



Text for **Section A**, an extract from *Stepsister* by Jennifer Donnelly, about Isabelle, her sister Tavi and her stepsister Ella

‘Six *sous*<sup>1</sup>,’ the baker’s wife said.

‘Six?’ Isabelle echoed, confused. ‘But the sign says three.’ She pointed to a slate on the baker’s stall with a price marked on it in chalk. 5

The woman spat on her palm, rubbed the 3 away and wrote 6 in its place. ‘For you, six,’ she said insolently.

‘But that’s double the price. It’s not fair!’ Isabelle protested.

‘Neither is treating your stepsister like a slave,’ said the woman. ‘Don’t deny it. You were cruel to a defenceless girl. Got your comeuppance, though, didn’t you? Ella is queen now and more beautiful than ever. And you? You’re nothing more than her ugly stepsister.’ 10

Isabelle lowered her head, her cheeks flaming. She and Tavi had only just arrived at the market and already the taunts were starting.

Taking a deep, steadying breath, she remembered her sister’s directive: *Behave*. She counted out the coins from her pocket and handed them over. The baker’s wife gave her an undersized loaf, burned on the bottom, and a sneering smile to go with it. 15

‘Serves her right,’ said a woman standing in line.

‘Burned bread’s too good for her,’ sniffed another. 20

Distracted by the villagers’ talk, Isabelle did not see the pothole in front of her until she stepped down in it hard. A searing pain shot up her leg. In agony, she glanced up the street hoping to see her cart, but there was no sign of it.

She did, however, see Odette, the innkeeper’s daughter, walking towards her, tapping her cane over the cobblestones. Odette was blind and used the cane to navigate the village’s winding streets. 25

Then Isabelle saw something else.

Cecile, the mayor’s daughter, and her gaggle of friends were walking behind Odette. She was waving her parasol in front of her as if it were a cane, mocking<sup>2</sup> Odette. Her friends were giggling. 30

Dread gripped Isabelle. She knew she should go to Odette and defend her. But her foot hurt and she had no heart for another confrontation. She told herself that Odette didn’t know what was happening. After all, she couldn’t see Cecile, but

she, Isabelle, could, and knew she would be the girl's next victim. She looked around anxiously for a place to hide, but it was too late. Cecile had spotted her. 35

'Isabelle de la Paumé, is that *you*?' she drawled, forgetting about Odette.

As Cecile spoke, Isabelle's eyes fell on the entrance to an alley. She didn't bother to reply but rushed down the narrow passage, heedless of<sup>3</sup> the pain she was in. The alley was damp and smelled like a sewer, but she managed to avoid Cecile and emerge on the very street where she'd left her cart. 40

Relief flooded through her. Tavi wasn't there yet, but Isabelle was certain she'd come soon.

Isabelle had been in such a hurry to escape that she'd started for the cart without looking up and down the street.

'Isabelle, darling! *There* you are!' a voice called out. 45

Isabelle's stomach tightened. Slowly, she turned around.

Standing behind her, smiling like a viper, was Cecile.

### Glossary

<sup>1</sup>sous: small coins used in France in the past

<sup>2</sup>mocking: teasing / making fun of

<sup>3</sup>heedless of: without paying attention to

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