**Extract taken from ‘Delirium’ by Lauren Oliver**

**The fence looms above us: fifteen feet, ten feet, five feet. I think, *We’re going to die.***

**Then Alex’s voice, clear and forceful and, incredibly, calm, so I’m not sure if I hear him or only imagine him speaking the words into my ear. *Jump. Now. With me.***

**I let go of the handlebars and roll to one side as the bike skids forward into the fence. Pain goes through every single part of my body – my body is being ripped from my muscle, my muscle is being ripped from my skin – as I tumble across jagged rocks, spitting up dust, coughing, struggling to breathe. For a whole second the world goes black.**

**Then everything is colour and explosion and fire. The bike hits the fence and a tremendous, rolling boom echoes through the air. Fire shoots into the air, enormous tongues licking hp toward the ever-lightening sky. For a moment, the fence gives a high, shrill whine and then goes dead again, silent. No doubt the surge shorted it momentarily.**

**This is my chance to climb, just like Alex said.**

**Somehow I find the strength to drag myself to the fence on my hands and knees, dry-heaving, vomiting dust. I hear shouting behind me, but it all sounds distant, like under-water noise. I limp to the fence and haul myself upward, inch by inch. I’m going as fast as I can but it feels like I’m crawling, barely making progress. Alex must be behind me because I hear him shouting “Go, Lena! Go!” I focus on his voice: it’s the only thing that keeps me going up. Somehow – miraculously – I reach the top of the fence, and then I step over the loops of barbed wire like Alex taught me, and then I tip over the other side and let myself drop twenty feet to the ground, hitting the grass hard, half unconscious now and incapable of feeling any more pain. Just a few more feet and I’ll be sucked into the Wilds; I’ll be beyond its impenetrable shield of interlocking trees and growth and shade. I wait for Alex to hit the ground next.**

**But he doesn’t.**

**That’s when I do the thing I swore I wouldn’t do. Suddenly all my strength is back, fueled by panic. I scramble to my feet as the fence begins to hum again.**

**And I look back.  
  
Alex is still standing on the other side of the fence, beyond a flickering wall of smoke and fire. He hasn’t moved a single inch since both jumped off the bike, hasn’t tried to.**

**Alex’s t-shirt is red, and for a second I think it’s a trick of the light, but then I realise he’s drenched, soaked in blood: blood seeping across his chest, like the stain seeping up the sky, bringing another day to the world. Behind him is that insect army of men, all of them running toward him at once, guns drawn. The guards are coming too, reaching or him from both sides as though they are going to tear him apart, straight down the middle. The helicopter has him fixed in its spotlight. He is standing white and still and frozen in its beam, and I don’t think I have ever, in my life, seen anything more beautiful than him.**

**He is looking at me through the smoke, across the fence. He never takes his eyes off me. His hair is a crown of leaves, of thorns, of flames. His eyes are blazing with light, more light than all the lights in every city in the whole world, more light than we could ever invent if we had ten thousand billion years.**

**And then he opens his mouth and his mouth forms one last word.**

**The word is: *Run.***

**After that the insect men fall on him. He is taken up by all their snapping, ravaging arms and mouths like an animal being set upon by vultures, enfolded in all their darkness.**