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**KARIN**

**SLAUGHTER**

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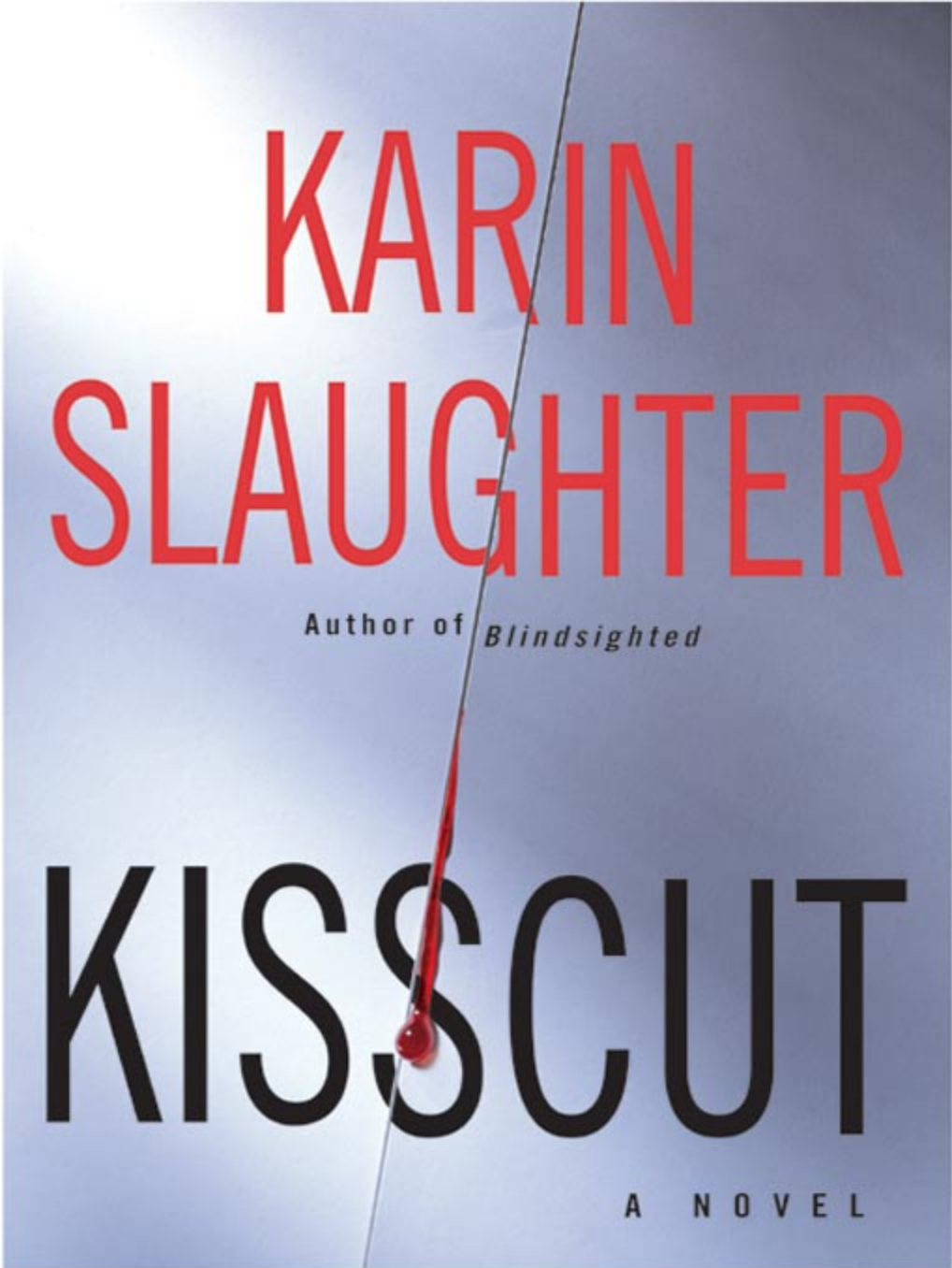
**KISSCUT**

## Synopsis | KISSCUT

Saturday night dates at the skating rink have been a tradition in the small southern town of Heartsdale for as long as anyone can remember, but when a teenage quarrel explodes into a deadly shoot-out, Sara Linton—the town’s pediatrician and medical examiner—finds herself entangled in a terrible tragedy.

