

# THE DARK LAKE

A HOT SUMMER. A SHOCKING MURDER...

A TOWN OF SECRETS  
WAITING TO EXPLODE.

SARAH BAILEY

**THE  
DARK  
LAKE**

SARAH BAILEY

  
**ALLEN & UNWIN**  
SYDNEY • MELBOURNE • AUCKLAND • LONDON

First published in 2017

Copyright © Sarah Bailey 2017

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher. The Australian *Copyright Act 1968* (the Act) allows a maximum of one chapter or 10 per cent of this book, whichever is the greater, to be photocopied by any educational institution for its educational purposes provided that the educational institution (or body that administers it) has given a remuneration notice to the Copyright Agency (Australia) under the Act.

Allen & Unwin  
83 Alexander Street  
Crows Nest NSW 2065  
Australia  
Phone: (61 2) 8425 0100  
Email: [info@allenandunwin.com](mailto:info@allenandunwin.com)  
Web: [www.allenandunwin.com](http://www.allenandunwin.com)

Cataloguing-in-Publication details are available  
from the National Library of Australia  
[www.trove.nla.gov.au](http://www.trove.nla.gov.au)

ISBN 978 1 76029 589 9

Set in 11/17 pt Minion Pro by Midland Typesetters, Australia  
Printed and bound in Australia by Griffin Press  
Printed in Australia by McPherson's Printing Group  
Printed and bound in Australia by SOS Print + Media Group

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



The paper in this book is FSC® certified.  
FSC® promotes environmentally responsible,  
socially beneficial and economically viable  
management of the world's forests.

And where two raging fires meet together,  
they do consume the thing that feeds their fury.

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

# now

When I think back to that summer something comes loose in my head. It's like a marble is bouncing around in there, like my brain is a pinball machine. I try not to let it roll around for too long. If I do, I end up going funny behind the eyes and in my throat and I can't do normal things like order coffee or tie Ben's shoelaces. I know I need to try to forget. Move on. It's what I would tell someone else in my situation to do. Probably I should move away, leave Smithson, but starting over has never been a strength of mine. I have trouble letting go.

During the day it's not so bad. I'll be in the middle of doing something and then my mind wanders to her and the little ball ricochets through my head and I stop talking in the middle of a sentence, or I forget to press the accelerator when the lights go green. Still, I can usually shake it away and keep going with whatever I was doing without anyone noticing.

It's amazing what you can keep buried when you want to.

But sometimes, late at night, I let myself think about what happened. Really think. I remember the throbbing heat. I remember the madness in my head and the fear that pulsed in my chest. And I remember Rosalind, of course. Always Rosalind. I lie flat on my back and she appears on my bedroom ceiling, playing across it

like a lightless slide show. I click through the images: her in first grade with her socks pulled up high; her walking down Ayres Road towards the bus stop, backpack bobbing; her smoking a cigarette on the edges of the school oval; her drunk at Cathy Roper's party, eyes heavy with dark liner.

Her at our debutante ball, dressed in white.

Her kissing him.

Her lying on the autopsy table with her body splayed open.

I can't even tell anymore whether the pictures are from my memories or ones I came across during the case. After a while, everything starts to blur together. A few times I've got it all mixed up and Ben ends up on my bedroom ceiling, sliced open on the autopsy table. When that happens, I get up, turn on the hallway lights and go into his room to check on him.

After it was all over I promised to make a fresh start. To stop letting the past weigh me down. But it's been hard. Harder than I thought it would be. So much happened that summer. It lives on inside me somehow, writhing around like a living beast.

It's weird, but in a way it's sort of like I miss her.

I miss a lot of people.

One memory I do have that I know is real is from our final year of high school English. It was warm and the windows were open on both sides of the classroom. I can still feel the breeze that ruffled across us as Mrs Frisk roamed around the room firing questions at us. We were studying Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*. This class was different from the English classes in earlier years. If you made it this far, you were serious. Even the boys would generally pay attention. No one sniggered at the love scenes like they had a few years earlier.

Rose always sat up the front, her back ruler-straight from years of ballet, her thick caramel hair spilling down it like a wave. I always

sat near the door on the other side of the room. I could look at her from there. Watch her perfect movements.

