

PRAISE FOR
THE
SIMILARS

“Fascinating. I was captivated.”

—Francine Pascal, bestselling author of the
Sweet Valley High and Fearless series

“A page-turner that more than delivers on its premise. Hanover takes on sci-fi and high school with equal wit and understanding. The perfect mix of achingly familiar and completely mysterious, the world of *The Similar*s is one we don’t want to leave.”

—Allison Raskin, *New York Times* bestselling
author of *I Hate Everyone But You*

“A brilliantly imagined near-future world where six clones and their counterparts grapple with profound questions of identity and what it means to be human. Part cautionary tale, part gripping teen romance, *The Similar*s is as immersive and fast-paced as it is shrewd, compelling, and heartbreaking.”

—Ray Kurzweil, inventor, futurist, and
New York Times bestselling author

“Episodic and fast-moving... Plenty of twists and one very big turn that will delight mystery readers.”

—*Booklist*

THE
SIMILARS



REBECCA
HANOVER

Copyright © 2019 by Rebecca Hanover

Cover and internal design © 2019 by Sourcebooks

Cover design by Nicole Hower/Sourcebooks

Cover images © Robin Macmillan/Trevillion Images, bennyb/Getty Images

Internal design by Travis Hasenour/Sourcebooks

Sourcebooks and the colophon are registered trademarks of Sourcebooks, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems—except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews—without permission in writing from its publisher, Sourcebooks.

The characters and events portrayed in this book are fictitious or are used fictitiously. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental and not intended by the author.

All brand names and product names used in this book are trademarks, registered trademarks, or trade names of their respective holders. Sourcebooks is not associated with any product or vendor in this book.

Published by Sourcebooks Fire, an imprint of Sourcebooks

P.O. Box 4410, Naperville, Illinois 60567-4410

(630) 961-3900

sourcebooks.com

The Library of Congress has cataloged the hardcover edition as follows:

Names: Hanover, Rebecca, author.

Title: The similars / Rebecca Hanover.

Description: Naperville, Illinois : Sourcebooks Fire, [2019] | Summary: “When six clones join Emmaline’s prestigious boarding school, she must confront the heartbreak of seeing her dead best friend’s face each day in class”-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018033682 | (hardcover : alk. paper)

Subjects: | CYAC: Cloning--Fiction. | Experiments--Fiction. | Boarding schools--Fiction. | Schools--Fiction. | Science fiction.

Classification: LCC PZ7.1.H36425 Si 2019 | DDC [Fic]--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018033682>

Printed and bound in Canada.

MBP 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Mom and Dad

For Ethan

THE SIMILARS

I DON'T ACTIVELY want to die. Not all the time.

If it weren't for my father, then sure, I'd consider it. He may not be my favorite person in the world, and I am definitely not his, but I don't relish the thought of him standing at my gravesite, hunched over my coffin, racked with sobs. I only think about dying sometimes—like now.

We're almost at Hades Point. In approximately two minutes and thirty seconds, the black Lorax I'm riding in will carry me past the infamous cliff's edge where, historically, twelve students at my school have plummeted to their deaths. I'm not afraid of the point, but maybe I should be. It's deep—Grand Canyon deep. A gaping mouth in the ground that swallows kids who can't

handle Darkwood Academy. That's the boarding school I go to in Vermont, where I'm starting my junior year. It's where I spent my first year and sophomore year, too, before *the thing that happened*. But more on that...never.

"Approaching Hades Point!" trills a merry voice, invading my thoughts. You'd think a driverless vehicle would guarantee a person some peace and quiet, but no. When the Lorax picked me up at the Burlington airport two hours ago, the operating system forced me to select a name for its virtual driver. I'd rejected the suggested monikers and typed in one of my own choosing: *Misery*.

"This is Misery, your friendly chauffeur!" the voice had immediately chirped at me. She hasn't stopped to take a metaphorical breath since.

Misery continues her assault on my ears. "If you look to your left, Miss Chance, you'll see we're passing Hades Point, one of the most scenic spots on campus!"

Sure, Misery. I take in the precipitous drop as we round the bend. *If by "scenic," you mean deadly*.

