



Kiss in the Dark (Scarlett Wakefield Series)

By Lauren Henderson

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With Dan McAndrews's murder finally behind her, Scarlett has high hopes for a fresh start at Wakefield Hall Collegiate, the elite English boarding school her grandmother runs. Unfortunately, those hopes are dashed when her nemesis, the infamous Plum Saybourne, is transferred to the school. Plum wastes no time turning Scarlett's impressionable classmates against her.

Scarlett has dealt with Plum's nasty schemes before, and she can handle her archenemy very nicely, thank you—until Plum sets her sights on Scarlett's best friend, Taylor, and new boyfriend, Jase. Then Scarlett is more than willing to fight for what's rightfully hers.

Things only get worse after Scarlett becomes entangled in a mysterious death on campus. Scarlett is compelled to investigate because she wants to protect someone close to her. She never imagines that she'll uncover secrets related to her parents' fatal accident so many years ago. . . .

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Kiss in the Dark (Scarlett Wakefield Series) By Lauren Henderson Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #3186978 in Books
- Published on: 2010-04-13
- Released on: 2010-04-13
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.50" h x .87" w x 5.75" l, .80 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 256 pages



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Editorial Review

About the Author

Lauren Henderson was born and raised in London, where she lives with her husband.

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One

Me and Jase against the world

We're running as fast as we can in the dark. Holding hands, our breath coming in quick spurts. Down a gravel path, the heels of our trainers crushing the stones against each other, sharp grinding noises each time we land and push off again. Onto tarmac, for a few short steps. Behind us a man is bellowing like an angry bull, and we know he must be chasing us, though we can't see him. Our ears are full of the yelling and the sounds of our own feet, our own breath, as we race away through the night.

And then, finally, grass beneath our feet. Open land. We're running even faster, in great lopes; if we were horses we'd be galloping. Cold night air on our faces, soft yielding soil below, on which we land almost silently. I think of werewolves in books, how they can race through forests so fast it's almost like flying, their paws barely touching the ground. That's how I feel as I run and run, my hand in Jase's, our strides matching each other perfectly even though he's much taller than me.

It's like when I'm running in my dreams, sprinting so fast I feel I'm almost about to take off. Someone's chasing me, but they'll never catch me, because my feet are winged.

But even in my dreams, I've never run like this with Jase. His father's yells are receding now, bare wisps of them carried on the air, reaching us across the stretch of untended grass that runs along the side of the barns. He tried to run after us, but we left him far behind. I picture him bending over, handson his thighs, wheezing for breath, his face an apoplectic red.

Jase wheels and turns and I follow him effortlessly as he swings to the side of the last barn, ducks, dropping my hand, and pries away a loose board from the wall of the barn.

At first we were running blind. When Jase's father sneaked up on Jase and me kissing goodnight, shone a torch on us, and yelled all kinds of things that I never want to hear myself or Jase called again, we took off like startled rabbits, straight into the dark, only our knowledge of the school grounds saving us from running straight into a wall.

But by now, my eyes have recovered from the torch beam and grown accustomed to the dark. There's a waxing moon, a fat unfinished white crescent low in the black velvet sky, and thousands of tiny white pinprick stars; luckily for us, it's a clear night.

So I can see what Jase is doing as he lifts a second board away and props it against the side of the barn, making a gap wide enough for even him, with his broad shoulders, to clamber through. And I can also tell that out here it's as light as day compared to the pitch-black interior of the barn.

Jase is already halfway through, entering sideways, careful not to catch himself on a snag on the boards. He

turns his head to me, his golden eyes bright even in the darkness, and holds out a hand.

"Scarlett?" he whispers.

But it isn't really a question. He knows I trust him. He knows I'll take his hand and follow him into the barn, even if the opening is as dark as the hellmouth and I have no idea what's waiting for me inside.

Right now, I think I would follow Jase anywhere he asked me to.

Because right now, it feels like me and Jase against the whole world.

I wriggle through the gap without any difficulty. Jase's hand is warm in mine, guiding me as I step cautiously over a board and onto the packed-earth barn floor. He snaps open his Zippo lighter, and a small circle of light around us shows me the looming yellow side of a tractor to our left. Beyond that is what looks like the big ride-on lawn mower that Jase and his dad use for the endless maintenance of the Great Lawn, tracing perfect green stripes up and down its length.

"This way," Jase hisses. He wraps his arm around me and guides me over to the back of the barn, where a wooden ladder is propped, leading up to sheer blackness.

I don't hesitate for a moment. I'm shinnying up the ladder before he can even tell me that's where we're going.

It's a hayloft. I crawl out onto the wooden platform and get a mouthful of the nasty scratchy stuff immediately; I'm coughing it out as Jase hauls himself up behind me. "God, you climb like a monkey," he says admiringly. "One minute you were there, next you were gone."

"It's my special skill," I say, grinning, but he can't see me smile. He couldn't climb the ladder with the Zippo on, and up here it's so dark I can barely spot my hand in front of my face.

I turn over to sit on my bum and wriggle back to make room for Jase, hearing him land on the floor of the loft. I don't manage it fast enough, though, and a second later he's almost on top of me; he must be on all fours. I hear his hands, his knees, padding on the wood, like he's a big animal coming toward me. I shiver from head to toe in excitement, tinged with more than a trace of fear.

Not fear of Jase. I could never be scared of him. But I'm a little bit scared of my own feelings. Of how excited he makes me. It's so powerful it's almost like something rising in my throat, almost like I'm going to be sick with the strength of my own emotions.

And no, that's not pretty. It's really raw.

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