What seemed at first to be a horrific but individual catastrophe proves to have wider implications. The autopsy reveals evidence of long-term abuse, of ritualistic self-mutilation, but when Sara and police chief Jeffrey Tolliver start to investigate, they are frustrated at every turn.

The children surrounding the victim close ranks. The families turn their backs. Then a young girl is abducted, and it becomes clear that the first death is linked to an even more brutal crime, one far more shocking than anyone could have imagined. Meanwhile, detective Lena Adams, still recovering from her sister’s death and her own brutal attack, finds herself drawn to a young man who might hold the answers. But unless Lena, Sara, and Jeffrey can uncover the deadly secrets the children hide, it’s going to happen again...

The book cover features a light blue background with a vertical crease down the center. A red string is tied around the crease, with a red wax seal at the bottom. The author's name and the title 'SLAUGHTER' are in red, while 'KISSCUT' is in large black letters. The text 'Author of Blindsighted' is in a smaller black font.

KARIN  
SLAUGHTER

Author of *Blindsighted*

KISSCUT

A NOVEL

***KISSCUT***

**A Novel by**

# **Karin Slaughter**

Book 2 of the Grant County Series  
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For Doris Smart,  
who loved Auburn football  
and reading—in that order

# *Saturday*

## Chapter One

"Dancing Queen," Sara Linton mumbled with the music as she made her way around the skating rink. "Young and sweet, only seventeen." She heard a furious clicking of wheels to her left and turned just in time to catch a small child before he crashed into her.

"Justin?" she asked, recognizing the seven year old. She held him up by the back of his shirt as his ankles wobbled over his in-line skates.

"Hey, Dr. Linton," Justin managed around gasps for breath. His helmet was too big for his head, and he pushed it back several times as he tried to look up at her.

Sara returned his smile, trying not to laugh. "Hello, Justin."

"I guess you like this music, huh? My mom likes it, too." He stared at her openly, his lips slightly parted. Like most of Sara's patients, Justin seemed a bit shocked to see her outside of the clinic. Sometimes she wondered if they thought she lived in the basement there, waiting for them to get colds or fevers so she could see them.

"Anyway," Justin pushed back his helmet again, knocking himself in the nose with his elbow pad. "I saw you singing it."

"Here," Sara offered, leaning down to adjust the chin strap. The music in the rink was so loud that Sara could feel the bass vibrating through the plastic buckle as she tightened it under his chin.

"Thanks," Justin yelled, then for some reason he put both his hands on top of the helmet, as if to rest them. The motion threw him off balance, and he stumbled, clamping on to Sara's leg.

Sara grabbed his shirt again and led them both over to the safety railing lining the rink. After trying on a pair of inline skates herself, Sara had asked for the old four-wheel kind, not wanting to fall on her ass in front of half the town.

"Wow." Justin giggled, throwing his arms over the railing for support. He was looking down at her skates. "Your feet are so huge!"

Sara looked down at her skates, feeling a flush of embarrassment. She had been teased about her large feet since she was seven years old. After nearly thirty years of hearing it, Sara still felt the urge to hide under the bed with a bowl of chocolate-fudge ice cream.

"You're wearing boy's skates!" Justin screeched, letting go of the rail so that he could point at her black skates. Sara caught him just before he hit the ground.

"Sweetie," Sara whispered politely into his ear. "Remember this when you're due for your booster shots."

Justin managed a smile for his pediatrician. "I think my mom wants me," he mumbled, edging along the rail, hand over hand, casting a wary eye over his shoulder to make sure Sara was not following him.

She crossed her arms, leaning against the railing as she watched him go. Sara loved kids, a characteristic most pediatricians shared, but there was something to be said for not spending her Saturday night surrounded by them.

"That your date?" Tessa asked, coming to a stop beside her.

Sara gave her sister a hard look. "Remind me how I got roped into this."

