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Opening Extract from...

Entangled

Written by Cat Clarke

Published by Quercus

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CAT CLARKE

entangled

Quercus

First published in Great Britain in 2011 by Quercus

21 Bloomsbury Square
London
WC1A 2NS

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A CIP catalogue reference for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 84916 394 1

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Typeset by Nigel Hazle
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

For Mum, for everything.

Elspeth Margaret Clarke
1947–2010

day 3

I met Ethan the night I was planning to kill myself. Pretty inconvenient, when you think about it.

The same questions whirl round and round in my head:

What does he want from me?

How could I have let this happen?

AM I GOING TO DIE? (That one's my particular favourite.)

This isn't quite how I planned it. And I *do* like things to go to plan.

First things first: let's just start writing and see where that takes me. I presume that's what all the paper is here for. And the pens. Seems to me there are enough pens to last a *long* time. This is very, very bad. Maybe I'll just lie down for a second.



Don't know how long I was out for. Don't have my watch. Or my clothes. The thought of him undressing me when I was unconscious is beyond embarrassing. And this gown thing is not exactly the height of fashion. I feel like I'm waiting to be operated on. God, I *really* hope that's not the case. I'm sort of attached to my internal organs. I must be losing it – cracking jokes at a time like this. But humour at inappropriate times always has been a speciality of mine.

I have to figure out a way to get out of here. Maybe I can reason with him. I just need to find out what he wants. But part of me doesn't want to know the answer.

Shit . . . I think he's coming.



Well, that was short and sweet. He just came in with my food on a tray, saw me sitting at the table, pen in hand, and nodded. He seemed pleased. I sat there like an idiot, gawping at him. He didn't try to read what I've written – just looked at me in that way that makes me sure he knows *exactly* what I'm thinking. And then he was gone. Door bolted behind him, of course.

The food was delicious. That's just one of the many, many weird things about this. The food is great. And how many kidnapping cases have you heard about

where the victim has her own en-suite bathroom? And possibly the comfiest bed in the entire world. I just wish everything wasn't so *white*. It makes my head hurt. Sometimes I have to close my eyes to remind myself that there *are* other colours in the universe. At least these pens aren't white. That would have been pretty annoying, to say the least. Because writing is *definitely* helping. Just the mechanics of it: forming the letters which make up the words which magically join up to make sentences. It's sort of soothing. But what does he want me to write? And *why* does he want me to write? Weird weird weird. Still, maybe this is my big chance to be the writer I've always wanted to be. My last chance, probably.

Anyway, you're supposed to write about what you know, aren't you? So let's start with Ethan. Maybe someone will be able to find him one day (probably years after my skeleton is found at this bloody table with a biro still clutched in my bony fingers). I reckon he's about six feet tall. I'm basing this guesstimate on Nat, who maintains he's six foot but is clearly no taller than five foot ten. Liar, liar, pants on fire.

But back to Ethan. He is beautiful. I mean *properly* beautiful. He has black hair. It's somewhere between long and short, and there's this bit that's always falling

in front of his eyes. His eyes . . . well, they're grey. Gunmetal grey? Slate grey? Sky-before-a-spectacular-summer-thunderstorm grey? Maybe just plain old grey grey. His face is perfect. Honestly, it's like he just fell out of a painting or something. Cheekbones, eyebrows, nose, jaw. He's got them all and they're all just right. And that mouth . . . he has the lushest lips I've ever seen. I liked kissing them.

So what else, what else? He's pale, really pale. Like never-seen-the-daylight-cos-I'm-actually-a-vampire pale. For a brief moment of madness yesterday (after an *entirely* sleepless night), I did entertain the thought that maybe he *is* a vampire. Until I remembered that my life *isn't* actually *Twilight*. Ethan's skin is amazing. I would kill for skin that clear. I can't quite work out how old he is. At first I thought he was maybe around twenty, but it's really hard to tell. Sometimes he looks older, and other times he looks like a lost little boy.

He has a scar from the bottom of his nose to his top lip. I remember tracing it with my fingertips. Some scars are good.

It's no big surprise that his body is beautiful too. Lean but strong. Smooth. And he wraps it up in pretty decent clothes. That night he was wearing a white vest, faded old jeans, and battered black Converse All Stars.

He's clearly not much of a colours person – greys, whites and blacks so far. Which is fair enough, but I *love love love* colours. Purple is good . . . and green. A green so bright it's like it's shouting. I miss green.

