out. Egged on by new friends, she makes an edgy joke online. Cassie doubts anyone will notice.

But the Hive notices everything. And as her viral comment whips the entire country into a frenzy, the Hive demands retribution.

One moment Cassie is anonymous; the next, she’s infamous. And running for her life.

With nowhere to turn, she must learn to rely on herself — and a group of Hive outcasts who may not be reliable — as she slowly uncovers the truth about the machine behind the Hive.

*The Hive* is a breathless race through the day after tomorrow, where online and real life are blurred beyond recognition, and social media casts ever-darker shadows.

0111001010011010100100  
1010101010000001010111  
0100001111010110000011  
1110000101101001110001  
0001011110000110100101  
1010011101110011100000  
0010010**THE HIVE**0010100  
0111001010010010100100  
1010101010000001010111  
0100001011010111011000  
1110000101101001110001  
0001010100000110101101  
1010001001110010100110



0111001010011010100100  
1010101010000001010111  
0100001111010110000011  
1110000101101001110001  
0001011110000110100101  
1010011101110011100000  
0010010**THE HIVE**0010100  
0111001010010010100100  
1010101010000001010111  
0100001011010111011000  
1110000101101001110001  
0001010100000110101101  
1010001001110010100110

**BARRY LYGA & MORGAN BADEN**

CONCEPT BY **JENNIFER BEALS**  
& **TOM JACOBSON**



KCP Loft is an imprint of Kids Can Press

Text © 2019 Barry Lyga, Morgan Baden, Jennifer Beals, Tom Jacobson

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior written permission of Kids Can Press Ltd. or, in case of photocopying or other reprographic copying, a license from The Canadian Copyright Licensing Agency (Access Copyright). For an Access Copyright license, visit [www.accesscopyright.ca](http://www.accesscopyright.ca) or call toll free to 1-800-893-5777.

This is a work of fiction and any resemblance of characters to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

Many of the designations used by manufacturers and sellers to distinguish their products are claimed as trademarks. Where those designations appear in this book and Kids Can Press Ltd. was aware of a trademark claim, the designations have been printed in initial capital letters (e.g., Microsoft).

Kids Can Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Ontario, through Ontario Creates.

Published in Canada and the U.S. by Kids Can Press Ltd.  
25 Dockside Drive, Toronto, ON M5A 0B5

Kids Can Press is a Corus Entertainment Inc. company

[www.kidscanpress.com](http://www.kidscanpress.com)

The text is set in Minion Pro and Menlo.

Edited by Kate Egan

Designed by Emma Dolan

Printed and bound in the United States, in 6/2019  
by LSC Communications.

CM 19 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



### **Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication**

Lyga, Barry, author

The hive / Barry Lyga, Morgan Baden, Jennifer Beals, Tom Jacobson.

Based on a story proposal by Jennifer Beals and Tom Jacobson.

ISBN 978-1-5253-0060-8 (hardcover)

I. Baden, Morgan, author II. Beals, Jennifer III. Jacobson, Tom  
IV. Title.

PZ7.L9995Hiv 2019

j813'.6

C2018-906094-8

Today, the promise of the internet is finally fulfilled in America. It's going to be big. And beautiful. And I think people are really gonna like it, and I think it's going to be very good for the United States of America.

— the President of the United States,  
announcing the Heuristic Internet Vetting Engine









Welcome to

# BLiNQ

---

Trend  Positive!

Hello, **CassieMcK39!**

So far today you have:

 4

 1

 0



Any mobs today? I have the day off and I'm bored!

**#SaveMeFromMyself**

Nice day for some Hive Justice! Look at that sunshine!

Who's heading to **#MonsterNotAMan**?

**#BLINQReaderPoll3995**: Is **#MichaelJones** a monster or a man?

Vote: [bl.inq/poll3995](https://bl.inq/poll3995)

HIVE ALERT: **#MonsterNotAMan** rally happening now in Rasche Field.

