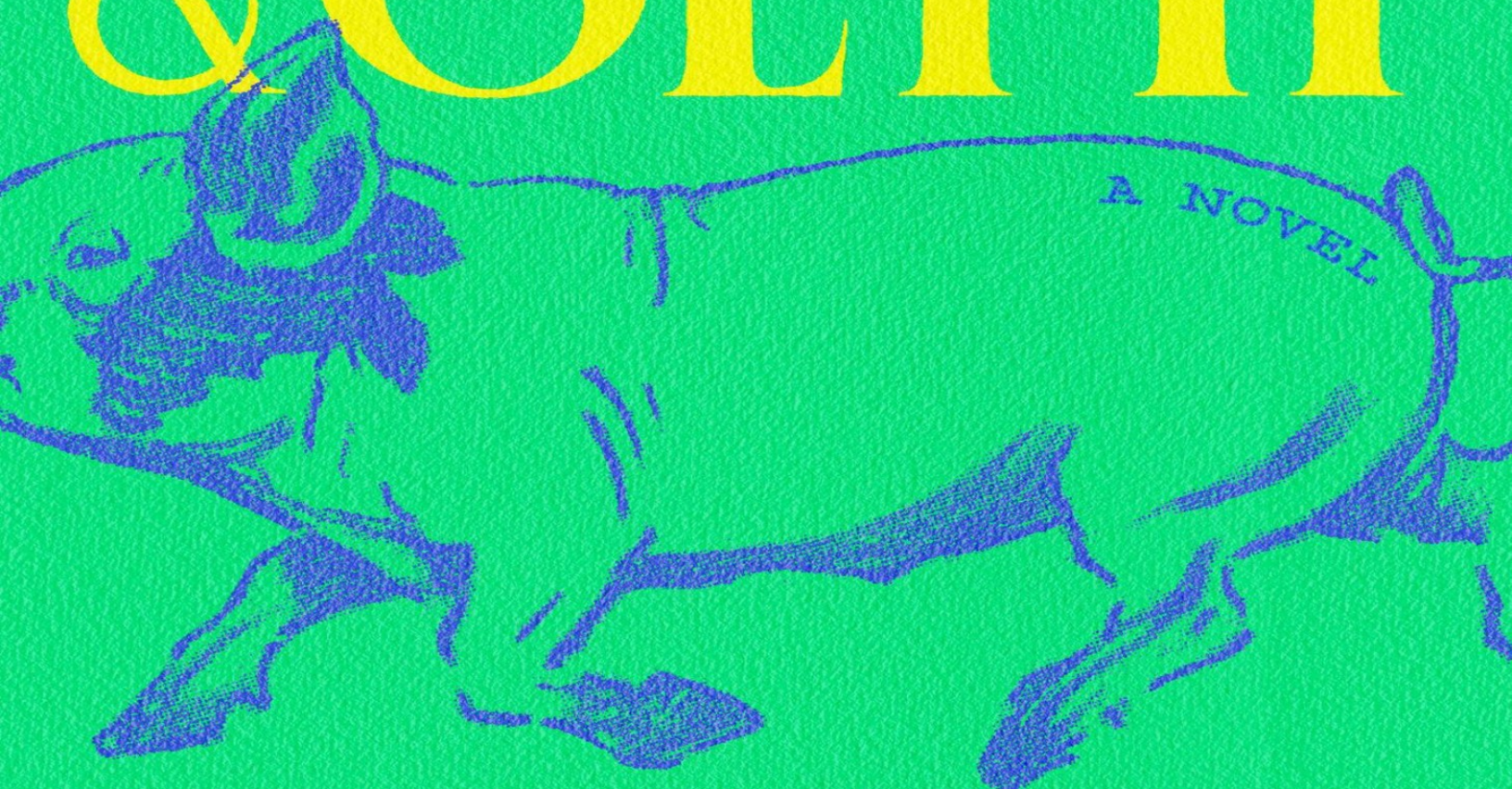


# COME & GET IT



NEW YORK TIMES  
BESTSELLING  
AUTHOR OF

*Such a Fun Age*

# KILEY REID

**ALSO BY KILEY REID**

*Such a Fun Age*

COME  
AND  
GET IT

*A Novel*

KILEY REID

**G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS**

New York

**PUTNAM**

— EST. 1838 —

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

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For Caleb Way

I don't want to spend eternity with the lights off. I'll buy the most expensive, longest lasting bulbs, and charge them to my Amex.

—Lucy Biederman, *The Walmart Book of the Dead*

We're all working together: that's the secret.