I stare at Hades Point laid out in the distance like a casket. I picture them, all twelve students who tumbled over. I've thought about jumping. I've dreamed of flying through the air and knowing my life would soon end. After what happened, who could blame me? Within hours of my best friend's death this summer, I had faced an onslaught of emotions so intolerable, I felt like a foreigner in my own mind. Grasping for some semblance of order, I began naming my different moods. Example: "A Zombie Just Ate My Body," which is like being frostbitten and stun-gunned

and about 94 percent dead inside. At least that one is bearable, unlike “Get That Serrated Knife Out of My Chest,” which is as painful as it sounds. I spend entire days walking around with the sensation that somebody stabbed me in the chest and the knife is still inside. Conveniently, there are pills I can take for these afflictions, pharma hybrids that make my life more tolerable. I slinked out of my psychiatrist’s office last month, a prescription tube clutched in my fist.

I slide a pill out of my pocket and swallow it dry, then press my cheek to the cool glass window. Sometimes feeling things makes you remember you’re alive. And sometimes that is too much to handle.

As we leave the point behind and embark on the last leg of our journey to Darkwood, I imagine it: *Stopping the car. Stepping out. Walking toward the edge of the point. Closing my eyes as the wind whips me, and then, without any fanfare, letting go. Ending it. Just like Oliver did back home in California. In his room. Where I found him—*

“Approaching Darkwood’s main campus!” Misery’s voice jars me out of the memory. “Established in 1927 by Cornelius Seymour, Darkwood Academy has remained a bastion of intellectual integrity for more than a century—”

“Thank you,” I interrupt, pressing my mother’s ancient tortoiseshell-framed glasses to the bridge of my nose. “I got it.”

“Sorry, Miss Chance. I—!”

“Emmaline,” I interrupt again. “But you can call me Emma.”

“Big day, isn’t it, Emma? Back to school! Seeing friends and starting classes. And, of course—the Similar!”

“Sorry.” I shrug. “I’m just not worked up about a couple of DNA copies of some teenage prepsters.”

“But, Miss Chance!” Misery sputters. “Have you been watching the feeds? People haven’t been this excited since astronauts landed on Mars!”

“Dash,” I whisper into my plum, the “everything” device I keep strapped around my wrist so I won’t lose it. “Can we turn her off?”

The voice of my genial virtual assistant rings out from the tiny screen on my wrist. “Your simulated chauffeur cannot be muted,” says Dash. “But if you would like, Emma, I’ll happily report her as spam.”

“That won’t be necessary. But thanks.” I sigh, settling back into my seat and trying to ignore Misery’s never-ending monologue. It’s not like Misery’s wrong. The Similar are *major* news. They’ve been making headlines for weeks, ever since they arrived in the United States this summer and it was announced that they’d be attending Darkwood Academy, right alongside the kids they were originally cloned from. It’s no wonder the whole country is transfixed. Six students at Darkwood Academy are about to sit in class next to their clones, who share their exact DNA, but who they only recently met for the first time. The old me would have shown more interest in the Similar, would have been buzzing Oliver about them nonstop, eager to hear him dissect each new piece of information about their curious upbringing and unlikely existence. But these days, I only care about one thing: keeping the feeling of the serrated knife at bay.

The Lorax reaches the bottom of a hill and turns onto a gravel road that winds through brush and woods to the center of Darkwood Academy.

“I wonder if you’ll meet them right away?” Misery muses. “Or later, once everyone has settled in their room—?”

“Can we turn on the feeds?” I interrupt.

“Of course, Emma! I’d like to hear what they’re saying too!”

“I was actually thinking music might be nice...”

But Misery’s already tuned to a news station and clearly didn’t hear me. I don’t feel like repeating myself, so I settle back in my seat to listen.

“It’s a pleasure to have you with us today,” says a distinguished woman whose image pops up in my view space. She’s nearly three-dimensional, but not quite. “For those in the audience who aren’t acquainted with his work, our guest today is Jaeger Stanwick, the journalist known for his vocal involvement in the pro-clone movement.”

“Happy to be here,” says a familiar voice. In my view space, Jaeger’s figure materializes, looking characteristically disheveled. I recognize him, and not just because he’s made himself famous, or rather, infamous for his views on cloning. Jaeger’s also the father of one of my closest friends at Darkwood: my roommate, Prudence Stanwick. Everyone calls her Pru.

“Can you put this momentous day into perspective for us?” the reporter presses.