I just voted MONSTER in **#BLINQReaderPoll3995**, join me:

**#MonsterNotAMan** Vote: [bl.inq/poll3995](https://bl.inq/poll3995)

ENTERTAINMENT NEWS ALERT: Rumor has it **#MichaelJones's** wife will be appearing at today's rally. What will she be wearing? Streaming now at [enewsalert.hive.gov/3995](https://enewsalert.hive.gov/3995). **#MonsterNotAMan**

What kind of man does this to his wife and children? An animal, that's who. **#MeetMeAtRascheField #MonsterNotAMan**

I just voted MONSTER in **#BLINQReaderPoll3995**, join me:

**#MonsterNotAMan** Vote: [bl.inq/poll3995](https://bl.inq/poll3995)

How much must it suck to be related to **#MichaelJones** right now? Poor kids. **#MonsterNotAMan**

HIVE ALERT: **#MichaelJones** has arrived. Hive Justice set to begin momentarily. **#RascheField #MonsterNotAMan**



10010100101

Somewhere nearby, shit was going down, and Cassie had to be a part of it.

She followed the crowd down a block lined with shady trees and around a corner that she remembered well. They were heading to the baseball field in her old neighborhood, the one where Cassie had swung and missed more times than she could count. The one where Cassie's dad, Harlon McKinney, had hugged her after a skinned knee, after a tough loss, after a mean joke from the pitcher. Now, with every step she took, her blood ran hotter, her breath pulsed quicker in her lungs.

She raised a hand to shield her eyes from the blinding sun, which had just peeked out over the trees like it knew the crowd needed its own audience.

As she approached the field, the charge in the air became palpable. These people, despite their varied ages, races and backgrounds, had a shared mission, and Cassie felt their energy in her body. Her fingers twitched, her stomach knotted. *Let's do this,*

she thought. And then, smaller: *Please let me feel something new. Anything.*

Her mother had disabled Hive Alerts on her phone, but there was nothing her mother could do to her phone that Cassie couldn't undo. Rachel was a classics professor, not a coder. Cassie's phone wasn't even running the software it had come with — it ran a custom variant she and her dad had cobbled together.

Now its sudden burst of pings made her jump. This was it. All around her, people were receiving the same notification she had just heard through her earbud: he was here.

The crowd roared, so Cassie did, too, the sound surprising her as it reached up her throat, around her teeth. It felt unexpectedly good to yell. Because all the others around her were stomping their feet and shaking their fists, she did as well, and that also felt good, kind of. It was real, and it wasn't pain, so that counted for something.

Cassie tried not to think about it too deeply, but for months she hadn't been able to shake the feeling that she was viewing the world from a distance, like she was occupying a different physical plane from everyone around her. Here, in this moment, Cassie thought — maybe — she could see things normally again. She could *feel* things normally again. She could belong.

And right now, she belonged *here*, at Rasche Field, with the others who'd also been drawn here by GPS and Wi-Fi and the unrelenting triangulation of cell towers.

“Do your justice,” the synthetic voice in her ear said, followed by the hashtag. Everyone else heard the same.

Cassie had always hated being tall, a trait she'd inherited from her dad, but today it felt like a sign. Her first Hive Mob and she



practically had a front-row seat. She saw the perpetrator immediately: a slight, sandy-haired man, his head down, climbing the bleachers, as he'd been instructed to do by the thousands who logged their votes locally. It took him forever to reach the top. When he finally did, Cassie took note of how his shoulders, which had been sagging, suddenly straightened; how his slight frame suddenly seemed to grow in size. This man was determined, Cassie realized.

Almost ... proud.

Well, he wouldn't be proud for long. He'd humiliated his family in public by writing an anonymous blog in which he'd detailed his ambivalence about his relationships with his wife and his children. Honesty on social media was admirable, but there were limits. After a particular post with the confession that his response to his wife's cancer diagnosis was to tell her he didn't love her anymore, his blog went viral, and the usual doxx gangs quickly uncovered his identity. His Dislikes and Condemns skyrocketed — even Cassie had shared the call to Condemn him, and she barely shared anything online these days.