‘What do you think Shakespeare is getting at when he declares that “*these violent delights have violent ends*”?’ Mrs Frisk’s forehead beaded with sweat as she stalked around the edges of the room, stepping in and out of sun puddles.

‘Well, it’s foreboding, isn’t it?’ offered Kevin Whitby. ‘You know they’re doomed from the start. Shakespeare wants you to know that. He loved a good warning to set the scene. These days he’d be writing shit-hot anti-drug ads.’

Soft laughter bubbled up from the class.

‘It’s a warning, sure, but I don’t think he’s saying they should stop.’

Everyone paused, caught in the honey of Rose’s voice. Even Mrs Frisk stopped pacing.

Rose leaned forward over her notebook. ‘I mean, Shakespeare goes on to say, “*And in their triumph dies, like fire and powder. Which as they kiss consume.*” So he’s basically saying everything has consequences. He’s not necessarily saying it’s not worth it. I think he’s suggesting that sometimes things are worth doing anyway.’

Mrs Frisk nodded enthusiastically.

‘Rose makes an important point. Shakespeare was big on consequences. All of his plays circle around characters who weigh up the odds and choose to behave in a certain way based on their assessments.’

‘They didn’t make great choices for the most part,’ said Kevin. ‘They all had pretty bad judgment.’

‘I disagree.’ Rose looked at Kevin in a way that was hard to categorise as either friendly or annoyed. ‘Romeo and Juliet were all-in-right from the start, even though they knew it probably wasn’t going to end well.’ She smiled at Mrs Frisk. ‘I think that kind of conviction

is admirable. Plus, it's possible that the happiness they felt in their short time together outweighed any other happiness they'd have felt if they lived their whole lives apart.' She shrugged delicately. 'But who knows. Those are just my thoughts.'

I think about that day often. The fresh, fragrant air pouring through the windows as we debated the story of the two young lovers. Rose lit by the sun, her beautiful face giving nothing away. Her elegant hands diligently making notes, her writing perfect compared to my own crude scrawl. Even back then, she was a mystery that I wanted to solve.

There had been a few minutes when I was alone with her in the autopsy room. I'd felt wild. Absent. Before I could stop myself I was leaning close to her, telling her everything. The words draining out of me as she lay there. Her long damp hair hanging off the back of the steel table. Glassy eyes fixed blindly on the ceiling. She was still so beautiful, even in death.

Our secrets circled madly around the bright white room that morning. Rocking back and forth on my heels as I stood there next to her, I knew how far in I was again, how comprehensively her death could undo me. I looked at Rosalind Ryan properly for the last time before breathing deeply, readying myself, letting her pull me back into her world, and I sank down, further and further, until I was completely, utterly under.

# Chapter One

Saturday, 12 December, 7.18 am

Connor Marsh jogs steadily around the east side of Sonny Lake. He throws a quick glance at his watch. He is making great time and it feels good being out of the house and running in the fresh air. The kids had been crazy this morning; they'd woken at six and had still been bouncing off the walls when he left the house an hour later. The place is way too small for two little kids, especially boys, he thinks. And Mia had been in such a foul mood. He couldn't believe that she'd had a go at him about the fishing trip next weekend. He hadn't been away in ages and had been taking the boys to footy or soccer every Saturday morning for over two years now. Connor grimaces, frustrated at how unreasonable she can be.

His feet pound along the dusty track making a steady beat. One, two, one, two. Connor often finds himself counting when he is trying not to think too much about running. His legs burn more than they used to and his ankle hasn't been the same since he fell off the ladder at work a few years back. Still, he is fitter than most guys his age. And he has a full head of hair. Lots to be grateful for.

The day starts to break in earnest. Connor catches glimpses of the sun through the messy tips of the gums. Another scorcher is on

the way. Birds trill from their lookouts and the wispy haze of sleep across the lake is starting to clear. Connor sighs. He's taking the kids to a fifth birthday party at ten, followed by a seven-year-old birthday party this afternoon. Weekends sure are different these days. He'd give almost anything to crack open a beer and watch the cricket in peace.