“‘Momentous’ doesn’t even cover it,” Jaeger says. “The arrival of these six teenagers at Darkwood Academy—”

“The Similar,” the reporter interrupts. “The teens just

released a written statement to the media sharing their nickname for each other with the broader world. ‘The Similar’s’ is what they began calling one another when they first learned the circumstances of their birth.”

Jaeger nods. “I believe these teens wanted to take control of how the world views them. By giving us—and the press—a name to call them rather than allowing us to craft our own, they are signaling that they’re in charge of their own destiny. And they’re doing it with a commendable sense of humor, I might add. But as I was saying...”

“Go ahead—”

“The arrival of these six teenagers at Darkwood is an enormous opportunity.”

“How so?”

“It’s our chance to welcome them into our lives with open arms. To give them the space and respect they deserve, so they may show the world who they are.”

“And that they harbor no evil agendas?” quips the reporter.

Jaeger frowns. “They are boys and girls, just like our children, Demetria. Like every other teenager in America, they have goals and dreams, fears and ambitions. They can be hurt, deeply. They can feel pain and love—and joy. It’s time the world acknowledged that.”

“Off!” I shout. “Please.” All this talk about the Similar’s is making my head spin.

“Are you finished listening already?” Misery asks. “Do you already know everything there is to know about the Similar’s?”

“No,” I say, trying not to let Misery get to me. She’s only

a bot; she can't help it if she's been programmed to be overly eager. "We're here. At Darkwood. See?"

"You're right! So perceptive, Miss Chance."

I resist the urge to roll my eyes as we pull up in front of the main house, a Queen Anne-style manse that looks unbalanced, like it exists on several overlapping planes all at once. As the Lorax inches behind the other cars idling in front of the school, I feel myself tensing. Classmates line the driveway, hugging and gossiping. That would have been me and Oliver. But no more.

The silver car in front of ours stops, and a girl steps out, teetering in high-heeled boots. I instantly recognize her. Tessa Leroy. We aren't friends, but I know all about her—everyone does. Birdlike and petite, Tessa is one of the Ten. She's a year ahead of me, a senior, and her stratum from last year will guarantee her a spot, once again, in that elite group. In spite of her Ten status, no one envies Tessa anymore. Not since the police came knocking on the door of her family's home on Central Park West and arrested her father, Damian Leroy, for fraud.

The Lorax slowly pulls to the front of the line. It's my turn.

"Have a wonderful school year!" Misery calls out as I retrieve my luggage from the trunk. "I'd be bursting to meet the Similar if I were you! I wonder if you'll get one as a roommate. That would be simply—"

I shut the trunk with a *clang* and wheel my bag straight into the throng of students. I pass a girl sporting gorgeous box braids who hoists her cello onto her shoulders, a tenth grader signing up new members for the on-campus LGBTQ+ club, and another girl I don't recognize, probably a first year, who is plugging

her bestselling memoir about growing up on the International Space Station. We haven't even unpacked our bags yet, and kids all around me are already raring to go, advertising auditions for the fall musical, *Hamilton*, and recruiting players for several on-campus sports teams. I'm not the extracurricular type—sports bore me senseless, and I've never been good with musical instruments. But I'm like a bot when it comes to numbers, and in eighth grade I wrote a short story that won a bunch of awards, so here I am. Enrolled at Darkwood Academy. Sure, I'm a legacy—my father went here when he was a teenager more than twenty years ago—but that's not enough to get admitted without something “extra.” Not that I care about any of that showiness. I didn't before Oliver died, and I definitely don't now.

Classmates block me on all sides, so I'm forced to pause in the driveway, unable to make my way to my dorm. Without meaning to, I've stopped next to Tessa, who's conferring with another campus celebrity, Madison Huxley. The two of them are always together, although Madison—with her silky blond hair and perfectly symmetrical, heavily made-up face—usually outshines her less outspoken counterpart. Personally, I find Tessa's less flashy look far more appealing than Madison's. With long, straight hair like her Taiwanese mother's and a certain elegance to her movements, I'd call Tessa beautiful—except her personality seems lacking. I'm surprised to see Madison's parents standing a few feet away, consulting with Headmaster Ransom, Darkwood's fearless leader. Sporting pleated slacks and an elbow-patched smoking jacket, Headmaster Ransom is a likable figurehead, although I see no sign of his trademark smile today. He's all business.

“Mr. and Mrs. Huxley,” I catch Headmaster Ransom saying, “the last thing I want is to upset any of our most prominent families...”

