

Sarah Bailey is a Melbourne-based writer with a background in advertising and communications. She has two young children and currently works at creative projects company Mr Smith. Over the past five years she has written a number of short stories and opinion pieces. *The Dark Lake* was her first novel. *Into the Night* is her second book featuring Detective Sergeant Gemma Woodstock.

INTO THE NIGHT

SARAH BAILEY



First published in Australia in 2018 by Allen & Unwin, Sydney, Australia.
This edition published in Great Britain in 2018 by Corvus, an imprint
of Atlantic Books Ltd.

Copyright © Sarah Bailey, 2018

The moral right of Sarah Bailey to be identified as the author of this
work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright,
Designs and Patents Act of 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any
means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without the prior permission of both the copyright owner and the
above publisher of this book.

This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters and
incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination.
Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or
localities, is entirely coincidental.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Trade paperback ISBN: 978 1 78649 489 4
E-book ISBN: 978 1 78649 490 0

Printed in Great Britain

Corvus
An imprint of Atlantic Books Ltd
Ormond House
26–27 Boswell Street
London
WC1N 3JZ

www.atlantic-books.co.uk

Melbourne, this one is for you

“The eternal stars shine out again,
so soon as it is dark enough.”

Thomas Carlyle

Tuesday, 14 August

12.14 am

Freezing air slices my lungs every time I breathe. I walk to the other side of the tunnel in an attempt to shift blood into my numb feet. I peer into its black depths. I assume it's just a long stretch of concrete and rubbish, shelter for rats and mice, that eventually merges with other concrete passages running underneath unsuspecting roads and buildings. Faded graffiti hugs the curved wall, the colourful scrawls harshly exposed by a mobile spotlight and fresh police tape across the entrance is taut, barely shaking in the breeze. The nearby asphalt path is slick with recent rain. High above, a plump moon peers down at the blunt edges of the city. As the white puffs exit my mouth, I think about how much grittier the crime scenes always seem here than they did in Smithson. So much more sinister somehow.

I was drifting into my second hour of sleep when the call came through. A fatal attack in Carlton. Putting the phone down, I threw a glance at the lightly snoring man in the giant bed beside me. I slipped out of the warm cocoon, stumbled into the small lounge, then quietly pulled on the clothes I'd stripped off only an hour earlier. After easing the door shut, I made my way to the lift

and rushed through the gleaming lobby, eyes on the floor, before jumping into a cab. The city is smaller at night, and less than fifteen minutes later I'm staring into the face of a dead man, the wind biting at my nose and ears.

My body aches for rest. I taste wine on my breath. Sex is still fresh on my skin. I pull my wool coat tighter around me and shake my head, forcing my brain to accept that for the next few hours at least, sleep is out of the question.

The forensics officers are silent as they go about their business, glowing in their puffy white uniforms. Their jaws are set as they pluck items from the ground with gloved hands and tweezers, dropping them carefully into evidence bags, their experienced eyes taking in the story of the scene.

All I can hear is the endless buzz of the sprawling night.

I jump slightly as a camera flash lights up the dingy surrounds—once, twice, again—and it reminds me of a music video. But in place of curvy dancing silhouettes, there is only the profile of the victim, his head hanging forward into his lap, his back hard against the wall. In death, the old man's gnarled fingers curl gently into each palm. His bald head is partly shielded from the cold; a woollen beanie dotted with holes grips his head. His tracksuit pants are down around his knees but his oversized shirt grants him some dignity. His hands are slick with drying blood, indicating that he tried to keep the life inside his body. He didn't want to die despite living like this. The dark red mingles with the rubbish on the ground, creating a murky, smelly puddle. I wonder if anyone is left alive who remembers him as a child. I wonder about his mother.

The glowing tip of a cigarette bobs into my vision.

'What a place to go,' says Detective Sergeant Nick Fleet, extinguishing the smoke and placing it in a plastic bag before shoving it into his pocket.

The familiar smell finds my nostrils and instantly triggers a craving.

‘It’s pretty isolated,’ I observe. ‘And badly lit. You’d be fairly safe to assume that you could get away with pretty much anything out here.’

Fleet snorts. ‘Well, if it wasn’t for the witness I’d guess it was a gay hook-up gone wrong, seeing as our guy’s half naked.’ Fleet squints into the tunnel at the body, wrinkling his nose. ‘But it was probably drug payback. Usually is.’