So, you might be thinking that Ethan sounds pretty hot. And it even sounds like I want him. I *did* want him, but the whole abduction thing seems to have put a bit of a damper on our relationship. And I think it's too early for me to have that syndrome . . . what's it called? Where a hostage starts to identify with her captor, falls in love with him, and then joins him on his evil kidnapping/killing/whatever spree. All I'm trying to say is that an impartial observer would think he's hot *as* – and I would have to agree.

I can't work out where he's from. I don't think he's a local boy – he certainly doesn't *look* like any of the boys round here (or rather, *there* – back home, I mean . . . where AM I?). On Monday night, I asked him where he was from and he said 'around', which *maybe* should have aroused my suspicions. At the time I probably thought he was just appealingly mysterious. Idiot.

Ethan. Perfect boyfriend material. Apart from the tendency to kidnap unstable girls who are too wasted to even realize what's happening. I can just imagine the lonely-hearts ad:

Tall, dark and handsome man WLTM green-eyed girl. Interests include films, long walks in the rain, Italian food and a just a teensy bit of kidnapping every so often.

Sane girls need not apply.

Things I know about Ethan (not including the whole looking-like-a-Greek-god thing)

1. He drives a newish-looking silver van.
   Man in van = obviously dodgy.
2. He doesn't seem to be your classic slasher-movie psychopath.
3. He's gone to an awful lot of trouble to make sure that I'm comfortable here. The bed, the bathroom, the delicious food . . . All unnerving in the extreme.
4. He didn't choose me. I chose him. I chose to go and sit next to him on the swings. Maybe he knew what he was going to do but hadn't got around to picking his victim yet. It's almost like he was the bait – all alone and shining like a beacon of hotness. He reeled me in good and proper.
5. He likes to listen. Not so much with the talking.
6. He hasn't tried to hurt me. Yet.
7. I don't actually have a seventh point, but seven is

my lucky number and I REALLY could do with some luck right now.



Night night. Sleep tight. Don't let the strangely alluring psychopath/vampire bite.

day 4

Well, wasn't I just the bizarrely upbeat little kidnappee yesterday? I reckon that's what someone who's been kidnapped should be called. Kidnapper, kidnappee. Makes sense to me. That rhymes.

Not feeling quite so upbeat today.

Why is this happening to me?

Stop thinking. Keep writing. Keep the pen on the paper and move your hand.



I needed a bit (OK, a lot) of Dutch courage before I went through with it. While I was getting ready, I swigged from the bottle of vodka that I keep under my bed. I chose my clothes with care. Just cos you're going to die, there's no need to look sloppy. I put on my new jeans, which make my legs look super-long and skinny. I went through practically every top I own,

before settling on my trusty old green T-shirt (my *lucky* green T-shirt – ha!). Shoes were tricky, but I eventually went for comfort with my Adidas shell-toes. Not exactly glamorous, but they added a certain old-school chic. I put on more make-up than was strictly necessary, all the while looking in the mirror thinking, *No more eyeliner for me. Last lipgloss I'll ever wear. Last time I'll look in this mirror knowing I'll never be good enough,* and things to that effect.

Knife in bag, then good to go.

I tripped down the stairs like a girl without a care in the world. Shouted, 'I'm off to meet Sal. Don't wait up!' to Mum, who was watching telly in the living room. Maybe I should have just popped my head round the door for a second, instead of slamming the front door when I heard, 'Grace, wait a sec . . .' But I didn't. One more second in her presence would be too much to bear.

So I didn't say bye, and I didn't leave a note. I just didn't see the point. Suicide notes are lame *as*, anyway. And if I *had* left a note, then everyone would now be thinking I'm dead. Which I'm most definitely not (yet).

I caught the bus into town. Sat right at the back – unusual for me. My last ever bus journey, or so I thought. Come to think of it, that may well still be

the case. As bus journeys go, it was pretty standard. A woman with loooong grey hair sat in front of me. The lank locks hung over the back of her seat, and the straggly ends brushed my jeans. It was revolting. Long hair after a certain age is just not an attractive feature. Thankfully Icky Hair Woman got off the bus before I started gagging.

I felt kind of peaceful after she'd gone. I closed my eyes and breathed deeply. I was going to do it – I was really actually truly going to do it. This was it. *Oh, they'll be sorry* . . . The sing-song voice in my head made me smile.