Connor steps heavily on a stick. It flicks up and scratches along his shin.

'Shit.' He stumbles before regaining his balance. The cut stings as it breaks into a thin red line. He slows his jogging, breathing heavily. He won't bother doing another lap now; he needs to head back home anyway to help get the kids ready for their party marathon. Walking, he places his hands on his hips as his heartbeat calms, breathing jaggedly from his mouth.

A duck flies low across the water, wings outstretched. Rubbish dots the edges of the lake. Chip packets and Coke bottles are held hostage by the rocks and submerged branches. The heat has caused the lake to creep away from the banks. Tree roots are exposed like electric wires. Connor's eyes scan across the water. He really should come running here more often; get back into a routine again. He can still remember training here for athletics years ago, doing laps around the track before school, the burn in his thighs. He catches a glimpse of the gaping eye of the stormwater drain, pitch black against the glare as it disappears into the clay wall of the lake. A little further along, Connor notices something caught along the water's edge; it appears to be made from some kind of material. He squints and realises he is looking at hair swirling out past a line of reeds. His feet lock to the ground. It looks like human hair, a woman's hair. His heartbeat picks up again. His limbs feel missing. Two steps forward confirm it is indeed a woman face down in the lake, her golden hair fanning out around her. Bare white arms are

visible every time the water ripples and what looks like red roses bob across the top of her watery grave.

A cluster of swans watches Connor from under the old wooden bridge. One of the birds lets out a low haunting cry and the sound echoes across the lake.

He drops to his knees and worries for a moment that he will be sick. His breathing slows and then quickens again. He looks back at the body again and then just as quickly looks away. Barely thinking, he dials triple zero and thrusts his phone against his ear.

# Chapter Two

Saturday, 12 December, 8.04 am

I stand in the shower with my head against the wall as blood oozes out of me. I had guessed I was about six weeks along but hadn't been sure exactly. I wonder if my denial has made this happen; my complete lack of acceptance. My sheer desperation for it not to be real. The blood mixes with the water before it disappears down the drain and I squeeze my eyes together and wish I was a little girl again, tucked up in bed, my mother's soft pout of a kiss pressing against my forehead.

God, I miss her.

Scott left early this morning to beat the traffic. He's secured a couple of weeks' concreting work on a large housing development just north of Pyre, a town about thirty km's east of Smithson. Ben is at my dad's; he slept there last night because of our early starts. Dad will be getting jumped on about now. Ben is always so cuddly in the mornings.

I can hear my phone ringing but I don't move. The cool tiles feel firm and reassuring against my skin as I spread my palms out on either side of my face. Trying to focus. Trying to feel normal. After a few minutes I lift my head. My vision takes a while to

adjust. My guts ache, the pain settling in low and deep.

I'm exhausted. I feel separate to my body. To my mind.

I know I should probably go to the hospital but I already know that I probably won't.

The bathroom is misty with steam. The bleeding seems to have slowed. I wash myself carefully and turn off the tap. The pipes shudder through the walls. I step out of the shower and pull a dark grey towel around me. I look at the mirror but I am just a blur in the fog. In the bedroom, I throw the covers across the bed and kick a slipper underneath it, stopping for a moment and leaning forward to catch my breath as sharp pain runs through me again. I dress quickly, lining my pants with a pad before pulling on black jeans, a plain grey t-shirt, low black boots. The temperature is climbing steadily and the leftover heat from yesterday still lingers unpleasantly in the house. I pour a glass of water and throw back a couple of Nurofen. Then, staring at the wall, I think about the day of loose ends in front of me: paperwork, a few reports to follow up, a cold case Jonesy has asked me to review. I picture my small desk in the middle of the station's main room and wish that I had an office. My mobile rings again as I am towel-drying my hair: it's Felix, and I look at his name on my phone and think a million things.

'Yep, hi.' I keep my voice light. 'I'm on my way. I'm just about to walk out the door.'

'Go straight to the lake, Gem,' he says, and I love the way his accent curls around my name.

I force myself to understand what he's saying. 'Why? What's happened?'

