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Opening extract from
The Deviants

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A Day at the Beach

I'm sitting beside the café window when I see the man running up the beach and I instantly know it's washed ashore. The sand flicks up behind him as he sprints. And he's screaming.

His face is alive with fear. He's running so hard to get away from it, what he's found. In those brief moments, I am the only person in the café to see him. But, within seconds, the quiet crumbles into chaos.

'Somebody! Help!'

'What's he saying?'

'Did he say a body?'

Someone calls my name, but I don't turn around. I keep walking, out of the café, into the morning air, along the Esplanade, down the steps and onto the wet sand, like the sea is a magnet and I am metal.

People overtake me. Someone shouts, 'Call the police.' Thudding footsteps, snatches of breath. The sand's covered in a billion worm hills and tiny white shells. A group of crows squawks nearby. They're all clustered around an object, pecking at it.

'Let the police handle it.'

'Don't look. Don't look.'

I keep walking towards the mound, until I can see for myself what the man was running from. Until I can see for myself what I have done.

*'Tell me everything. Start with what was
happening between you and Max.'*

Moonlight Adventure

Saturday, 1 August

It's like those really old paintings you see in art galleries – if you look at them from a distance, they're beautiful. A quick glance, it's a masterpiece. But as you get closer, you start to see all the cracks. We were a masterpiece, me and Max. We'd known each other for ever. We had the same taste in music. We finished each other's sentences. We ate Carte d'Or watching *Botched Up Bodies* and he'd pretend not to wince. We watched romantic comedies and he'd pretend not to cry. And he had these marvellous arms and always wore sleeveless hoodies in summer.

But close up, there were problems. And these problems were becoming harder to ignore. I was snipping at him more and he took nothing seriously.

He could still impress me though. This one night, he arranged a big surprise for me at the garden centre. I had no idea what the occasion was.

'You don't remember, do you?'

There had to be a good reason why he'd gone to so much trouble. Not only had he stolen Neil's keys and broken us in after hours, he'd set up a table in the café, with lit candles,

buttered teacakes and two glasses of milkshake. It looked like something from a honeymoon brochure, with all the fairy lights strung up in the palm trees and the white cloth on the table. Essentially, though, we were still *in a garden centre*. I'd worn an actual dress and shaved my actual legs to be taken to a place that sold worm poo and weed killer.

'Of course I remember,' I lied. 'This is nice. Thanks.'

He folded his arms. 'I could get quite offended, you know.'

'What?'

'You don't have a Scooby, do you?'

'Ummmm, well... I'm pretty sure it's not my birthday. And you've just had *your* birthday, so that must mean that it's...' I scanned my brain for something, anything. What did 1 August mean? But I had nothing. Max looked so disappointed it was almost painful.

And then I got it. It was the synthetic strawberry smell of the shakes that did it.

Our first proper date, five years ago, when I was twelve and he was nearly thirteen and we realised we liked each other more than as the best friends we'd been since primary school. It had been here, in the café, supervised by our mums on another table. We'd had teacakes and strawberry milkshakes, and Max paid for it with his own money from his Pokemon wallet, even though his dad owned the store. Then we had our first proper kiss, inside one of the sheds, while the mums went to look at geraniums. On the way out, Max had held my hand.

My whole body flashed over with goosebumps. 'Oh God. I'm so sorry!'

'It's all right.' He shrugged. 'I wanted to do something without my parents or your dad being around. Something for us.' He pulled out a chair for me and sat down opposite.