I'm not sure how I feel about the yes-you-really-were-minutes-away-from-topping-yourself thing now. But I'm not ready to examine my feelings too closely. Not quite yet. It's like I have a bandage wrapped round me. I sort of know why it's there, but if I unravel it and actually *see* the festering wound underneath, all yellow and oozy, I may just lose my mind.

I got off the bus and skipped into an off-licence. I spent a good few minutes choosing my tipple. Went for gin, which is strange, cos I hate the stuff. It reminds me of Dad. So I headed towards the counter and the guy had the worst case of acne I have ever seen (apart from Scott Ames in Year 9, but at least that cleared up and now he's looking pretty fine). Then the most

ridiculous thing happened: I got ID'd! Now you have to understand that this *never* happens to me. I've been buying alcohol since I was fourteen, for Christ's sake. Maybe it was a sign from God: 'Grace, you can kill yourself if you really must, but I'm not going to make things easy for you.' I gave Acne Boy my best you-have-*got*-to-be-kidding-me look and said, 'You have *got* to be kidding me. I'm twenty-two years old! Do I look like a kid?' He just pointed to the sign that said, 'If you look under 25 blah blah blah blah blah . . .' I wasted a couple of minutes spinning him a line about having left my ID in my jacket, and having left my jacket at home cos of the unseasonably warm weather we've been having. Still no sale. Irritating. But I suppose you've got to get your kicks somehow when you've got the most disgusting, pus-ridden excuse for a face, and no hope of getting sex (ever). I flounced out of the shop in an appropriately flouncy, indignant fashion, popped into the shop next door and bought exactly the same bottle two quid cheaper. So I guess God wasn't sending me a sign after all.

As I walked down the street with the bottle clutched under my arm, I passed a couple about my age. They were holding hands and laughing. *Go away go away go away!* The guy pushed the girl up against a shop window and kissed her. I missed being kissed like that.

I walked on, nearly bumping into a gang of townie boys with shiny shoes and questionable hair. One of them turned and shouted to me, 'Cheer up, love. It might never happen!' I grinned at him. *Oh, I think it will . . .*

I came to the park gates. My dad used to take me there when I was little. I'd feed the ducks, then run around like a crazy person. Dad would chase me and pretend to be a zombie. And then he'd push me on the swings – so hard that I was sure that I'd go right over the top of the crossbar, but I'd still shout for him to push harder. I never got bored of that.

After Dad was gone, the park started to mean other things to me. Things I'm glad he wasn't here to see. It meant smoking and drinking stupidly strong cider and doing things with inappropriate boys. And other stuff too.

A lot of memories in that park. Good and bad. (Mostly bad.) It seemed as good a place as any for my date with death. I'd decided on the den at the top of the climbing frame. I tried not to think about the possibility that some random kid might find my body. *Hopefully it'll be the park warden – the one that looks a bit like a paedophile. Urgh. He'd better not touch me. Even if I am too dead to care.*

I wandered past the duck pond. It had been drained years ago. It looked sort of sad at not being able to

fulfil its one purpose in life. *Christ – already getting sentimental and I haven't even started the serious drinking yet. Next thing you know I'll be on about melancholy trees or despondent rubbish bins.*

I went straight to the den, climbed up into it and sat down. The floor wasn't too filthy, and I was glad. Not that it really mattered.

Took the knife out of my bag.

Stared at the blade and remembered.

Every detail of that night knifed my heart.

And every reason not to live twisted that knife – twisted it hard.

I opened the bottle and drank.

Drank some more.

Closed my eyes.

Took a deep breath.

I was ready.

Cut.



And then I heard something. A creaking, squeaking sound. *Too loud. Shit. Someone's out there.*

I peeked out of the den's window and saw him. On the swings. Back and forth, back and forth, going as high as he possibly could, just like I used to do.

Damn. Can't very well do it now, can I? Got to make him

go away. Leave me in peace. So I put the knife back in the bag, grabbed the bottle and clambered out of the den.

If only I'd just stayed put and waited till he went away.

He saw me coming and watched my somewhat unsteady progress towards him. As soon as I got close enough for a proper look . . . well, I don't need to go into that again. *Reckon there are worse ways to spend your last few minutes. Just talk to him for a bit. He'll go away eventually.* As I approached, he slowed the swing to a stop. He watched me and I watched him. I sat down on the swing next to him and said hello. There was something about the way he looked at me that I couldn't quite put my finger on. Now I think I know what it was – I think he *recognized* me.

And even more weirdly, I think I recognized him.

But that's not possible.