

The Highest Bid

A dystopian novel by Lulu Duarte, Jane Reall, and Rachel Berry

Logline:

In a world where women are sold to the highest bidding man for marriage and every aspect of their lives controlled, Esther risks a life of torture to break down the system that has oppressed women for generations.

Characters:

Key Characters:

Esther Bennett Winters (hero): Esther is very conventionally attractive with brown curly hair, green eyes, and fair skin. Begins as a 15 year old girl in the prologue, she is 19 for the rest of the story. She is raised by her parents and has an older sister who she was very close to growing up. Esther gets the highest bid at the ceremony, a great honor, but did not want the recognition. The other women from her town are jealous of her for receiving such an honor, and she is alienated from all of her family and former friends when she has to move to the capital city after marrying Cain.

Leo Winthrop (ally): Leo has sandy brown hair and blue eyes. The same age as Esther, and Cain's secret son. He was born into the rebellion, when his mom, Cain's first wife, ran away from Cain and joined the rebellion. Leo comes out of hiding to work for his father as an assistant in order to keep an eye on him and gather information to report back to the rebellion. He is intensely loyal to his loved ones and would do anything to protect them, as well as incredibly brave. He has a good sense of humor and provides an escape for Esther from her

Cain Winters (antagonist): Cain is tall with ginger hair and blue eyes. He first bid on Margaret when he was young, and was then elected to become a representative of the district Esther grew up in. His hunger for power only grew, and manifested when he began treating Margaret poorly. Before running away from him, Margaret tells Cain that she is pregnant. This set Cain off because he lost control, and that is his main motivation. He re-bids on Esther 16 years later, setting a record for the highest bid. He has an unnatural desire for control, and he makes irrational decisions based on it.

Margaret Winthrop (mentor): Margaret has sandy brown hair and brown eyes. She is the first wife of Cain and the mother of Leo. After running away from Cain, she becomes the leader of the rebellion.

Marsha(s): Marshas are found during annual testing done on young women on bidding day in all 12 towns, to see if they will grow up to be the most conventionally attractive and “perfect” women. Marshas all have blonde hair and blue eyes. women who are on the TV programs, are imprisoned at the capital. Replaced every few years to not show aging, are scouted throughout the country every bidding day – the underage girls participate in tests while everyone else is at the bidding ceremony to determine if they are obedient enough to be the next Marsha

Other Characters:

Richard Benneett (dad): Richard is the father of Esther, as well as the auctioneer of the bidding ceremony. He is very motivated by money, and also the success of his daughters in society.

Deirdre Bennett (mom): the Mother of Esther and Ruth. Deirdre pushes her daughters to be the best and the most perfect so that they aren’t punished by the system and can live a life free of judgement from the public.

Eleanor Evans (librarian) (ally): Eleanor is the librarian. She is part of the rebellion and helps Esther discover her role in it.

Ruth Bennett (sister): Ruth is the sister of Esther and bears the brunt of her Father’s criticism. Her husband treats her very poorly, and she acts out against it many times. This leads to her being part of the public shamings and an outcast of society.

Setting:

Story Overview:

Main conflict: The women in this society are very oppressed and controlled and live their lives with the sole purpose of serving their husbands.

ACT I:

Exposition: The Bidding Ceremony and world in general is introduced and we go through Esther's bidding.

Inciting incident: Four years later and married to Cain Winters, Esther says something offhand that hints at the rebellion to her husband. He loses control with his reaction and hits her, which leaves her confused because she didn't understand why he would have reacted that way to what she said.

Plot point 1: Leo breaks the norm and upon visiting Cain and Esther's house, serves himself tea instead of having Esther serve it for him. He also is very pushy with her regarding her reading a book gifted to her and every other woman from the Bidding Ceremony.

ACT II:

Rising action: Esther connects with Eleanor, and asks for more books similar to the one she was gifted. She reads more books, evading the attention of Cain because they help point her to the rebellion. She goes back multiple times to get more books to read, and continues seeing and talking with Leo.

Midpoint: Esther goes to her first meeting of the rebellion, and meets Margaret.