Overnight, Hive Justice was declared, and #publicjunk was agreed to be an appropriate sentence. So justice would be served, right here, right now. As punishment for his indiscretion, he'd be forced to parade around town naked, with the words "World's Worst Husband and Father" written on his chest.

Someone started chanting — "Monster, not a man!" — and Cassie joined in, even though it was a dumb chant. But the chant wasn't the point of all this, was it? It was the togetherness, Cassie knew. The unity. That's what everyone said, anyway. She tried to say the words again, to be a part of it all, but the chant caught in

her throat. She coughed as she watched the man on the bleachers square his shoulders again, like he could form a barrier around himself before things got started. The sun shifted overhead, brightening the field even more, giving Cassie a clearer look at him. She blinked. There was something about his face ... for a second Cassie wondered if she knew him.

Still waiting on the top row of the bleachers, the man took off his glasses, folded them carefully and placed them in his left shirt pocket. Then he patted them. Twice.

Cassie's stomach heaved.

"Dad," she whispered.

Around her, the crowd quieted.

"Wait," Cassie said. No one heard her.

A woman with a bright scarf wrapped around her head, carrying a marker, climbed the bleachers. Noticing her, the man began unbuttoning his shirt. The sunlight gleamed off his sandy hair. Cassie struggled to catch her breath.

"Mark him!" someone behind Cassie yelled. Bursts of applause followed. The new chant thrummed — "Mark him! Mark him!" — on the bleachers, the perfect stage for the crowd in the field; the woman had approached the top, and the man had removed every item of clothing. He was completely naked, completely vulnerable. Cassie averted her eyes and tried to squelch the hot nausea climbing her throat.

She struggled to even her breathing. "It's not him," she whispered to herself. She knew that. He was white, for one thing. But still. He was *a* dad, someone's dad, and her own father, like this man, was always taking off his glasses and putting them in his pocket for safekeeping. Her limbs felt shaky and loose. What

happened to the energy, the charge she'd felt just moments ago? The camaraderie?

The woman held the marker up to the crowd. Cassie expected her to be giddy, to smile at least, but instead her face was expressionless. She appeared to hesitate, then leaned in and gave the man a quick peck on the cheek. He closed his eyes in response.

The crowd, though, savored this moment. They clapped harder while Cassie felt herself shrinking back into the shell she'd formed so many months ago.

"A-ni-mal!" a little girl next to her roared. Cassie stared at her, this tiny angelic-looking thing whose eyes were burning, whose teeth were practically bared. She looked like she couldn't hurt a fly but yearned to do damage.

Cassie blinked. She looked around at the others, each of them cheering at the scene unfolding before them. On the bleachers, the woman began writing on the man's chest. He stood naked and perfectly still. Cassie turned away.

"I have to get out of here," she wheezed, and started to push back the way she came. Bodies everywhere. Cassie struggled, dodging elbows and shoulders and fists, trying to breathe.

Finally, a break in the crowd. She hit the open field and broke into a run. The sun was hot now, pounding on the back of her neck, her knees. The noise of the Hive Mob behind her quieted enough for her to clear her mind, to think again. She slowed to a jog, then a trot, kicking up the light brown dirt under her feet. It floated around her, making it hard to see. Any moment of clarity Cassie had had, any seconds when she hadn't felt like she was separated from the rest of humanity, were gone. *Poof.*

Behind her, the man was getting ready to spend his day naked

in public, where the whole world could see his shame. He would be streamed live online, where people would comment and laugh and share. His wife would be even more humiliated. His kids, too. And Cassie had helped. Had cornered him at the field, left him nowhere to go.

That's what she'd wanted, right? To mete out the sort of immediate justice that the world demanded? To feel the righteous thrill of the mob at her back?