‘Maybe,’ I reply, ‘but I don’t think so. Everything here suggests that he was taken by surprise. I think he was urinating against the wall when someone attacked him.’ I point to the rancid wet circle not far from the body.

Fleet clears his throat loudly and the rattle of loose phlegm nauseates me. ‘My money is still on drugs.’

‘It’s possible,’ I say, ‘but there’s no suggestion that he was using or selling. No track marks, no drug paraphernalia.’

‘Maybe he pissed someone off.’

‘Maybe,’ I say curtly.

Fleet clicks his tongue. ‘We must keep an open mind, Gemma,’ he says in a faux-wise voice. ‘It’s early days after all.’

A familiar surge of frustration flares just as headlights swing across the darkness nearby. The bark of a dog explodes behind us. Moments later, our boss, Chief Inspector Toby Isaacs, ducks under the tape and into the mouth of the tunnel. He nods at me, then Fleet, before surveying the scene with wide grey eyes. His features don’t move but his gaze lingers on the dead man’s worn boots; the sole of the left one gapes open at the toes like a howling mouth.

‘What do we know?’ asks Isaacs.

‘He was stabbed,’ I say, straightening my shoulders and forcing strength into my voice. ‘Looks like a single wound, though we haven’t moved him yet. No sign of a weapon. I’ll arrange for a field

team to do a search at first light and see what CCTV we can pull from the area, but I think we'll hit a dead end on that front. I can't see any cameras.'

Isaacs nods briskly. 'And we're sure he was homeless?'

'It certainly looks that way,' I confirm.

'And smells that way,' says Fleet. He points past the forensics team to a blanket and a tatty backpack. 'That looks like his bedroom over there.'

'We can't find any ID,' I add.

'Where's the witness now?' asks Isaacs, looking around.

'She's at the station,' I tell him. 'We'll head back there and take her statement once we're done here. Apparently she's elderly and homeless herself. On my way here I spoke to the constable who's with her, and he says she's in a bad way.'

'She definitely doesn't have anything to do with it?'

'It doesn't sound like it. He said she's terrified.'

Isaacs purses his lips. 'Do we have a description to work with?'

'A man in a hoodie,' I reply. 'We'll push for more details but it's so dark out here I doubt she saw much.'

'Men in hoodies really are the root of all evil, aren't they?' quips Fleet.

I watch as he scratches his elbow and pushes a hand roughly through his wiry hair. Isaacs seems to tolerate rather than favour him, which he never seems too fussed about—but, then, Nick Fleet never seems particularly ruffled by anything.

In the three months I've been in Melbourne, I've worked more closely with him than anyone else on the squad. He's a detective sergeant like me but at least a couple of years older—I'd be surprised if he's forty. I get the feeling he had another life altogether before entering the force. I also quickly learned he has a massive reputation with the ladies, though I'm yet to see the charm.

He's unappealingly hairy and frequently rude, and he has a rough, primal quality: a harshness.

The forensics officers begin to trawl through the pile of bedding. The camera strobes again before a jumper and a faded picnic blanket are swiftly bagged.

Isaacs rubs his hands together and breathes into them. 'Hopefully it was someone he knew. A random attack on the homeless is the last thing we need.'

'I'm going to have another smoke,' announces Fleet. 'I'll have a bit of a look around while I'm at it.'

Isaacs just clasps his arms and rocks back slightly on his heels. He turns his head to look out across the parkland, his angular profile sharp. The moonlight paints his hair silver. As always, I can't tell what he's thinking.

I shift my gaze past Isaacs to take in the maze of lights and uneven rooftops. I feel uneasy, not knowing who might be watching from the darkness.

'Detective Woodstock?' says Brenton Cardona, one of the senior techs. 'We're going to move him in a minute. That okay with you?'

Aware that Isaacs' eyes are on me, I give Cardona a firm yes before squatting next to the nameless victim one last time. Careful to avoid the blood and debris, I look into his face. His bottom lip hangs open slightly and shines with saliva. His unseeing eyes are fixed on his broken shoes. I would place him around sixty-five but the layers of grime on his leathery, pockmarked skin make it hard to tell. He might be much younger. My back teeth grind together as I play out his macabre demise in my mind: the split-second register of a presence, his surprise at being grabbed from behind and spun around. The blinding pain as a knife is pushed into his chest, eyes widening as his blood flowed straight from his heart and onto the ground. His panic as he realised he was dying. His terror.