'A body's been found. It's a teacher from Smithson. A Rosalind Ryan.'

The room turns upside down. I sit down heavily on the bed as I grab at my throat, forcing myself to breathe. Felix keeps talking,

oblivious. ‘She used to be a student there too, apparently. Your age. Do you remember her?’



Set in between a burst of mountain ranges, Smithson is a little oasis of greenery in the middle of endless fawn-coloured acres of Aussie farmland. Smithson is known for ‘catching the rain’ that runs from the mountains, which is ironic as it’s the surrounding farms that actually need it. It’s changed a lot over the past decade. Carling Enterprises, a major cannery business, built a manufacturing plant on the outskirts of the town in the late nineties, just as I was finishing school. The large, silver structure already looks grossly out of date but is nevertheless a hive of activity. It milks the surrounding area dry, sucking the fruit from the trees and yanking the vegetables from the ground, and in return spits out over ten million cans of tinned fruit and vegetables every year. This productivity has slowly but steadily grown Smithson from a modest population of just under fifteen thousand to one of almost thirty thousand. Factory workers, truck drivers, engineers, food scientists, marketing people: new faces are everywhere. Suddenly, Smithson, the Noah’s Ark town that had always proudly boasted two of everything, multiplied. There are five bakeries now, and that’s just in the town centre. Someone told me that Carling does this all over the world: bases themselves in regional areas where the land is cheap and permits are easy to come by, and implants their business into a community, completely changing the landscape and the culture. In fairness, Smithson probably needed a bit of a kick in the arse, but it can be unsettling watching the giant trucks descend on our little world, the roads groaning under their weight, the smoke streaming out behind them.

To the right of the town centre is a large lake surrounded by dense bush land and a popular community park. Sonny Lake is really Smithson Lake but no one ever calls it that. I don't know why, but it's been called Sonny Lake as long as I can remember. Even the road signs read *This Way to Sonny Lake*. My parents were married there in a very bohemian ceremony back in the seventies. I've got a photo of Mum from that day on my bedside table. It was taken just after she and Dad said their vows. There are daisies in her hair and a glass of punch in her hand. She looks about twelve.

The lake backs onto the main high school. When I was in primary school I used to come down here with Mum to feed the ducks and to hunt for four-leaf clovers in the grass. In my high school days, the lake was where we came to smoke cigarettes, drink stolen alcohol and kiss boys. The old gazebo on the little bridge across the water always provided the perfect place for a ghostly séance and the ancient wooden tower in the clearing near the lake was a great vantage point from which to see if someone was coming. Once you climbed its creaky, winding staircase, you reached a lookout where you could see the entire lake, the main highway and all the way to the high school. It was also a great place to hide. Before he died, Jacob and I had spent hours up there talking and kissing and more. I close my eyes briefly, picturing his young face. He feels so far away now.

I've avoided coming here for years.



The crime scene is already swarming with cops and nosy passers-by. The lake is a popular hangout in the summer and around two years ago, the council built one of those modern, soft-edged playgrounds at the north of the lake to compliment the rickety old one

that remains to the west, but I've never thought to bring Ben; there are way too many memories lurking around for a Sunday afternoon play date.

Several people in jogging gear huddle nearby, talking quietly to each other as I walk past. I spot Felix and my insides bubble gently. As always I marvel at the effect he has on me. His brow is furrowed as he bends down to talk to one of the techs who is brushing gently at the ground just off the path. I see a white tarp a little further down in the reeds. Casey, our squad photographer, is snapping away to the left of it.

I allow myself to fully process the fact that Rosalind Ryan is dead. I suddenly feel startled to find myself a fully grown adult. I remember how our summer school dress had moulded to her womanly figure. I remember the way my own uniform had brushed below my knees, how I'd tried to pin it at the waist and the hem to look more like hers. I breathe deeply and exhale slowly. Walking down towards the lake, I set my face to blank. I try to block out the well-worn images of Rosalind that are fighting to settle in my vision. I try to block out everything. The sun is cracking through the last of the clouds and beats down like fire. The air is sharp. Dry. We are going to have to move quickly. We need to get her out of here.

'Hey,' I say.

