

# A Hunger of Thorns

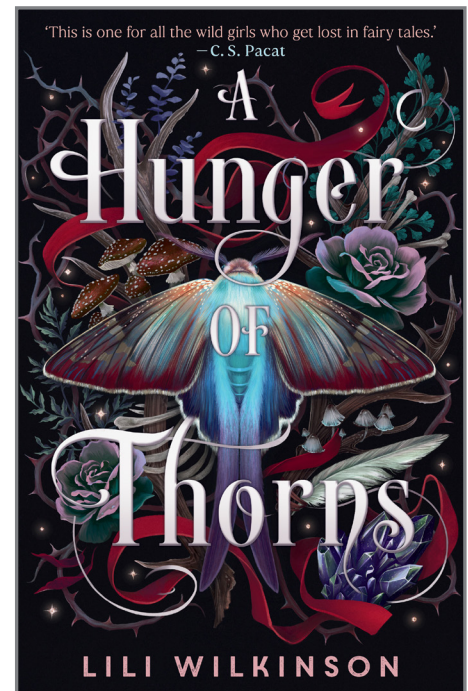
AUTHOR

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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Mid to Upper Secondary  
(Language, Sexual References)



## 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 . . .

## 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.

## THEMES

- Fantasy
- Magic
- Friendship
- Feminism
- Society

## STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the following questions about fairytales:
  - Define the term 'fairy tale' and name some of the most famous fairytales. Discuss how and when you discovered these stories and why you think they were first told.
  - Discuss the idea that fairytales 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 fairytales 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 fairytale tropes.
- 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 the author, 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.' (p 46) What do you think Nan means here? Consider how good characters in traditional fairytales 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?
- 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 fairytales and this particular novel.
- Witches, birds, towers and woods are common tropes in classic fairytales. Choose one and compare and contrast its traditional symbolism with how it is portrayed in *A Hunger of Thorns*.
- Do you think fantasy novels can help us make sense of our own world? If so, what do you think the author 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 p 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?
- 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.' (p 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*.
- The author, 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.