SARAH BAILEY

It's impossible for me to know if he was good, bad or any of the shades in between. But no matter what happened at the end, right now—punctured, slumped forward and drained of life—this dead old man looks like an abandoned little boy.

Tuesday, 14 August

7.43 pm

The heavy door thuds shut behind me and I stand in the dark boxy entrance for a moment. I just want to be perfectly still as the day fades away. The brutality of the homeless man's death has pulled me down, his crumpled corpse heavy in my thoughts. I walk over to the lounge-room window and take in the sprawl of activity below. Cars creep along the ruler-straight roads, the angry glow of red tail-lights evidencing the collective frustration of their drivers. Everyone here is so impatient to *be* somewhere.

My apartment is at the top end of Melbourne, near the corner of Little Collins and Exhibition streets. It's eight floors up and the view gives the city such a sense of grandeur. Smithson, my home town in regional New South Wales, is definitely growing, but its 25,000-odd people has nothing on the crazy melting pot of lives that Melbourne homes.

Dropping my keys onto the kitchen bench, I shake off my jacket and flick on the ancient wall heater. It chokes into life, half-heartedly filling the room with warm stale air.

I ended up leaving the station just before 3 am, wired on caffeine, my eyes like two hot discs in my face after interviewing

Lara Maxwell, the terrified witness. Lara couldn't tell us much and knew the victim only as Walt. Both homeless, they'd spoken occasionally but she said he'd mainly kept to himself. She described him as simple but harmless; she often saw him talking to the pigeons and whistling show tunes. The perfect sitting duck.

Fleet and I calmed Lara down and arranged some temporary accommodation for her before heading home.

By the time I returned to the station at midday, Isaacs had appointed Ralph Myers as case lead and we'd confirmed an ID. Swallowing my disappointment at being overlooked again, I sat through the formal briefing.

Our victim, Walter Miller, a 62-year-old perennially homeless man with a staccato history of mental illness, had been living rough for over two decades. He last had a fixed address in the early nineties. Tammy Miller, his 33-year-old daughter, hadn't seen her father for almost twenty years, after her mother, Walter's ex-wife, decided she wanted nothing to do with him. Tammy, now an event planner with two young children, is clearly bewildered about what to do with the news of her estranged father's murder. She's suddenly grieving for a man who in many ways was dead to her years ago. Her mother died in 2013, and the shock of her orphan status and the horrific circumstances of Walter's death were written on her pretty face as Ralph led her to an interview room.

At around 3 pm I was sent back to the crime scene to interview workers in nearby factories. Had they seen anything the previous evening? They hadn't. They were all long gone and tucked up safely in bed by the time Walter met his grim fate.

So far, our investigation has revealed a life as lonely as his death. There's no sign of chronic drug use and no criminal record. There is no apparent motive for the attack at all, unless the objective

was a cold-blooded kill. We'll continue to pull his world apart, analyse his recent interactions and track his movements, because someone is better than no one to blame, even if it's the victim himself. I'm already getting the feeling that Walter's death will remain an inexplicable cruelty. A nasty statistic. Sometimes you can just tell.

Walking past my tiny bedroom, I consider collapsing straight into my unmade bed. But not yet. It's a Ben night and it's almost time for our call. I should eat now so that I can put all my focus into his face and voice. The slow turn of my stomach is familiar, my pre-Ben conversation physiology always the same. I've come to recognise it before I'm consciously aware of it. It's similar to the feeling of having a crush but with a ribbon of melancholy tied tightly around it. I love talking to him but it is somehow also very unsatisfying, the pain so acute when he hangs up that I'm still not convinced the high is worth the crashing comedown. But, of course, none of it is supposed to be about me.

In the end, my relationship with Ben's dad Scott simply faded away. After working a major murder case a few years ago, where the victim was an old classmate of mine, I was empty. Rosalind Ryan's murder had completely broken me. It forced so much of my past into the present that eventually I collapsed under the weight.