She was going to be sick. She ran through the neighborhood, through the shade of the trees she'd grown up under, across streets and around corners until she reached her house.

Wait. Her *old* house.

"Dammit!" Cassie yelled, fists clenched at her sides. She stood in the middle of her old street, in front of the house that had been sold to new owners just a few weeks before. She'd been so desperate to flee that she hadn't been thinking; she'd just relied on muscle memory. Her new apartment was in the city. She'd have to ride a bus to get there.

"Thanks, Mom," Cassie mumbled. Rachel always ruined everything.

Luckily, Cassie knew the bus stop was nearby. She hurried there and caught the next one just in time. On the bus, she ignored all the BLINQs coming in to her feed and tried to settle her stomach. If she didn't think about it, about #publicjunk and the man who didn't look like her dad but could have been him anyway, about the press of the crowd and the little girl's blazing eyes, she was fine.

The bus ride was quick enough. When she got off, the sun hid behind towers and the air felt thicker. Cassie hated the city,

but she had to admit it was at least useful: when you didn't feel like making eye contact, when you felt like you couldn't hold it together for another second, everyone left you alone.

"Cassie!" Rachel exclaimed when Cassie burst through the door to their cramped new apartment. She was sitting at the tiny kitchen table, laptop open, surrounded by books. "You OK?"

"Later, Mom," Cassie said. She went straight to her bedroom and slammed the door.

In her bedroom, Cassie dived onto her bed and fumbled at her phone's screen. Once the chat app opened, her breathing returned to normal. Everything was OK. She was safe.

**Dad, she texted, today is horrible.**

The response from her dad was instantaneous. **Hey there, kiddo. Any day you can walk away from is a good one, right?**

She groaned. Her dad's mordant sense of humor always had the ironic effect of making her feel better.

**I miss you so much,** Cassie wrote.

**I miss you and I love you.**

Cassie stared at her dad's words for a few minutes, letting them warm her the way they always did. There was an ache inside her without him around, like someone had torn a chunk of her body away and now she was expected to just live like that, without the very piece that made her a whole person. The only thing that filled that ache was anger. Some part of her knew that it wasn't healthy to walk around angry all the time, but it felt so much better than the pain.

She started to write back, needing to work out her thoughts about the day. He wouldn't have an answer for this one, would

he? **So, Dad, I joined my first Hive Mob today ... I was punishing a person whose name I can't even remember, if I ever knew it in the first place.**

Then her mom burst through her door.

"Mom!" Cassie said hotly. "Jesus! Knock first!"

Rachel grimaced. "You're right. I'm sorry. But we talked about you texting your dad —"

"Who says that's what I'm doing?"

Her mom crossed her arms over her chest, leaned against the door and stared. Cassie scowled at her with deep, abiding rage. There was plenty left over from her aborted attempt at Hive Justice. All that anger and froth had to go somewhere. Mom was as good a target as any.

Instead of fleeing or bursting into flame, her mother sighed and sat gingerly on the edge of Cassie's bed.

"Honey, we talked about this, right? About texting him?" Rachel tried to smooth a lock of Cassie's dark hair, which was pulled into a knot at the top of her head, but Cassie batted her hand away.

Inside, the jumble of emotions that had been competing for her attention all day kindled. Cassie knew that if her mom lit the match, things would explode.

She set her jaw — her defiance another trait inherited from her dad — and glared at Rachel. Her voice was cold. "You can't keep me from talking to him."

Rachel glared back at Cassie for a moment. "Actually, I can."

Rachel hated this part, the part where her daughter was finally feeling something, and she had to go and ruin it. As tears started to spill over Cassie's cheeks, Rachel steeled herself. Her only child was approaching meltdown, but she had to keep herself together for both of them. This was hard for her, too. Different, but just as maddening.

Rachel saw her husband in Cassie's big brown eyes, in her height, in the tiny dimple she had when she smiled. She never got to see that dimple these days. So what if Cassie needed to text her dad? Rachel felt herself caving, even though she knew it wasn't healthy. Even the therapist had said so.

