



# I Am Made of Death

BY KELLY ANDREW

## The Story

Following the death of his father, Thomas Walsh had to grow up quickly, taking on odd jobs to help pay his gravely ill mother's medical bills. When he's offered a highly paid position as an interpreter for an heiress who exclusively signs, Thomas—the hearing child of a Deaf adult—jumps at the opportunity.

But the job is not without its challenges. Thomas is expected to accompany Vivienne wherever she goes, but from the start, she seems determined to shake him. To make matters worse, her parents keep her on an extremely short leash. She can't go anywhere without express permission. She can't deviate from her routine.

Most importantly, she can't be out after dark.

A selective mute, Vivienne Farrow hasn't said a word in years—not since going missing in Red Rock Canyon when she was four years old. No one knows quite what happened to her out in the dark. They only know that the sound of her voice is now as deadly as a poison. Anyone who hears her speak suffers a horrible death.

Vivienne is desperate for a way to regain control of both her voice and her body. Because the face staring out of the mirror isn't hers. It's something with teeth.

Thankfully, she's finally found someone who claims to be able to perform a surgical exorcism. She just needs to find a way to get rid of Thomas first. But Thomas can't afford to walk away, nor is he willing to abandon the mysterious girl he's quickly falling for, no matter what dark powers threaten to swallow them both whole.

## Reading Group Questions

1. Vivienne's voice is fatal to anyone who hears it, so she stops speaking to protect those around her. Does this have any symbolic significance? In what ways does our society try to silence young women like Vivienne?
2. What role does ballet play in *I Am Made of Death*? Why do you think the author chose to make Vivienne a dancer?
3. Do you think the phrase "dark romance" accurately describes Thomas and Vivienne's relationship in the book? Why or why not?
4. What do you think happens after the final scene? Where do you imagine Vivienne and Thomas in five years?

# I am made of death

BY KELLY ANDREW



## About the Author



Photo © Kelly Andrew

**Kelly Andrew** lost her hearing when she was four years old. She's been dreaming up stories in silence ever since. Kelly lives in New England with her husband, two daughters, and a persnickety Boston terrier. You can find her online at @KayAyDrew.

## Author Q&A

**Vivienne and Thomas have such electric chemistry! Who are some of your favorite fictional couples? Did any of them inspire the relationship in *I Am Made of Death*?**

I grew up watching the '80s classics with my dad, and some of the most formative fictional couples for me ended up being generational staples like Johnny and Baby from *Dirty Dancing*, Claire and Bender from *The Breakfast Club*, and Westley and Buttercup from *The Princess Bride*. All three of those couples fit the “rogue with a heart of gold” and the “angry princess” archetype. With films like that in the movie night lineup, it's no surprise that I grew up to love stories where two people from vastly different backgrounds collide and then spend the rest of their time together challenging one another. I really wanted to explore that dynamic in the context of a horror story.

**Was any scene particularly difficult or fun to write?**

The horror in *I Am Made of Death* is largely mirror-horror. Vivienne's struggles with body dysmorphia—shown here through a paranormal lens—is played out in her relationship with her reflection. To write it, I drew on my personal experiences after undergoing cochlear implantation surgery. At the time, the equipment was large and blocky, and as an adolescent I resented wearing something so visible and different. Hiding it became an obsession. Tapping into something that was once so raw and all-consuming is always difficult, and writing that kind of warped sense of self into a young adult novel comes with a great deal of personal responsibility. Any scene that dipped into that territory took significant time, care, and revision.

**What role does ASL play in the book?**

Vivienne Farrow has a fraught relationship with language, both spoken and signed. As a selective mute, she uses signed language to communicate, though very few people in her life have taken the time to learn. This means her access to language has been stunted and slow and she's frequently isolated, even in her own home. Her use of signed language works to both showcase her isolation and to deepen her connection with Thomas Walsh, the CODA (child of a deaf adult) who comes to stay with her family over the summer.

**Can you talk about the significance of class in the novel?**

Vivienne is a wealthy socialite with a trust fund and a private school education, while Thomas is a college dropout from a family who is experiencing significant financial strain. In spite of their opposing backgrounds, each of them grapples with parental expectations and a personal sense of responsibility to their family. At the start, their differences seem irreconcilable—neither of them has a great deal of grace for the other—but they have more in common than they initially assume, and this commonality heightens their bond over the course of the story.



TM/© SCHOLASTIC INC.