Plot point 2: Leo tells Esther to leave the rebellion and run away because she is getting too involved and he is worried that his dad will catch her. She doesn't understand why he's being so pushy and they both yell at each other, causing tension and leaving their friendship in a tricky place.

ACT III:

Pre-climax: Government has a public shaming demonstration and is planning another one, Esther's sister is one of them; she and the younger generation of rebelling women urge the rebellion to happen sooner to prevent the demonstration from happening

Climax: Rebellion goes through with plan to prevent public shaming demonstration, get the women out but everything else kind of falls apart; detain 12 leaders and think they are done but Cain goes crazy and gets out, goes after Esther; finds her and she is with first wife, he goes crazy, starts yelling, whips out a gun and aims for Esther and then first wife steps in front of her; Leo sees his mom die, says a one liner and stabs him in the gut

Detailed Description:

ACT I:

Esther Bennett is backstage at her district's annual bidding auction. Freshly fifteen, she waits with the other girls her age to be presented to the public, then sold off to the highest bidding man for marriage. The ceremony is the biggest event of the year, and the most important moment in a girl's life. At least that's what they're told. Two years ago, Esther saw her sister auctioned off to a man she knew nothing about, and has watched her decline in physical and emotional health. Since then, Esther has questioned if the bidding is actually the best moment in a girl's life, or if it's more like the worst. But questioning is illegal. Most especially when your father is the auctioneer. Esther watches as each girl is announced, then bid on. The prettiest ones have fast and furious calls, getting sold for more and more money. The girls considered "less attractive" have fewer bids, some getting none at all. Finally, Esther steps onto the stage. Her father introduces her and the bidding starts. Men start shouting out sums, everyone talking over each other. The amount gets higher and higher until one man in the back raises his hand. The room slowly goes silent as everyone looks at him. He calls out his sum, far bigger than anyone else's. Esther's father smiles, and she is sold to Cain Winters, representative of the capital.

We fast forward to 4 years later, and Esther is now 19 years old. She is living in the Capitol with Cain, and she is miserable. Cain is extremely emotionally manipulative and breaks her down slowly. After an argument, Esther mentions something about women rebelling against men, and how it's not fair that they have no control over their lives. Cain loses his control and hits her. This leaves Esther both shocked and confused. Cain has never hit her before, so she wonders why that particular comment set him off.

A couple weeks later Cain hires a 19 year old boy to be his assistant. His name is Leo Winthrop, and he introduces a whole new world to Esther. Cain brings Leo home for dinner one day. Esther immediately notices how similar the two look. As the night goes on, Leo breaks every norm that men usually follow. Instead of lazing around and ordering Esther to do things, he helps her get the food ready. He gets his own drinks instead of forcing her to get them. And instead of treating her like a porcelain doll without a brain, he talks to her like she's a normal, intelligent human being. Esther is immediately drawn to him and in awe of his kindness towards her, unlike any man she's ever encountered before. At the end of the evening, Esther and Leo have a conversation. He tells her to read the book that every girl is given after her bidding ceremony. Esther is skeptical because this book entirely objectifies women, and Leo has been such a support all night. But he keeps insisting, and Esther finally tells him she will.

ACT II:

After reading the book gifted at her bidding ceremony a couple times, Esther finally notices something strange about it, and realizes why Leo was so pushy with her reading it. Certain letters that

seem to be misprinted spell out to read: “I will not be a willing participant in this society”. This phrase intrigued Esther because it is the opposite of one of the terms from the marriage contract every woman signs. This book makes Esther think a lot about the society she lives in and if it could possibly be different. Yearning to learn more about what the bidding book had hinted at, she visits the library to ask the librarian for similar books. The librarian sends her back home with a couple miscellaneous books, cooking books, fashion books, etc. Esther hides them at home and waits to be alone to read them. She has to read them thoroughly to uncover what they are really saying, and her knowledge of a world where women are free starts to grow. It takes her a long time to get through those first couple books, trying her best to find free time to read them and needing to be away from prying eyes, whilst also accomplishing all her duties for the day and serving Cain. She gets through them, and when she can, goes back for more.