'Hi.' Felix smiles up at me, squinting into the sun. 'You okay?'

My vision blurs with patches of white. 'Yep.' I shrug his question away. I gesture to the white tarp. 'What are you thinking?'

'Hard to say. We ID'd her from a coin purse in her jacket that had a school library card in it. There's nothing else on her except for her keys, which were also in her jacket. No phone or bag that we've been able to find yet.' He wipes at his forehead, already beaded with sweat. 'Fuck it's hot.' Felix is still trying to get used to the relentless heat that invades Smithson every Christmas. 'She was in the

water when the guy found her but Anna doesn't think she drowned. She thinks she was strangled. But there's also a nasty injury on her head. No visible stab or gunshot wounds. We'll know more when we move her, obviously.' He staggers into a stand. A few grey hairs glint above his ears. The skin around his eyes wrinkles as his gaze meets mine. I look away before I can't.

'Do you know her? Remember her from school?' he asks.

I nod and look out across the lake. Two ducks bob along side by side, the beautiful markings on their faces like stage masks.

'She's not the kind of person you forget.'

'Yeah, I figured. Were you friends though?'

'It was high school! We were all friends until we weren't. You know what it's like when you're that age.'

He raises his eyebrows and looks as if he's about to say something else, so I cut him off before he can. 'Felix, is this our case?'

He's still looking at me curiously but says, 'I think so. I was in when the call came through and Jonesy asked me to call you. Matthews might kick up a stink but yeah, I reckon it's ours.'

A familiar current pulls through me. A new case. My head clicks into gear as I try to start firming up the possibilities. But it's Rosalind Ryan lying dead over there in the water, I think. It's *her*. My usually reliable brain is stuck on an image of her face and it glitches over and over like a buggy computer screen. The click of Casey's camera forms a steady beat behind us and the sound bores into my ears. I deliberately take a few deep breaths before I say, 'Good. I really want to work this one. Look—' I finally turn to meet Felix's eye '—I knew her a bit from school but it's not an issue. Honestly.' I try to ignore the throbbing in my abdomen. 'So who found her?'

'That guy over there with Jimmy. He went to Smithson High too, but I think he's a bit older than you. He's pretty shaken up. His wife is coming to get him soon. Name's Marsh.'

I look at the well-built man clad in running garb sitting on a park bench with Jimmy. I think he's Phillip Marsh's older brother. I don't think we've ever spoken.

'I'll go and talk to him.'

'Okay. Don't be too long—we need to take a look at her before we get out of here.'

I walk past a lush patch of grass that must be the beneficiary of a timed sprinkler system and make my way over to our witness, trying to remember his name. Spencer? Cooper? Something like that.

'Hello.'

Jimmy and the man look up at me.

'I'm Detective Sergeant Gemma Woodstock.'

Jimmy smiles at me briefly. 'This is Connor Marsh. He found the body of the young lady this morning. He was running laps.'

'Hi, Connor,' I say.

'To be honest I was only going to do one. One lap. I'm not as fit as I used to be.' Connor doesn't look at me as he speaks. His eyes are fixed on a stick near his feet. He is nudging it back and forth between them.

'Tell me about when you first saw the body,' I say.

He kicks at the stick again. 'God, it was so weird. You know?' He looks up at me again and there's a flash of recognition in his eyes. I'm pretty sure that after I finished school and started going to the gym behind the library I'd see him there lifting weights. He squints and turns his gaze to the lake. 'I was just running. Just down there, along the bend.' He points down to a curve in the path about twenty metres from Rosalind's body. 'I wasn't thinking. Well, you know what I mean: I wasn't thinking about anything in particular. I was just running. I decided not to do another lap and sort of slowed down and then I saw her in the water.' He breathes out heavily. 'I didn't know what she was at first. Thought it was just rubbish or something.'

And then I sort of realised what I was looking at in a weird moment. I totally freaked out.' Connor pushes his hair back from his eyes and says, 'I heard one of the cops say she's a teacher at the school.'

I hold his gaze but I say nothing and keep my expression neutral.

'I know the one. She went there too, like us. She was really pretty.'  
Connor looks at me. 'Probably in your year, I reckon.'