—Sam Walton, *Sam Walton: Made in America*

# 1.

**A**GATHA PAUL STOOD IN FRONT OF BELGRADE DORMITORY AT 6:59 p.m. One block down was an ice cream store with outside seating and young women holding paper cups. An Airstream trailer with a colorful pennant banner was selling tacos across the street. Two students with large backpacks walked past her toward the dormitory entrance. One said, “No, I’ve actually had oatmeal every day this week.” The other opened the door with a key fob and said, “See, I need to start doing that, too.”

A moment later, through a partially frosted glass door, Agatha saw brown Birkenstocks hustling across a tile floor. She didn’t know what Millie looked like, but she immediately assumed that these shoes belonged to her.

“Hi, Agatha?” she said. She opened the door with an outstretched hand. On her chest was a lanyard weighted with keys, an ID case, and hand sanitizer.

“Yes. Millie? Hi.” Agatha shook her hand. “Thanks for setting this up.”

“No worries. Come on in.”

Agatha stepped into the dorm. The paneled ceiling lights in the lobby were the kind that made her skin look transparent and baby pink. There was a front desk behind a glass window. An overloaded bulletin board: kickball sign-up, dining hall menus, and flyers for movie nights (*Beetlejuice*, *Pitch Perfect 2*). The dorm smelled both dirty and artificially clean. There was a faint Febreze scent and something candied in the air. It smelled like perfume purchased from a clothing store, like Victoria’s Secret or the Gap.

Millie waved to a Black woman sitting behind the sliding glass. “Can I get the sign-in sheet, please?” she asked. The woman swiveled in her seat and said, “Yes, you can.” Agatha signed her name beneath a few others: David.

Hailey. Aria. Chase. She hadn't seen this many Black people (Millie and this security guard) in the same room since she arrived in Fayetteville. Millie walked to the elevators and pressed a button, but then she turned around. "Our elevator is super slow," she said. "Are you okay with stairs?"

Millie wore black cotton shorts and an oversized red polo with *University of Arkansas Residence Life* embroidered in white. She had rosy brown skin, a pear-shaped form, and an expanse of dark wavy hair in a lopsided bun at the front of her skull. Millie was cute with bright eyes and large, lightly freckled cheeks. From the neck down, she looked like an adult poking fun at campus life, someone dressing like an RA for Halloween. In one arm she held a clipboard and pen. A dated cell phone was behind her waistband at her hip. In a two-finger hold was the plastic loop on a wide-mouth Nalgene bottle. It was covered in overlapping stickers; one said *Save the Buffalo River...Again!* As Agatha followed her up three flights of stairs, she decided that Millie was probably twenty-two years old. She was the type of student that college student service centers swept up for pictures and profiles. Students paid parsimoniously to give brief campus tours.

Millie bent to use the fob on her lanyard to open the stairwell door. She looked back and asked, "So you just moved here for the school year?"

"I did," Agatha said. "Are you from Arkansas?"

"No, I'm from Joplin. But I used to camp here when I was little."

"Did you go to Devil's Den?"

"Yeah. Many times."

"It's lovely over there."

Millie dipped her chin. "You've been camping already? That's impressive."

"No no, long time ago. But I should go again."

Agatha followed her down a long, bright hallway past several doorways that had pool-themed cutouts taped above the peepholes. Written in Sharpie on paper sunglasses and palm trees were names like Sophia, Molly, and Jade. Agatha had lived in a residence hall for her freshman year at Amherst, but then she moved into one of the Amherst Houses, which felt more like a

boardinghouse than it did a residence hall. Evidently, aside from her own age and the trend in baby names, everything else had stayed and smelled the same.

“Is this okay?” Millie led Agatha into a tiny room with white walls and a speckled tile floor. Near the door, a tall stool held a landline phone. There was a tilt-and-turn window at the far end, and in the center was a circular table and five chairs. Agatha was certain that whatever website boasted Belgrade Dormitory, and probably Millie herself, referred to this room as something like the Resident Lounge or Media Center. “This is perfect,” she said, and she meant it. There was a gentle tug of wholesomeness, and she liked the lack of pretension. Millie removed a Post-it from the wall. *Reserved from 8–8:45. xo Millie.*

“You’re welcome to sit in,” Agatha said, “if weddings are a thing you’re into.”

“Oh, no. I can’t,” Millie said. She swiped at the table, pushed crumbs down onto the floor. “I have to do rounds in a minute. Oh wow, that’s so nice of you.”