Tessa tried to smile. "Because you love me?"

"Right," Sara returned caustically. Across the rink, Sara picked out Devon Lockwood, Tessa's latest boyfriend, who also worked in the Linton family's plumbing business. Devon was leading his nephew around the kiddy rink while his brother watched.

"His mother hates me," Tessa mumbled. "She gives me nasty looks every time I get near him."

"Daddy's the same way about us," Sara reminded her.

Devon noticed them staring and waved.

"He's good with children," Sara noted, returning his wave.

"He's good with his hands," Tessa said in a low voice, almost to herself. She turned back to Sara. "Speaking of which, where's Jeffrey?"

Sara looked back at the front entrance, wondering that herself. Wondering, too, why she cared whether or not her ex-husband showed up. "I don't know," she answered. "When did this place get so packed?"

"It's Saturday night and football season hasn't started; what else are people going to do?" Tessa asked, but did not let Sara change the subject. "Where's Jeffrey?"

"Maybe he won't come."

Tessa smiled in a way that let Sara know she was holding back a snide comment.

"Go ahead and say it."

"I wasn't going to say anything," Tessa said, and Sara could not tell if she was lying or not.

"We're just dating." Sara paused, wondering whom she was trying to convince, Tessa or herself. She added, "It's not even serious."

"I know."

"We've barely even kissed."

Tessa held up her palms in resignation. "I know," she repeated, a smirk on her lips.

"Just a few dates. That's all."

"You don't have to convince me."

Sara groaned as she leaned back against the railing. She felt stupid, like a teenager instead of a grown woman. She had divorced Jeffrey two years ago after catching him with the woman who owned the sign shop in town. Why she had started seeing him again was as much a mystery to Sara as it was to her family.

A ballad came on, and the lights dimmed. Sara watched the mirrored ball drop down from the ceiling, scattering little squares of light all over the rink.

"I need to go to the bathroom," Sara told her sister. "Will you keep an eye out for Jeff?"

Tessa glanced over Sara's shoulder. "Somebody just went in."

"There are two stalls now." Sara turned toward the women's rest room just in time to see a large teenage girl go in. Sara recognized the girl as Jenny Weaver, one of her patients. She waved, but the girl didn't see her.

Tessa muttered, "Hope you can wait."

Sara frowned, watching another teenager she did not recognize follow Jenny into the rest room. At this rate, Sara would go into renal failure before Jeffrey arrived.

Tessa tilted her head toward the front door. "Speaking of tall, dark, and handsome."

Sara felt a foolish smile come to her lips as she watched Jeffrey make his way toward the rink. He was still dressed for work in a charcoal-gray suit with a burgundy tie. As chief of police for Grant County, he knew most of the people in the room. He glanced around, looking for Sara, she supposed, stopping here and there to shake hands. She refused to do anything that would get his attention as he walked through the crowd. At this point in their relationship, Sara was content to let Jeffrey do all of the work.

Sara had met Jeffrey on one of her earlier cases as town coroner. She had taken the helm of the medical examiner's office as a way to earn extra money to buy out her retiring partner at the Heartsdale Children's Clinic. Even though she had paid off Dr. Barney years ago, Sara still kept the job. She liked the challenge of pathology. Twelve years ago, Sara had done her residency in the emergency room of Atlanta's Grady Hospital. Going from such a fast-paced, life-and-death job to tummy aches and sinus infections at the clinic had been a shock to her system. The coroner's job was a challenge that helped keep her mind sharp.

Jeffrey finally caught sight of her. He stopped in the middle of shaking Betty Reynolds's hand, the corners of his mouth rising slowly, then dipping into a frown as he was pulled back into conversation with the owner of the town's five-and-dime.

Sara could guess what Betty was talking about. The store had been broken into twice in the last three months. Betty's posture was adversarial, and even though Jeffrey's attention was obviously elsewhere, she continued to speak to him.

Finally, Jeffrey nodded, giving Betty a pat on the back as he shook her hand, probably making an appointment to talk with her tomorrow. He extricated himself, then walked toward Sara, a sly smile on his face.