Bianca Huxley smooths her Chanel jacket. “I have never doubted your commitment to Darkwood—not once in all these years. But this time, I’m putting my foot down.”

Headmaster Ransom presses his fingertips together, his eyebrows knit with tension. “I will simply repeat what I told the news outlets: I trust these boys and girls, and I believe they deserve a chance.”

It’s obvious who *they* are: the Similar. Ransom is referring to his decision to invite them to Darkwood, despite the controversial events surrounding their birth.

“Respectfully, we disagree with you, Ransom,” Bob Huxley says tightly. “And if I may speak frankly...”

“Please.” Headmaster Ransom gestures for him to go ahead.

“My wife and I plan to alert the board that we do not approve of your decision,” Mr. Huxley continues. “And we will be adjusting our donation to the school accordingly. I’m afraid there isn’t much you can do to change our minds short of sending those boys and girls back to where they came from.”

“You know I can’t do that. Historically, Darkwood has always placed a great deal of emphasis on inclusion and representation. Students join us here from every socioeconomic background—every race, religion, and sexual orientation. It’s the reason I believe these new students will thrive here, of all places. I won’t change my mind—”

“Then you leave us no choice. Bianca? It’s time to go.”

Mr. Huxley slides a protective arm around his wife, and they turn to leave, kissing Madison goodbye before stepping into their waiting stretch Tesla. Did I mention the Huxleys aren't regular people? Robert "Bob" Huxley used to be vice president—*of the United States*. His wife is taking advantage of his former veep status to run for the U.S. Senate in Texas. Early polls indicate she will win.

"I met her," Madison tells Tessa. "A few weeks ago."

"Who?" Tessa rummages through her bag, looking bored.

"My Similar. I've got one, of course. She came to our house. My parents paid her off and warned her not to show her face—*my face*—ever again."

"So she's not coming to Darkwood?"

"Of course not. If the public found out I had a Similar, it would end my mother's political career."

"So where's she going to go?" Tessa asks, finally looking up from her leather tote.

"Who cares? As long as we never see her again."

That's when Tessa notices me standing there, eavesdropping. She stares at me. Tessa and Madison both do.

I feel a nauseating lurch in my stomach. The serrated-knife feeling starts to throb in my chest. I hightail it out of there, pushing my way through the crowd of students toward Cypress, my dorm. It's just beyond a cluster of trees north of the main house. Once comprised of servants' quarters, Cypress is as gloomy as the rest of Darkwood's architecture, what with its gray stone exterior and polygonal tower that looks crooked, as if it might fall at any moment, taking the entire dormitory down with it.

I drag my bags to my dorm room, then flash my gold key in front of the sensor. The lock chimes open, and I slump inside. My room hasn't changed since I was last here in May. It's not much to look at, but even with its plain Shaker-style furniture and lone window looking out onto the depths of Dark Lake, it feels more like home than my real one. Of course, a big part of that isn't *what's* inside it, but rather *who*. Pru. Friend to everyone. But mostly to me.

She drops the book she's reading and jumps up when she sees me. "Emma—"

I don't let her finish her thought.

"Ugh," I say, depositing my bags next to my bed. "I completely forgot Madison and Tessa are still on the transplant list."

Pru frowns. "Transplant list? What transplant list?"

"You know." I slouch down on my sagging twin mattress. "To receive actual beating hearts."

Pru cracks a half smile, her brown eyes lighting up. "What have they done now?"

"Besides contributing to climate change every time they open their mouths and breathe out their toxic fumes of elitism? Everything."

I slip off my shoes and am about to flop back onto my bed when Pru's arms are around me, holding me so tight I can barely breathe. I don't have to ask her why she's squeezing me like a lifeline. I already know. She's thinking of *the thing that happened*, and of the 843 things she wants to say to me but can't. It's okay. She already said them, this summer, in a buzz with the subject line: *Re: RE: RE: RE: FWD: Oliver*.

“You should have let me come to California,” Pru says, finally letting go of me. “I wanted to be at Ollie’s funeral, Emma. I feel awful that I missed it...”

“You had to take care of your mom. She needed you.” There’s no way I would have let Pru leave her mother’s side, not when she’s been decimated by a cancer so rare, even nanobots can’t reverse its effects. “How is she? I haven’t heard from you in two weeks. I was worried when you went dark...” I don’t want to say the words out loud. *I thought your mom died.*

Pru sweeps a strand of her curly black hair out of her eyes. “She’s doing okay. They think this latest treatment is going to work.”