She was referring to the items Agatha removed from her bag. A six-pack of lemon La Croix. A cutting board and knife in a gallon Ziploc bag. Two blocks of Manchego cheese. Raw almonds. A red apple and a flecked orange.

“Yeah? You think this will be okay?”

“Oh, for sure. They like anything free. I’m gonna grab them unless you need a minute.”

Agatha pushed a chair toward the window. “No, that’s fine. I’m ready now.”

Millie left the room, but very quickly, she was back. The crumpled reservation Post-it was still in her hand. “Do you mind what they call you?”

Agatha leaned forward on her arms.

“Do you prefer Miss Agatha? Or—sorry. Professor?”

“Oh. No no,” she laughed. “Agatha is just fine.”

Agatha’s first real writing assignment had been a campsite review, when, at twenty-five years old, she drove a rental car to six different states. In

Georgia, she started a fire without matches. In Louisiana she was bitten by a dog on her lower thigh (she gave herself two temporary stitches to hold the wound closed). And here, in the Ozarks, she started writing her first book. She spent two nights each in Devil's Den, Tyler Bend, and Mount Magazine State Park. Perhaps it was silly to feel a connection toward a state she'd spent only six nights in, where she'd talked to fewer than four people, but this appreciation, however dormant it had been for thirteen years, was considerable enough to make her submit a recent change of address.

Fayetteville, Arkansas, had a screen-saver, campus-visit, Scholastic Book Fair beauty to it. There was a thirty-six-mile bike trail called the Frisco Trailway that crossed a stream not too far from Agatha's home. It was spotted with overly courteous biking couples ("On your right, ma'am. Thanks so much"). Every Saturday morning in the town square was quite possibly the cutest farmers market Agatha had ever seen. She walked with a weekend pace, drank iced coffee, and bought eggs the color of wet sand. One Saturday, she spotted a little bakery that said *Stop in for a bloody* on a chalkboard outside. The young man behind the counter said, "Would you like a to-go cup?" Agatha smiled under her sunglasses. "Yes. That would be great."

She lived rent-free in a two-story, three-bedroom house that belonged to a professor on sabbatical. The house sat on a grassy hill at Wilson Park: a large block of green with a basketball court, tennis courts, two playgrounds, and a winding walking path. The park, and Fayetteville in general, was teeming with hills and trees. In many of the latter were thick webs stitched into the branches with Gothic little worms that writhed in the shade. Agatha's street was filled with enchanting homes and people much like her: academics, liberal-seeming couples, families affiliated with the university. Two blocks behind her home was sorority row. Brassy-looking houses with porches, columns, and stairs, all created with group photos in mind. There were often cars parked along her street with bumper stickers of Greek letters in white. Inside, through the windows, Agatha saw Target bags and paisley duffels. Tangled leggings in back seats. Diet Dr Pepper cans.

Agatha's previous trip to Arkansas came with the realization that she was very good at being alone. But this time, after three years in a relationship—now broken up in practice yet still married on paper—the act of experiencing a new place, however bucolic and convenient, was mostly grim and sobering. Agatha poured the almonds into a small glass bowl and laid two wedding magazines on the table. She sliced the orange into eight slivers. She took one of the La Croixs, wished it was colder, and popped it open. Being alone in a new college town was kind of like watching the local news in a hotel room. With someone else it could be amusing and fun. By yourself, it was a little depressing.

Millie returned to the room with three young women behind her. “So this is Agatha,” she said.

Agatha stood. “Hi. Thanks for coming.”

The shortest one wore sneakers and looked to be coming or going to the gym. “Oh,” she said of the cutting board. “I love that. How cute is this.”

Agatha guessed they were around twenty years old. Each young woman had a thin layer of matte-finish makeup, cotton shorts like Millie's, and long, straight hair that didn't look necessarily straightened. The most compelling correlation was the fact that each of them wore an oversized T-shirt, the colors of which were faded but deep: a butter yellow, lacinato kale blue. Seeing them, Agatha was reminded of what the dog owner had yelled back in Louisiana, just before she was bitten. *Hi!* she'd said, cupping a hand to her mouth. *Don't worry. They're friendly.*

“Hah there,” the blond one said. “So nice to meet you. Ah'm Casey.”

There weren't many on faculty or in her classes, but accents this strong could still derail her train of thought. Agatha fought that innate instinct to mimic the songlike sounds. “Hi, Casey,” she said flatly. “Nice to meet you, too.”