Then again, Dr. Gillen was long gone, along with the extra funds to afford him. He wasn't there to see how Cassie changed when she talked to her dad, how she morphed back into the care-free, loving, spunky kid she deserved to be. Even if it was only for a few minutes.

"Please, Mom," Cassie whispered again. Outside, the city noises seemed to fall away, leaving a quiet, a peace Rachel hadn't heard in ... well, in six months.

"OK," Rachel relented. "For now."

Rachel wasn't even out the door before she heard the blips and pops of Cassie's keyboard. A car honked outside, and the subway vibrated under her feet, even up here on the tenth floor.

*Ping.* Whatever Cassie had texted, she'd gotten a response.

It was all Rachel could do not to grab the phone from her daughter's hands to see what Harlon had written. She gripped the doorknob, her knuckles white, and shut it behind her. In the dark hallway she closed her eyes and counted to ten.

Of course, she reminded herself, padding back into the

kitchen-slash-office-slash-dining room, it wasn't Harlon. Not really.

It couldn't be Harlon, because they'd buried him six months ago.



# 10010200101

Cassie made a face at herself in the bathroom mirror, still foggy from her shower. In the old days, she would do her hair, sweep on some mascara. But these were new days. She pulled her hair into another topknot and, doubling down, even decided to forgo her trademark berry-red lipstick. Who was she trying to impress anyway? The kids at her new school? Hard pass. They wouldn't give a damn about her, so why not return the favor?

The one thing she refused to compromise on, though, was her bracelet. She would wear it today as she wore it every day. It was a simple gold chain with ten colored stones on it. Not even real gems — just cheap knock-offs. But her dad had given it to her, so she adored it.

When she burst into the kitchen to grab breakfast, she stopped short at the look on Rachel's face. "What?" she snapped. Her hands flew to her lips, to her hair. Maybe she looked *really* bad, even for her.

Her mom's mouth had shrunk to a shriveled pucker, so tightly

was she pursing her lips. Cassie realized for the first time how tired her mom looked, how the lines around her eyes and mouth had deepened. She was even more pale than usual, her skin almost translucent. Rachel shook her head tersely, fatigue and anger radiating from her in nearly visible waves.

“What, Mom?” Annoyance was overtaken by a jolt of worry then; she had a sudden flashback to that unspeakable day six months ago. Was Rachel about to say something else that would make Cassie’s life explode into pieces again? She wouldn’t be able to take that.

*It’s about your father. It’s about —*

But there was nothing left to explode, Cassie reminded herself. Nothing left to be taken from her. Rachel could say anything, and no matter how bad it was, it wouldn’t make a difference. Things were already rock bottom for Cassie: Dad gone. Shitty new apartment. No doubt a shitty new school. No friends. And of course, nothing to wear, just to add insult to a festering pile of injuries.

When Rachel finally spoke, her voice was strained, like she was struggling to be heard through a wall. “What. Is. This.”

Rachel spun her tablet around on the table, showing a video to Cassie. It took Cassie a few confusing seconds to understand why Rachel was so pissed.

Someone had recorded the Hive Mob yesterday. And there, clear as the blue sky overhead, was Cassie. Her height and pitch-black hair drew the camera to her again and again as it panned over the crowd, shouts and chants drowning out whatever Rachel was saying now.

The sick feeling started to bubble in Cassie’s throat again, the same one that made her turn and run yesterday. Only this

time she held it down, forcing it back into the pit of darkness she carried around with her these days.

As she watched the video, which was trending online, she was captivated. Watching yourself on-screen when you don't know you're being filmed is a total trip — though of course, everyone was filmed everywhere these days. It was like she was watching a twin she didn't know she had. As the video played, Cassie could see it in her eyes: the weakness. The fear. If she had been stronger, she would have stayed. If the perpetrator hadn't reminded her of her dad, well ... the video wouldn't be showing her turning her back and running away. Like a child.