“Good,” I say. I’m grateful to Pru; besides Oliver, she’s the one person I can actually stand to be around. Still, I turn away from her, feeling the tears coming hot and fast. The hug from my friend has lodged the serrated knife deep in my chest, and as much as I love Pru, all I want is to be alone.

“So tired,” I say, lying back and shutting my eyes. “Must rest.”

“I’ll see you at assembly,” Pru says, as I drape an arm over my eyes for dramatic effect and wait for her to slip out of our room. “And Emma...” she adds, lingering in the doorway. “I’m sorry.”

When I hear the door click shut behind her, I sit up. Sleep is my own personal brand of hell, but Pru has no way of knowing that I do almost anything to avoid being unconscious. I never know what, or whom, I might encounter in my dreams.

I slip on my flip-flops and make a beeline for the door, glancing down the hallway to make sure Pru’s gone before

heading outside. I hurry down a shady path toward a modest clearing by the lake. I picture it in my mind as I walk: the rocks big enough to sit on and the patch of dirt where Oliver and I always convened after our last class of the day. I would tease him for being a flirt, and he'd tell me my sarcasm was going to render me physically incapable of a real smile. I'd shove him, and he'd fall backward... We'd laugh so hard, never imagining our joy would have an expiration date.

Memories of Oliver flood my heart like a vein opening. *Sunlight, gray eyes, floppy bangs, cocky smile, backpacks tumbling, minds daydreaming, fifty years, fifty years—I'll be your best friend for fifty more years. And after that? You have to reapply.*

I stop in my tracks as I arrive at our old spot. I'm not alone.

They're ten, fifteen feet away, at most. Their presence—their existence—sends my heart hammering in my chest. I freeze, watching, observing. I don't think they can see me, not yet—but I can see them.

There are three of them, and one is Tessa. Only, I can tell she isn't Tessa. She has the same long brown hair. The same elegance and fragile features. But her outfit is plain and old-fashioned. She wears a white button-down shirt and a black skirt, both so...*ordinary*, I could never imagine Tessa in them. And her hair—it's pulled back into a french braid, the kind we used to wear in grade school. There's something girlish about her. Something naive. She's a Similar. I'm sure of it.

They talk in hushed tones, and I'm not close enough to make out their words. But I watch as the Tessa Similar addresses another girl. It takes me a moment to process what I'm seeing.

Because the girl the Tessa Similar is talking to isn't simply *any* girl. It's Pru.

No, it's *not* Pru. She was in our room not ten minutes ago, wearing her signature running pants and hoodie. This girl isn't Pru. This girl is her clone, her copy. The Similar standing ten feet from me is willowy and delicate, while my roommate is athletic and lean. Pru's hair is always wild and untamed, while this girl wears her curly locks pulled back in a tight bun. She talks quietly to the others. She doesn't smile.

I shouldn't be surprised that Pru, the daughter of the man who made a name for himself defending clones to the nation, has an identical copy. But I am. Why didn't she tell me? My stomach flips. *Does she even know?* I'm so anxious to find out, I almost buzz her. But this is too big. It can wait a few minutes till I see her in person.

The third Similar is a clone of another boy in my class, Jake Choate. He has the same black hair as Jake, the same dark skin and attractive face. The same build—not too thin, not too muscular. But the devilish expression Jake has spent years perfecting is nowhere to be seen. This boy's face is full of burden, sacrifice, and hardship.

I feel drawn to them. I want to know what they're talking about in hushed, conspiratorial tones. Less than an hour ago, I had little interest in the Similar. Now, I'm more than interested. My mind spins with questions. I want to know everything about them. Where they grew up. What it was like. What they think of Darkwood—

“Are you feeling all right, Emma?” Dash asks.

“Of course,” I answer softly, relieved he has no way of knowing that I’ve been spying on the Similar. I feel like an intruder. As if I’m invading a private moment I have no right to see. “I’m fine,” I fib. “Why?”

“Elevated heart rate. I assume you were thinking about Oliver.”

“Always,” I whisper, my eyes still glued to the clones.

“Assembly starts in ten minutes,” Dash reminds me. “You don’t want to be late.”

“Thanks, Dash,” I say, looking down at my plum to swipe away the notification for the assembly and silence my bot.

By the time I look up from my plum, the Similar is gone.