Jimmy's head snaps towards me. I ignore him.

'Connor, did you notice anyone else this morning? Anyone hanging around? Anything at all that you can remember might be helpful.'

He is looking at the ground again. I notice the top of a tattoo snaking out of his ankle socks. It looks like the Smithson Saints Football Club emblem. 'I don't think I saw anyone. Maybe there was a girl in her car in the car park when I first pulled up. Talking on her phone. I think I remember that.'

'Anything else?' I press.

'I don't think so. Well, not really. I think I ran past someone walking their dog at some point. A guy, I think. An older guy maybe. Sorry, it was pretty early and I wasn't paying attention.'

'That's okay. If you recall anything else just let us know.'

'Do the flowers mean anything?'

'The flowers?'

Connor nods. 'Yeah, there were flowers around her in the water. I saw them. Looked like roses.'

I exchange a look with Jimmy. He shrugs subtly. 'We can't speculate at this stage. We'll be looking into everything.' I speak smoothly but my blood has turned white-hot.

'Can I go soon? I think my wife is coming to get me but she'll have the kids with her so I think I should wait near the car park.' He looks down towards the lake again and shivers despite the heat. 'Not here.'

‘That’s fine, mate, I’ll come with you.’

Jimmy’s calm voice is always reassuring. He’d make a great voice-over artist selling life insurance or something.

‘Hey, Connor, one more thing,’ I say as they get up. ‘You didn’t touch the body, did you?’

‘No way. I didn’t even go very close. To be honest, I’m not good with stuff like that.’

‘A good way to be, mate; a good way to be,’ Jimmy says, leading Connor away.

Rocking onto the balls of my feet I survey the scene again. A couple of young girls wearing neon running shoes and black lycra are clutching at each other, their faces ashen. They’re probably Smithson students I think, grimacing. There are a few mothers cautiously pushing their children on the swings and half-heartedly helping them to navigate the slide as they fix their eyes squarely on the activity near the edge of the lake. I can hear the low hum of a chopper approaching. We need to keep moving.

Felix sees me coming and breaks away from the techs, raising his eyebrows in a question.

‘The guy’s clear. Saw nothing, knows nothing. We’ll pull him in later today or tomorrow to get it all logged and double-check with his wife for an alibi but I doubt he can help us.’

‘I didn’t think so,’ says Felix. ‘Well, c’mon, let’s talk to Anna and get this done so we can get moving.’

‘I was going to suggest that exact thing.’

We smile briefly at each other as we walk along the rocks to where the reeds start. I see the dark entrance to the stormwater drain and can’t help feeling that someone could be watching us from in there.

‘Hey,’ I say to Felix, shaking the paranoia away, ‘what’s with the flowers? Connor Marsh said there were flowers all around her.’

‘Yeah,’ he says, turning his head so I can hear him. ‘Long-stemmed red roses were floating all around her in the water. Fucking creepy.’

I picture it in my head, thinking for a brief moment how perfect she would have looked covered in roses under different circumstances, and keep following Felix. Suddenly I experience a jolt of emotion so strong, I think I will fall into the water. This can’t be real. I focus on remaining upright, my eyes fixed on the back of Felix’s head, and breathe deeply.

Grey water laps gently at the brown dirt under my boots and then I see it: a foot, pale and ethereal, floating out from under the tarp. I remember watching Rose on the podium at the end of the local pool on a swimming sports day, her dainty feet squared together as she bent down low, snapping her goggles on, ready to jump into the water.

‘Hey, Gem!’ Anna’s head appears from the other side of the tarp.

‘Hi, Anna,’ I say, shielding my face from the sun and stepping over a dirty plastic bag, crab-walking along the edge towards her.

