



## CHAPTER 2

# HANDS OF STONE

A month after the wake, I found myself outside a gym. Hands of Stone was a long, low building with the entire front made up of windows, so I had a good view without needing to go inside.

I stared through the glass, pretending to read the adverts. This gym was close to home, right on the high street, between a barber's and a chip shop. It was the two-week Easter holidays so, without school getting in the way, maybe now was a good opportunity for me to learn how to box.

Mum wasn't home much these days anyway.

Her friends had suggested she keep herself busy by signing up for different evening classes. If I focused my energy on something else, too, maybe that could be a good distraction. Besides, every little thing wound me up these days. Having an outlet would be cool.

Apart from the school sports hall I'd never set foot in a gym, but I stepped inside anyway. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, Dad liked to say.

Inside on my left was a shop area selling gym gear. Rows of gloves hung from the wall. The other part of the gym was full of punchbags swinging from the ceiling, and there was a small boxing ring at the back. A couple of boys were sparring.

A young woman with a nose piercing and short, bleached-blond hair sat behind a desk, punching the buttons on a cash register. She glanced up and smiled brightly, which made me feel at ease.