

# The Dark Lake

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For my sons, Oxford and Linus,  
who have somehow managed to make the world  
feel both bigger and smaller,  
at exactly the same time.



## 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 should 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 grade one with her socks pulled up high; her walking down Ayres Road toward 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.

Once 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.

## THE DARK LAKE

“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 categorize 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 were a few minutes when I was alone with her in the autopsy room. I 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.

SARAH BAILEY

Our secrets circled madly around the bright white room that morning. Rocking back and forth on my heels as I stood 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.