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Opening Extract from...

Glasgow Kiss

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PROLOGUE

Her lips were still warm when he kissed them, petal-soft, unyielding. It was like kissing a child's lips at bed time: he could remember that sensation, recalling vividly how the drowsy breath exhaled in a tiny shudder.

But the girl made no response even when he let his finger run across her cheek, down to the corner of her mouth. He could still see traces of pink gloss smeared over the tiny ridges that crossed her parted lips, smell her familiar scent; hands cupped across his nostrils, he breathed in the sweetness mingling with his own sweat. The sun filtered through the leaves, warming his back, filling him with a deep sense of peace as if the world understood his longings and had colluded to bring about this ultimate satisfaction. A kiss, just one kiss: that was all he'd ever wanted, all he'd ever desired.

When he finally looked into her eyes, wide with horror, he had to look away. He turned, hand on his mouth to stop the sound coming out, shaking his head in disbelief. Looking at these eyes spoiled everything.

Now he was angry with her again. She would have to be punished for what she was doing to him.

A dog barking in the distance made him stand up, alert, knowing there was little time to lose. With a final glance at the shallow

grave, sunlight-dappled under a canopy of trees, he wiped his hands on a tussock of grass, smoothed down the creases on his jeans and walked further into the woods, his footfall silent on the soft earth.

CHAPTER 1

They were walking a little apart now. Her face was in profile, half shaded by the overhanging trees so that he could not make out her expression, though from time to time he would sneak a glance to see if she was looking his way. Her long pale-golden hair was twisted into plaits, leaving the cheekbones naked and exposed. It should have made her seem like a child but instead she looked older, more remote, and Kyle wished she'd left it loose as she usually did, burnished and glimmering in the afternoon sunshine.

It hadn't always been like this. They'd walked through Dawsholm Park loads of times, sometimes hand in hand, dawdling by the grass verges, snatching the chance to have a quick kiss. But now, Kyle thought gloomily, these halcyon days were over. Halcyon had been Kyle's favourite word last term. His English teacher, Mrs Lorimer, had explained that it derived from a Greek story about a mythical bird that in the middle of winter made its nest floating upon the Aegean seas. The bird had magical powers to make the waters calm and the winds drop. Kyle loved that story and had used the word in his own mind to describe his relationship with Julie.

He'd even dreamed of them once – floating together like that bird, side by side, waves lapping gently against their boat.

Something made him shiver suddenly and the girl turned to him, a question in her eyes.

Kyle shook his head, too full to speak. She was still watching him and must have seen the bob of his Adam's apple as he swallowed back the tears.

'All right?' Her voice was full of concern, but not for what was happening between them. Not for that.

'Aye, fine,' he replied but failed to stifle the sigh escaping from his chest. Would she stick with him out of pity after seeing his battered face? Part of him wanted to have Julie around, her warmth and loveliness blotting out the misery of the last two days. But deep down he knew he'd lost her long before his father's release from prison.

'Kyle?'

'What?'

'D'you want to talk about it?' She had stopped walking now and was looking at him, frowning. 'It might help . . .' Her voice trailed off in an unspoken apology.

Kyle shrugged. He hadn't talked about it to anyone though he'd done a fair amount of listening. His gran's house had been full of talk: recriminations, wild accusations and shouting. But that was because women did that sort of thing. And because Kyle was Gran's favourite, the youngest of her three grandsons. His brothers and his gran: they all had something to say about what Tam Kerrigan had done, and not just to him. That was one reason why he was here, with Julie, to escape from all of the talk. But also he'd

been interested in the bit about the murder victim, in spite of everything.

What happened to a dead person at a post-mortem examination? He'd looked up stuff on the net, reading in a detached way about incisions and bodily fluids, not really making a link with the dead man his father had killed. Even the illustrations on the Internet site hadn't put him off. It was like selecting bits of vacuum-packed butcher meat from the supermarket shelves and not seeing the animal they'd come from. Not like in the school trip to France where you were in no doubt about the origin of your dinner. One of the lassies had nearly thrown up that time someone had served up a chicken with everything still attached, the yellow claws curled over the platter and the head all to one side; you could imagine its squawk as the neck had been wrung.

'Kyle?' Julie's voice broke into his thoughts and he looked up, seeing her staring at him, a tiny crease between her eyes.

'Och, I'm okay,' he told her, then dropped his gaze, unable to bear the kindness in her face. 'The bruises'll be gone in a day or so. Probably by the time we go back to school,' he added.

'Are you going back right away?'

Kyle shrugged again. 'Why not? Can't see what good it'll do me to hang around the house.' He paused to let the unspoken words sink in. Keeping out of the house meant keeping away from his father.

They walked on again in silence but this time Julie reached out for his hand and he took it, feeling its warmth, glad to have her there. It would be okay. There might be folk staring at him, curious to know the truth behind what

the papers said about Tam Kerrigan, but if Julie was there, even as a friend, he'd manage all right. All summer they'd talked about the advantages of being in Fourth Year, both excited, dropping the pretence of being too cool to show it. His mouth twisted at the memory. That had been another person, a young carefree creature whose whole life had stretched before him like an open road. Now that person was dead and gone, his boyhood behind him for ever.