“Hi, I'm Jenna,” the tall one said. Jenna did not have a discernible southern accent, but she did have a dark and even tan that looked deliberate. Her hair was dark brown with light sweeps of chestnut highlights. Agatha said hello, thinking, Jenna, tall, tan. Casey, blond, accent.

“I’m Tyler,” the last one said. “Ohmygod, I love cheese like this.” She took up a piece that was impressive and big. Tyler wore a muted-blue baseball cap with a thick brown braid hanging out the back. Beneath her heather teal T-shirt she wore black biking shorts that ended a few inches above her knees. Tyler was the type of person Agatha could picture holding her phone for the entire duration of a painfully slow, high-resistance elliptical ride. There was a familiar, greedy, adolescent edge about her. It implied that she was accustomed to getting her way. Perhaps she was wrong, but pressed for time, Agatha categorized the residents like this: Jenna: tall. Casey: southern. Tyler: mean.

“So I’ll be doing rounds,” Millie said. “But text me if you need anything.”

“Thanks so much, Millie. Ladies, are you ready?”

The three young women pulled out chairs and took a seat. Agatha pushed her hair behind her ears.

“So I’m sure Millie told you the basics, but I’m Agatha Paul. I’m a visiting professor this year and I’m teaching nonfiction as well as culture and media studies in the graduate nonfiction program. I’m also doing some research on weddings and I’m really excited to ask you a bunch of questions.”

Jenna placed an apple slice in her mouth. “Is this like, for your own wedding?”

Agatha looked up and saw that her question was in earnest. “No no. My first book centered around funerals and grief. The second was about birthday celebrations. And this one will be about weddings. All of them focus on money and culture and traditions. And you’re all big wedding fans, yes?”

Jenna nodded. “That’s like, all we do.”

“What’s that?”

“We just like...” Casey laughed a bit. “We watch a lot of the highlight videos. Or we send each other things we find on Instagram or whatever.”

“Okay, great. But let’s back up. I want to make sure we start properly.”

Agatha took out her phone, switched the setting to airplane mode, and then began to record. Next, she retrieved her small, black tape recorder, pressed the recording buttons, and placed the device between the cutting



board and the young women. “As I said in the email, your names and your likenesses won’t appear anywhere in the book. So speak freely and honestly. There are no right answers.”

Casey folded her arms on the table and said, “Why did Ah just get nervous?”

“I know, me too,” Tyler said.

“There’s no need to be nervous, I promise.”

“Actually?” Jenna stood up. “Can I grab my sweatshirt? My room is like... right there.”

“Oh, of course.”

Jenna left and silence took the room. This moment was familiar: the sudden dread that it would be a struggle to pass the next forty-five minutes, let alone with something inspiring. But after hundreds of interviews in the last ten years, Agatha’s brief apprehension was eclipsed with the firsthand knowledge that, for the most part, people liked talking about themselves.

Casey pointed at a La Croix. “Do you mind if Ah take one?”

Agatha said, “No, please. Help yourself.”

Casey opened the can with both hands. “May Ah ask what type of stone that is?”

Agatha looked down at her ring. “Oh, sure. It’s called a sunstone.” She thought twice about it, then slipped the ring off her finger. She reached and handed it to Casey.

Casey held the ring up to her line of sight. “A sunstone,” she said. “That’s so neat.”

Tyler leaned into Casey. “I love that. It kind of matches your hair.”

“Huh,” Agatha said. “You’re right. I guess it does.”

Casey carefully handed the ring back. “It’s real pretty,” she said.

Agatha said, “Thank you,” and slipped it back onto her hand. When she looked back up, she found that Tyler’s brown eyes had centered on Agatha’s neck and chest.

“So this is a weird thing to say?” Tyler said. “But you dress how I want to dress when I’m older.”

Agatha wished she could fight the impulse, but her face pouted at Tyler's words. She looked down at her outfit with a "This old thing?" expression. Light blue chino pants. A white boatneck top. Gold bar necklace. A chambray vest that went past her knees.

Agatha leaned forward and pulled up on the waistband of her pants. "That's very nice, Tyler. Thank you."

"Mm-hmm," Casey agreed. "Ah see what you mean. Mah goal is to have really solid pieces that all kind of go together."

"Exactly, same," Tyler said. "Okay, also? I have a random question. Do you get to write about whatever you want?"

"For the most part."

"That's so neat. So you're like, a journalist?"

"I am."

"Ohh," Casey said. "Ah didn't realize. That's so neat."

Jenna came back into the room, but this time with a large adornment. A gray knitted throw blanket was wrapped around her shoulders.