Anna is standing knee-deep in the lake in her waterproof scrubs. She looks like a spaceman. I can tell she is hot; her face is red and her fringe sticks to her forehead in messy little lines. ‘Right,’ she says, when we are close enough. ‘Well, guys, you know the drill. We have a deceased female, twenty-eight years of age. Her birthday would’ve been on Christmas Day, actually, according to her ID, which is a Smithson Secondary College teacher’s library card. She’s been dead for at least five hours, but it could be up to eight; the water makes it hard to tell. I’ll be able to be more accurate later. Like I said to McKinnon earlier, I think she was dead before she hit the water. There’s a large wound on the side of her head. I’d guess she was struck with a rock or something with rough edges but this should be clear when we do the autopsy. There might be dirt or gravel that confirms the weapon. I’d say she was strangled too, based on the

marks on her neck, and obviously I'll want to run tox as well. I'm thinking lovers tiff. Or a random attack, especially if her wallet is missing.' Anna pushes damp hair away from her eyes. 'Either way, this isn't pretty. It looks like she's been assaulted too: her underwear is missing and there is some bruising around her thighs and upper arms. Again, I'll know more when we get her back to base. But I can rule out suicide and accidental death for you. This is a homicide.'

Behind us children squeal in delight as they are spun around on the play equipment. I look at Felix. He is staring down at Rosalind seemingly deep in thought.

Anna gestures for the techs to come and get Rose's body. The reporters have arrived and are circling like hungry lions. I can see the black puff of a microphone bobbing along above the small crowd. The glint of a camera lens. The flick of sleek, TV-ready hair.

Great, the last thing I need today is a run-in with pocket-rocket reporter Candy Fyfe.

Anna puts her hands on her hips. 'Okay, guys, I'm done here. We've taken all the shots and bagged everything. Nothing that I think will be helpful, mind you, there's bloody rubbish everywhere. Water never helps.'

'Yep, much better if everyone was killed in the middle of a wide open sports field on a still day,' says Roger cheerily. Roger is one of our oldest techs. He's been working in the squad for almost forty years and has a perpetually sunny attitude regardless of the situation. I often picture him at home, happily telling his wife about his day. 'Yes, the dead girl was strangled it seems, murdered in cold blood. Pass the salt, please, darling.'

Roger and Fred, our other tech, pull up the tarp and place the stretcher carefully underneath Rose's left side. I look up to see the belly of a helicopter flying low and I come around the other side to block the view of her body. They pull Rose onto the white bed. Her

face is exactly as I remember it. A Disney princess beauty: her even features waiting patiently for a prince's kiss. When I heard a few years back that she'd come back to teach at Smithson High I'd been disappointed. I wanted better for her than that. Her hair hangs to the side and Fred picks it up and pulls it along her face so that it rests across her shoulder and down the side of her arm. He looks at her as if she is a sleeping child. I remember that Fred's wife had their first baby a few months ago and I wonder what is going through his mind.

Rosalind's toenails are painted a vivid blue and there are silver rings on her fingers. Her brows and lashes are dark against her pale skin. I remember trying to re-create those eyebrows in my bedroom. Even though my colouring was much darker than hers it had never looked right.

The boys pull up and close the body bag around her. The marks around her neck look almost black. Her pale face looks out at us, two pools of dark chocolate stare unflinching into the burning sun. The harsh buzz of the zip and then she is gone.

'Right, well, I'll see you all soon I'm sure.' Anna's already checking her phone as she walks off towards the car park.

We instruct the field team to start the search.

'Start with the area around the lake,' I tell Charlie, our field lead. 'Then move into the playground and the denser bushland. And get rid of these people. It's a bloody nightmare.'

A few of our guys are already cordoning off a large section of the park, ushering people away from the scene as Rosalind's body is bundled into an ambulance.

I turn back to the lake. The water gives nothing away.

Once everything is underway, we get into my car and head back to the station. Felix is listening to voicemails but he reaches over and gives my hand a slow squeeze. A deep shiver plays through me. I pull my hand away and flick on the radio to drown out the buzz

in my ears. The ache has settled deep in my groin where my belt is pressing and I shift my weight, trying to placate it. I can't tell how much I'm still bleeding and want desperately to get to the bathroom at work. I want to be alone. I brake suddenly, seeing a red light just in time. Felix throws me a look but I keep my gaze on the road. *Rosalind Ryan is dead. Rosalind Ryan is dead*, I think, over and over. And then I think that somehow I always knew that something like this would happen.