She wouldn't make that mistake again.

"Do you hear me, Cass?" Rachel flipped off the tablet. The juxtaposition of the screams of the video and the sudden silence of the kitchen made Cassie feel underwater, out of sorts. "What did we talk about? You are not to participate in this garbage!"

"Garbage?" Cassie shook her head. Only someone who hadn't felt the goose bumps on her arms from the energy of a Hive could call it garbage. And her mom, who barely knew how to operate her email, definitely didn't get it. "Mom, this is the way the world works. Don't you care about progress? About justice?"

"This isn't justice!" Rachel slammed her palm on the table so hard that her coffee cup jiggled and threatened to capsize. "Justice isn't hunting down some miserable guy who was venting about the hand life dealt him and —"

"This *is* justice now!" Cassie jabbed a pointed finger toward the window. "This is how we do things now!"

"Other countries don't do this," Rachel pleaded.

"That doesn't make it wrong," Cassie snapped.

“Or right!” Rachel shot back.

“Are we really going to have this fight again?” Cassie rolled her eyes. “Our greatest hits, right? Let me know if you forget your lines.”

As soon as Rachel’s skin bloomed into that particular shade of purple that it turned whenever she lost her temper with her only child, Cassie tuned her out. It was like someone muted the room; Rachel’s voice just became background noise, blending in to the traffic and sounds of people outside. They’d been having this particular argument forever, it seemed.

Cassie could barely remember what it was like before Hive Justice. Her dad used to tell her about the days when someone’s name trending on Twitter usually meant they had died or, best case, had dropped an unannounced album. But slowly, the online behaviors that were and were not acceptable began to change.

“People act mean when you give them the permission to,” Harlon used to say. Any slight that someone shared, perceived or genuine, became fodder for vicious threats, harassment, doxxing. Send a mean tweet to an ex? Your name, your address, even your grade point average were almost immediately uncovered and broadcast to the world, potentially turning hundreds of millions of users against you. And it was all fair game. Cassie remembered a neighbor close to their old house, a sweet old woman who liked to spend most of her time gardening. She’d been the first person Cassie had known to be virtually shunned after she posted a photograph making light of some bad landscaping she’d seen in the neighborhood. Her photo went viral, and soon the internet hated her. She was a bully, a bitch. Her sharp tongue was a “microaggression cannon,” a danger to society. Eventually, she’d

had to sell her house after groups of angry people kept showing up unannounced and pulling the flowers out of her garden, leaving a graveyard of colors on the street. Cassie didn't know where the woman lived now. But she was sure she didn't make fun of people anymore, wherever she was.

So that's what it was like in the beginning: slowly, people online became the judge and jury for all "uncivilized" online behaviors. This condemnatory mass of the social media majority became known as the Hive, responsible for identifying and punishing whatever actions were deemed socially unacceptable.

With frightening speed, the Hive became known for its outright vigilante violence. With the national social media engagement rate at nearly 99 percent, anyone who was believed to have done something wrong was hunted down by angry crowds that meted out "justice," as the internet deemed it.

At first, the Hive was considered the price you paid for living in a free and open society, the way so many people used to treat mass shootings.

Then came the riots. After a series of them in several cities, the government was forced to catch up and enact legislation to control them the best they could. But the Hive was decentralized. There were no leaders. There were no plans to disrupt. It just *was*.

"It was us," Harlon had said to Cassie. "We met the Hive and it was us." And then he'd laughed in that way that told her he'd just made a reference to something old, something she'd have to look up if she ever wanted to understand it.

It was too late to take away their power — the Hive was too big by then — but it could be directed. Channeled. With the help of all the big technology companies running the internet, the

government set up new algorithms to legislate the management of the Hive's justice system. A new, mandatory social media platform — BLINQ, available only to U.S. citizens — came into being, aggregating content from all the other platforms, making it easier to see a person's whole social profile in one place. You could still Like or Dislike a person's activity, just as before ... but now you could also Condemn. And once a user's Condemns hit a certain threshold, weighted by things like speed of virality and past social media content, they were officially sanctioned.

