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Opening extract from

Blood Ransom

Written by

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Blood Ransom by Sophie McKenzie

EXTRACT 1:

Rachel

Both men moved closer. I clenched my fists and pressed my feet into the ground, breathing deep into my guts to calm myself, like Lewis had taught me back when we were preparing to rescue Theo last year.

"Come on now, hen," the dark-haired guy cooed in a silly voice. "We just want you to show us what you've got."

The first man - McRae - laughed. "Aye." He reached out for my arm, pulling me round to face him.

Something snapped inside me.

"Piss off." I stared at McRae – right into his mean little eyes – then strode past him.

He grabbed me. Pulled me back.

I fisted my hand and punched, putting my whole weight behind the throw. The blow landed on McRae's shoulder, sending him reeling, doubled over with pain and shock.

I glared at the other man. His mouth fell open. I turned and sped away, out of the alley. I raced on, going over the route to the High Street in my head. Left. Left. Then a long stretch before the right turn onto the High Street, further up from the internet café than I was planning – but who cared.

I'd take the next couple of lefts, then double back to the High Street, further up and nearer the internet café.

The sound of pounding feet echoed behind me. I glanced over my shoulder.

Damn. The two men were hot on my tail – vicious looks on their faces.

I ran faster. Took my two left turns. I was holding them off – but not getting away.

Almost at the High Street now, I pushed myself on. The men were so close behind me I could hear them breathing as they ran. For a sick second I wondered if they were RAGE operatives, sent after me on purpose.

I darted down one final short road, then onto the High Street. I raced into the first shop I came to – a charity clothes place. I ducked behind a large rail of overcoats. They smelled of dead men's sweat.

I glanced over the top of the rail. The two men had stopped outside the shop but they weren't looking inside. They were laughing, like hassling me had been the best game ever.

Pigs.

As I watched, they sauntered off, swaggering down the street like they owned it. I shook my head. Well, at least they were just stupid men, not people from RAGE.

It was a few minutes to five now… nearly time to speak to Theo. The internet café was just up the road. I moved away from the rail of overcoats, tugged my hood off my face and headed towards the door. Outside, a boy in a wheelchair propelled himself past the window.

I froze.

The boy was olive-skinned with short, dark hair and a square jaw. He looked older than I remembered him, but otherwise it was the same face I'd been remembering and seeing in my dreams for the last nine months.

No way.

It *couldn't* be him.

What was he doing here? What was he doing in a wheelchair?

I stared as the boy wheeled himself along the street. I knew that profile as well as I knew my own.

It was Theo.