In the immediate aftermath of Rosalind's case Scott and I came together, but ultimately we ended up even further apart. Scott tried, I know he did. He is a solid person, inside and out: broad-shouldered and stocky with a thick crop of dark hair and a sense of reliability that always sees him called upon for favours. His kind eyes, full of hope and effort, followed me around the house. He wanted to be close to me, to connect with me, but I'm ashamed to say, that after a few months of hypervigilance in regard to taking

it easy, and giving our relationship the attention it deserved, I regressed to my old ways and funnelled my scant energy into work. I was an exceptional detective but a shitty partner and a barely passable mother. Rosalind haunted my dreams and I was grieving badly for Felix, my colleague who had transferred to a Sydney squad. Our affair, and the resulting miscarriage I'd endured, paired with the emotions Rosalind's murder unearthed, left me badly bruised. Over time the pain faded to apathy, and I found myself directing that toward Scott. It was as if I'd decided that if I couldn't be with Felix, there was no point in trying to make it work with anyone else. I was high-functioning but deeply broken and eventually something had to give. When the opportunity to transfer to Melbourne arose, I needed to take it. Living in Smithson was slowly killing me.

I lean against the bench, looking at my poky kitchen. I can't be bothered to cook but I know I should eat, especially after my coffee lunch and afternoon snack of crackers and chewing gum. I've lost over five kilos since arriving here. I fire up the gas. Grate some bright yellow cheese and pour the dregs of some fading chardonnay into a wineglass. As the water begins to boil I dump half a cup of pasta into the saucepan.

I close my eyes as I tip the wine down my throat. Next door a man's voice yells through the thin common wall and a woman's sharp voice retorts loudly, sparking a ping-pong argument; it penetrates the soothing shield that alcohol is gallantly trying to form around my brain. I picture the cold grey tunnel that Walter Miller called home and shiver, turning the heater up higher. I open a new bottle of wine and pour another glass. It seems that the TV options on Tuesday night are no better than those on Monday.

I flick from an episode of *The Street* to the news, and my boss's face fills the screen. I sit up a little straighter and note how Isaacs'

grey stare holds the reporter's as he calmly answers her questions about Walter Miller's death.

As I shovel my unappetising dinner into my mouth, I have to admit my boss is compelling on TV. His thick grey hair obediently falls into place every time he shifts his head. His nose hooks slightly, set above full lips. His movements are slow and deliberate, like those of a lizard whose blood needs warming in the sun. His low voice is steady, an authoritative baritone.

Isaacs is polite to me, polite to everyone, but everything about him feels distant. I sense it's intentional: he seems determined to keep everyone at arm's-length. Our relationship is formal, forced, and so far I feel like I've struggled to transcend the job interview phase, which is unsettling as I'm still technically on probation. Nan, Ralph and Calvin are his clear favourites but even with them he is frosty. He's so unlike Ken Jones, my old station chief who wore his heart—and every thought that ran through his head—prominently on his sleeve.

Rumour has it that everyone thought Isaacs was a shoo-in for the commissioner role a few months back, but instead Joe Charleston, a well-regarded inspector from Tasmania, got the gig. Allegedly Isaacs has been even more aloof since then.

The news shifts a gear and a reporter is now talking excitedly about the Hollywood movie *Death Is Alive*, which will begin filming in Melbourne tomorrow. I'm vaguely aware of the production—a bunch of our guys have been working with the film's security team and the council for the past few months, and Candy keeps mentioning it because she has a crush on the lead actor.

Candy Fyfe is a reporter back in Smithson and probably my closest friend. She is a force of nature, the first indigenous journalist Smithson has seen and probably the most dedicated. We weren't friends initially, in fact we were openly hostile, but I've

grown to love her relentless energy. She is single-handedly trying to keep our friendship alive via various forms of electronic correspondence. With a stab of guilt, I realise I never got back to her most recent message, which she sent over a week ago. I pull it up on my phone, laughing as I reread her updates about our home town. She's heard a rumour that the local Presbyterian minister is having an affair with the funeral director, so she's been fronting up to church every Sunday to investigate. I can just imagine Candy, her athletic brown body poured into one of her trademark tight-fitting outfits, lurking around the church trying to catch the unlikely couple out.