As Cain’s assistant, Leo visits the house more and more. They start sparking conversations when Cain leaves the room, and Leo recommends her some more books she should check out at the library. Though they can’t talk all the time, they connect through what is unspoken, knowing that they know things they aren’t allowed to know. Esther returns to the library with Leo’s list, and the librarian specifically points out a “special book” that Esther needs to take special care of. Esther is immediately intrigued, and once she can finally start reading it it points her to a rebellion composed mostly of lower class women who have rejected the system forced upon them.

After a lot of reading and talking with Leo, the rebellion is pretty much the only thing she can think about. She’s learned so much about it, and finds out that Leo is a member. She plans to attend a meeting, and gets Leo to help her plan how she is going to make it to the meeting. Esther makes it to her first rebellion meeting, and for the first time is really able to connect with people. Women share ideas and Esther is in awe with how comfortable they are talking about this topic that she never really knew could exist until a few months ago. She meets with the leader of the rebellion, Margaret, and instantly connects with her. Esther looks up to Margaret’s bravery and everything she sacrificed, choosing a life of freedom over a life of protection.

Some time passes, and Esther has finally felt like she is truly a part of the rebellion, a part of something bigger she believes will save all of the women in this society, specifically her sister and herself. Although Cain doesn’t know her involvement with the rebellion, he can tell something in her demeanor is off. She seems more secure and she speaks more thoughtfully and intelligently than she had when they were first married. This triggers Cain a lot because it happened before his ex-wife ran away from him 20 years ago. Cain starts acting up in response to anger, raising his voice more, and seeming like he has less control over his actions. He is becoming restless because he knows something has got to be up but he just can’t quite place it. One day, Esther does something to upset Cain, and he raises his voice and reaches for a wooden spoon. Leo was over at the house and walked in right at this moment and became terrified for Esther. Cain looks over to see Leo and is able to gain his control

enough to walk off to blow off some steam. Leo rushes over to Esther to see if she is alright and starts begging her to un-involve herself with the rebellion and run away to leave Cain. Esther becomes upset by this because at this point, the rebellion is the reason for the passion she still has being trapped in this marriage, the rebellion is the hope for a life of freedom someday. Esther would never leave when she can help the rebellion and in turn help women be free. Their conversation quickly becomes heated and they raise their voices with each other. They can hear Cain coming back so they quickly act like they are working on other tasks, but the tension is still there.

ACT III:

The government holds a public shaming demonstration that is broadcast to the entire country, consisting of women from each of the 12 towns reading from their marriage contracts: "I will be a willing participant in society. I will obey my husband. I will not break the rules. I will accept the punishment agreed upon by the board in any instance of disobedience..." This goes on for hours, slowly breaking down the will of the women forced to participate. Everyone is given the day off from work and is forced to watch the broadcast on their TVs, so that women know what will happen to them if they continue to push back. Despite their awkwardness, Leo tells Esther that he saw her sister's name on the list for the next public punishment in Cain's office, and Esther worries that she would not survive her husband's violence if she is publicly shamed.

Esther urges the rebellion to speed up their timeline and act before the next demonstration takes place, and to save the women who will be punished. Margaret and the older members of the rebellion object, but the younger members agree with Esther and outnumber the dissenters. Final adjustments for the plan are put in place, and on the day of the scheduled demonstration, put into action.

The operation seems to be going smoothly with all 12 town representatives detained and Esther's sister and the other women saved from the demonstration. However, Cain escapes from captivity and goes after Esther, attempting to kill her for escaping his power and breaking the system that has given him so much control and supremacy. Margaret takes the bullet meant for Esther, and Leo sees as his father kills his mother. He then kills Cain in revenge. As he mourns Margaret, he is initially angry at Esther for letting his mom die, but comes to his senses that all of it was Cain's fault. He and Esther talk through the situation, apologizing for crossing the line, and establish that they are there to support each other, but not to protect or hold each other back. They move forward side by side, ready to help fix the broken society.