Which meant actual consequences.

In the analog world, where things were physical not digital, the courts still played their role. Crimes — robberies and embezzlements and assaults — were still all cops and lawyers and that antiquated crap. But everyone finally realized that the only way to police the internet was *with* and *through* the internet. For years, they'd tried applying the old analog tools to the digital frontier. It was a losing battle, as anyone who knew anything about the internet could have guessed. Now, people were fully accountable for their online behavior ... and faced real-world consequences.

And, as Cassie repeated to Rachel whenever she went on one of her anti-Hive crusades, things were better now. People were more careful online, more responsible. How could that be wrong, no matter how much her mother bitched about it?

"I'm late for school," Cassie said airily, right in the middle of her mother's diatribe. "One of us should probably care."

Rachel hated yelling. And she didn't yell, usually. But Cassie getting involved in Hive Justice ... well, that was guaranteed to nuke her self-control, not to mention trigger a migraine. Had Cassie been listening at all? It was hard to tell. Cassie had mastered her facial expressions in such a way that Rachel couldn't decipher her feelings. "Perfect Teenage Apathy Affect," Harlon had called it.

Harlon. Jesus, Harlon. The part of her that she still allowed to dream and fantasize believed that if he hadn't died, none of this would be happening.

Cassie was right about one thing.

Rachel's eyes fell on the clock on the stove. "Shi — crap!" She tried not to swear in front of Cassie; she had a beautifully naive theory that her daughter would start modeling her mother's behavior one of these days. "We're going to be late!"

"Yep," Cassie said mildly. So maybe she *was* listening? Rachel shook her head. It didn't matter. It was a big day for both of them: Cassie was starting her senior year at Westfield High School, and Rachel was starting her new professorship at Microsoft/Buzzfeed University. Maybe, she thought as she threw a granola bar and an apple into her briefcase, they should celebrate tonight. Maybe she'd order Thai. It was a splurge, but it was also Cassie's favorite.

Preparing for this new job had distracted Rachel from Harlon's death, and for that she was grateful. But she was also terrified, somewhere deep down inside of her, in a place she couldn't let Cassie — or anyone — see. As a part-time professor at the local community college in their old neighborhood, Rachel taught a few classics courses each semester, leaving plenty of time

to join the parent-teacher association at Cassie's school and to attend most of her soccer games and math meets. Not that Cassie particularly cared, Rachel remembered; no matter how many times she'd sat in the bleachers to cheer Cassie on, Cassie had been disappointed if Harlon wasn't there, too.

But Harlon had been a computer engineer at some of the biggest technology companies in the world and at some of the smallest but most influential; his frequent work travel had been a thorn in their marriage. After his death, she'd discovered that they were in fairly deep financial trouble in spite of his constant work, thanks to some bad investments and Harlon's expensive technology hobbies. He had done a fantastic job keeping it a secret from her. Sometimes, it made her weep with regret, quietly, when Cassie was asleep. Other times, usually in the harsh light of day, it made her want to throw things. Why hadn't Harlon prepared her? Why had he been so secretive for so long?

Rachel had had no choice but to sell their house, pay off their debts and find a smaller (OK, *significantly* smaller) place in the city, where she could find a better-paying job. Even she had been surprised when MS/BFU contacted her for an interview. The university was a tiny, private one that had a well-deserved reputation for having a student body that descended from the wealthiest of the wealthy. Its students' parents were founders and CEOs of luxury companies and technology firms, investment bankers and entrepreneurs, and oil and gas tycoons. While no student these days was clamoring for a classics education, their parents — the ones footing the bill — still thought it necessary. How she was supposed to reach kids like that, she had no idea.

Cassie stood at the front door, tapping her foot. She raised



her eyebrows in that bored, testing way when Rachel froze at the sight of her. Rachel couldn't help it. She was suddenly struck by how grown-up her daughter was, with her height and her attitude, with the way her eyes seemed to have millions of stories to tell. Grown-up, Rachel noticed, but also damaged.