Famous faces flash onto the screen as the reporter chatters on. Having zero interest in celebrities, I barely recognise any of them. I yawn and get up to pour another wine. My hips creak as I rise and stagger the few steps to the kitchen. I might be losing weight but my fitness is at an all-time low. I've stopped running. I do enough at the squad gym to pass for trying, but I'm only going through the motions. I need to get into a better routine.

I need to do a lot of things.

Checking the time, I head onto the tiny balcony for my daily cigarette, eyes on the twinkling dots in the sky as smoke fills my lungs. I begin to picture Ben's face. His pale green eyes, identical to mine. His smattering of freckles. The sweet curve of his mouth. 8.28 pm. He will ring any second now. He is punctual, a trait inherited from his father.

Scott sometimes says a quick hello to me but we spoke on Sunday so it's unlikely that we will this time. The finances are agreed for now, Ben is fine, so there's nothing for us to talk about.

Shoving the cigarette into the growing graveyard of yellow butts in an empty flowerpot, I go back inside and pull the door closed. I drink more wine, wrestling with the memory of the hotel room

from last night. The abstract art on the walls, the strong eager hands on my body. I cringe slightly, my head pounding. I realise the bottle of wine is already half empty.

My phone buzzes and I scramble to mute the TV. Wipe my mouth. Pull my legs underneath me and curl into a ball to Skype with my son.

‘Hi, Mum.’ His face fills the screen and he waves at me.

‘Hey, Ben!’ I summon my best smile and push my guilt firmly aside. ‘How are you, darling?’

‘Good.’

My chest tightens at his little boy nonchalance. He’s not obtuse; he just doesn’t go into detail. Our conversations are a blissful jumble of simple words and sweet silences. They are everything. They are not nearly enough.

‘Did you have sport today?’

‘Yep.’

I smile, just taking him in. He always sits up straight when he talks on Skype. It’s still a task that requires his full concentration, like he’s worried he’ll get the next answer wrong if he relaxes. Ben has just turned five and I often struggle with the thought that he’s not that many years from being the same age as so many of the kids I deal with at work. The kids who are tangled up in the bad situations I’m trying to figure out. Kids who’ve been around evil for so long that it has seeped into their souls and erupts in all the worst ways. I swallow past an image of a future Ben, broken by his mother’s rejection.

‘Soccer, right?’ I say.

‘Yep. And my team won again!’ He beams at me.

‘That’s great, sweetheart! And do you have footy on the weekend?’

‘Yeah, this Saturday, and then we have a week off. That’s what Dad said.’

We chat about his friend's mini-golf party, and he asks about my goldfish.

'Frodo is fine,' I tell him, shifting the phone so he can see the fishbowl. 'He told me to tell you he says hi.'

Ben giggles and I smile again before sadness bubbles inside me. Oblivious, he chatters on about school, his teacher and what he ate for lunch.

'Do you want to look at the stars now?' he asks, already knowing the answer.

'Of course,' I say, careful to hide the crack in my voice. 'I bet I know which one you're going to talk about first.'

'Well . . .' He moves toward the window in the lounge. 'There's that big one right in the middle of the sky. And like, three little ones in a little line next to it. Can you see the one I mean?' He turns the phone around and I get a sweeping glimpse of the familiar room before hazy sky fills the screen.

'Sure can,' I tell him. 'That's a good one. Can you see the sneaky sparkly one on the right? I think it's right near my apartment.'

'Oh yeah,' he says, eyebrows shooting up, 'it's kind of yellow. Cool.'

He stifles a yawn and his eyes drop away from the heavens. 'Time for bed,' I say firmly—still able, occasionally, to be his mother.

'Okay,' he agrees, yawning again. 'Speak to you on Thursday, Mum?'

'You bet. Have a great day tomorrow. I'll give Frodo an underwater kiss for you.'

We blow a kiss to each other and, as I hang up, I realise that my hand is flat across my heart.

I brush my teeth, use the toilet and undress, sliding into my freezing bedding. My head spins and my stomach cramps uncomfortably. In the lounge, the heater makes an unhealthy ticking

INTO THE NIGHT

sound. The TV next door mumbles. Rock music thuds through the ceiling. Glass smashes on the street. A cat meows. I toss and turn, picturing first Ben sleeping peacefully in his bed and then Walter Miller slumped forward in his cold bloody puddle. Until finally, I am asleep.