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Kelly, Erin. The Poison Tree

From the start we know it will end badly. Karen Clark is educated, intelligent, a devoted mother and the last possible person you would expect to find harboring dark, violent memories. In alternating chapters, Kelly reveals Karen's past and present circumstances and how her fate was altered at the end of college by a chance meeting with an odd brother and sister. Biba Capel is a free-spirited actress with dark secrets of her own who lives with her brother, Rex, and an assortment of other bohemian friends in a crumbling mansion in Highgate. Rex and Biba share an unusually tight bond thanks to their joint survival of an especially dysfunctional childhood. Karen quickly trades her disciplined, boring life for the dark adventure of living with the Capels for the summer in what turns out to be one long, strange party that eventually goes horribly wrong.

Kelly excels at creating interesting, layered characters and a unique, gothic setting for her story. Suspense builds as Karen constantly alludes to the bloodshed that eventually dissolved their unusual household without ever giving too much away. Readers will follow the novel's twists and turns to the unexpected end of this dark, original novel.

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