\*

Outside, two men — it was always two men — waiting in an unmarked black sedan sipped the remnants of their coffee, the loose grinds sticking to the white paper cups in polka-dot patterns that could've been read like tea leaves. They'd been parked long enough that the coffee was nearing just that temperature that made you grit your teeth while you choked it down, that made you question why anyone drank coffee at all.

They'd been there since the sun came up. It was the first day of school for both Rachel and Cassie McKinney, and they weren't yet sure what their weekday schedules would entail. The top brass had demanded they make an early go of it. So here they were, slumped in well-worn seats.

Finally, there was movement.

Man One tapped the shoe of Man Two, who had crossed his long legs so that they imposed on Man One's space. Both men sat up, but coolly, like they'd done this a million times before.

They had, of course.

"Targets spotted," Man One murmured into his headset. He awaited further instructions. They had only one car, and the big brass would need to direct them on which target to follow.

The directive, when it finally came a few seconds later, was

clear.

“Roger,” Man One said, nodding curtly. He waited until the targets had reached the end of the block, and then he started the car.

In the city’s morning bustle, no one noticed.

# 1001ACKNOWLEDGMENTS0101

This book wouldn't exist without Jennifer and Tom, and we are so grateful to them for first conjuring Cassie and her world, and then for trusting us to take on this story. Thank you!

We'd also like to thank the fearless and thoughtful Kate Egan, our editor, and Lisa Lyons, as well as all the folks at KCP, including Alison Reid, Emma Dolan, Olga Kidisevic, Kate Patrick and Naseem Hrab. A shout-out to Eddie Gamarra of the Gotham Group, who brought the four of us together in something approximating harmony. ;) Thanks to Ryan Douglass as well.

Special thanks and a bottle of very expensive bourbon to our peerless agent, Kathleen Anderson, who did yeoman's work in making this project a reality. Thank you, Kathy!

Thanks to everyone who offered support while we wrote this book (in between babies and jobs and deadlines!), including the Badens, the Bershteins, the Lygas, the Guslers, and the Coven. Special shout-out to New Jersey Transit for all the train delays, which led to lots of unexpected extra writing time!

Last but not least, thanks to our two children, who have no clue what any of this is about because they're too young, but someday they'll get it and be super-embarrassed, which is all a parent can hope for.



ORDER  
YOUR  
COPY  
TODAY



Husband-and-wife writing duo **BARRY LYGA** and **MORGAN BADEN** have published more than two dozen novels collectively, but *The Hive* is their first collaboration ... unless you count their two kids. Barry is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the *I Hunt Killers* trilogy, as well as such critically acclaimed novels as *Boy Toy* and *Bang*. Morgan is a *New York Times* bestselling ghostwriter, as well as a social media expert. They live outside New York City, in a house bursting with books.

Jacket design by Emma Dolan  
Jacket image courtesy of iStock.com/Joen Stock  
Author photo © Gina Asprocolas

[www.kcploft.com](http://www.kcploft.com)

## PRAISE FOR *THE HIVE*:

“A brilliant doomsday warning about the perils of social media, justice and mob thought, *THE HIVE* is also the complex story of a young girl coming of age. This is a novel about ideas, love, grief and what hold the tricky narratives of history have on the violence of the present.”

— **WALTER MOSLEY**

“Everybody told you to quit social media, and you didn’t listen. *THE HIVE* is your last warning. Thrilling, chilling, nightmare-fulfilling, *THE HIVE* is a wild, spooky ride into a terrifying future that looks a lot like tomorrow.”

— **PAUL GRIFFIN**, author of *Adrift*

“Mob justice rules the internet in this thrilling debut from Lyga and Baden. You’ll never look at your phone the same way again.”

— **ALLEN ZADOFF**, author of *The Unknown Assassin* series