Tyler snorted. "Jenna, what are you *doing*?"

"I couldn't find my sweatshirt," Jenna said. Holding the blanket in place, she sat back down.

As Casey laughed and said, "Ohmahlord," Tyler held up a questioning hand. "Jenna's like, 'What? I couldn't find my sweatshirt.'"

"Okay," Agatha cut in. "Ladies, are you ready?" But as it seemed, Jenna's blanket scarf was still incredibly funny.

"That actually looks kind of good," Casey said.

"I'm gonna be so mad if I lost my sweatshirt, though."

Tyler patted down a piece of the blanket so she could see Jenna's face. "Awwww, look at her. Little Mexican bebe," she said.

"I know," Jenna said. "I'm just a cute little refugee over here." She adjusted the blanket and crossed her legs. "Sorry," she said to Agatha. "Okay, I'm ready now."

Agatha blinked and closed her mouth. She experienced a warm rush of blood to the face. The residents' eyes sat ready and patient; they were

waiting for her to begin. Wow, Agatha thought. Robin will absolutely lose it. But then she blinked again. Crossed her legs on the other side. For just half a second, she'd forgotten the two of them were no longer together.

"Let's start with some introductions. Just tell me your name, your age, where you grew up, and your major. Tyler, do you want to start us off?"

"Sure. I'm Tyler Hanna...I'm a junior and I'm twenty-one. I'm from Dallas, Texas. I'm a hospitality management major with a minor in marketing and...yeah. I think that's it."

"Great. Jenna?"

"I'm Jenna." She adjusted her blanket. "I'm nineteen. Do you need my last name?"

"No, that's fine."

"Okay. It's Saddler in case you do. I'm a sophomore. I'm from Waco, Texas. My major is exercise science, and...I'm nineteen. I said that already. Sorry."

In her lap Agatha took pointless notes. *Waco. 19.* "Alright, Casey?"

"Okay. Hah there." Casey bent toward the recorder. She introduced herself as if she were leaving a voice mail. "Ah'm Casey. Ah'm a senior at the University of Arkansas. Ah grew up in Clarke County, Alabama. Mah major is birth through kinder, and Ah'll be twenty-one this Saturday."

"Happy early birthday."

"Ohthankyousomuch."

"So," Agatha said, hands in her lap. "Who here wants to have a wedding?"

The girls, all of them, raised their hands in a similar way. They weakly held their arms up next to their shoulders, all their fingers slightly curved. It was as if Agatha had asked three children how old they were, and they were shyly answering "Four."

"Do you have friends who don't want a wedding?"

"Ah don't think so..."

"Me neither," Tyler said.

Jenna placed a handful of almonds into the pouch that she'd made with the bottom of her shirt. "We have friends who want to travel," she said, "and

be more independent before they settle down. And I'm kind of the same way. I went to Amsterdam and Italy last summer and it was so fun. So yeah, I want to get married but I'd do it late. Like...thirty-one, thirty-two."

Tyler smiled. "Ohmygod. No thank you."

"Tyler, why isn't that ideal for you?" Agatha asked.

Tyler stretched her forearms out on the table; they were slightly freckled with a surprising amount of brown hair. "I'd just rather travel with someone," she said. "And I think it's hard to have a good wedding later. Because then some people have kids and things, or they don't know how to have fun anymore when they're all old and thirty-eight or whatever. You know what I mean?"

Casey said, "Ah know what you mean."

Agatha pressed her lips into a smile. In her lap, on her legal pad, she wrote, *all old and thirty-eight or whatever*. This was the age she would be in a little less than a month.

"Let's talk about paying for a wedding."

Jenna did a sharp intake. "Ohmygod. So expensive. It's crazy."

"What do you think of the tradition of brides' families bearing the cost?"

"My parents expect it," Jenna said. "But also, they have certain expectations. Like, I get an allowance from them that comes with them expecting me to save up. So if I was getting married, and there was something insane that I wanted, they'd be like, 'Okay. You're gonna pay at least half.'"

"My mom is the same," Tyler said. "And even though my mom will pay, there's an understanding that I'm not gonna be all, 'Oh, I want this ten-thousand-dollar dress' or whatever."

"I see," Agatha said. "Casey, what about you?"

"The short answer is yes, mah parents will pay. But sometimes it depends on mah mom's moods. Like when mah sister got married mah mom was like, 'You need to pay for your shoes,' out of nowhere. And mah sister was like, 'Ummm okay?' But yeah. They know that we know that they saved for our