

# GEMINI FALLS

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Published by Affirm Press in 2022

Boon Wurrung Country

28 Thistlethwaite Street

South Melbourne VIC 3205

[affirmpress.com.au](http://affirmpress.com.au)

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Title: Gemini Falls / Sean Wilson, author.

ISBN: 9781922806390 (paperback)

Cover design by Lisa White

Typeset in Granjon by J&M Typesetting

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# 1

The night Catherine Fletcher died, Capricornus was high in the northern sky. I know because I'm listening to Father talk about it on the telephone. He's standing in the hall, speaking in his quiet voice. His hand is cupped over his mouth but from where I am, crouched on the stairs, I can hear most of what he's saying. If there's one thing I've learned about men like Father, it's that they can't, for the life of them, speak quietly on the telephone. I can see the grey hairs mixed into the black of his beard, lit by the faint glow of the kerosene lamp.

They found Catherine in a mine tunnel in Gemini. Out near mountain country, underneath the bright stars of the Southern Cross, more than halfway along the road to New South Wales and some miles south of that. A long way from Melbourne, from our house in Hawthorn. I've seen Gemini marked on a map in Father's library. A little dot on paper, wrapped by tight, curved lines. It's a small coal town in a valley between hills, barely eight hundred people to call it home. That's all Father has said about it, in the few times he's talked about the town. It's where he grew up, where his whole family is from, but he hasn't been back in a long time. Something happened,

something Father won't talk about, and the town and everyone in it is off-limits for us.

Catherine's body was lying in Long Tunnel East, down along the sloping, narrow rail tracks they use to cart coal up from the depths. She was a few feet past the tunnel entrance, before you get to the locked gate. She had some clothes on but not many, less than a young woman would wear outside her home. There were dark marks around her neck, marks that shouldn't have been there. She had two wounds in her back. Stabbed from behind, Father repeated through the telephone. Stabbed while she was walking away.

She was on her back in the tunnel when they found her. No blood around, nothing soaked into the dirt. It was as if her blood had been drawn from her body and carried to the heavens. Her face was covered by long brown hair, laid down like a shroud. That's the word Father used. I repeat the word in my head. *A shroud, a shroud, a shroud.* I try to see her in my mind's eye. It makes me sick and sad at the same time.

It had rained that night in Gemini. A big storm, the kind they often get there. That's what I know about Gemini, what I've put together from the newspapers and weather reports on the radio. A place of storms. A place where the clouds gather and settle. It had rained from midnight on. Catherine Fletcher was last seen by her mother at eight that evening. She must have stolen out of her room after that, but her body was dry. She didn't get wet in the storm. That means she died between eight and midnight, before the first rain fell.

Between the hours of eight and midnight. Capricornus shining in the northern sky.

People say the stars shine brighter in the country. The darkness makes them stand out. The farthest from here I've gone is some

dairy farms and market gardens a horse ride away. I try to imagine them, the stars above Gemini, laid out like a quilt from one end of the sky to the other.

I never knew Catherine Fletcher, never saw her in my life. Even so, I wish I could turn back the clock and stop that happening to her. I think about my sister and how I would feel if it was her lying in a tunnel, hair covering her face, rain falling outside. Father must be thinking the same. I see the way his shoulders slump, the way his head rolls to the side, as if weighed down by these thoughts. Something tells me he's thinking what it would be like to be Catherine Fletcher's folks, losing a daughter that way.

My name is Morris Turner. I'm thirteen years old. The man down there on the telephone is my Father, Jude Turner. Detective Turner. My older sister is Charlotte, but everyone calls her Lottie. We used to be close. We used to tell each other everything. When we were younger, I would go to her room in the middle of the night when bad dreams haunted me. She would turn down the sheet, wrap an arm around me and hold me close. I'd feel her heart beating against my back and my breathing would slow, my eyelids would droop and close. I can't remember ever feeling better than that, taken from fear to comfort so fast, the speed of it making the good feeling stronger. These days she hardly talks to me.

It's late. From my place on the landing of the stairs I can see dust floating in the air above me and around me, lit by the warm glow of the lamp. It's pleasant, the way it moves, the way each speck shifts like a star making its way across the night sky. Making constellations in the air and then falling apart.

Anyone keen on stars knows that at this time of year Capricornus is highest in the middle of the evening, this time of year being late spring. Lottie told me Mother used to say you could see all of time in

the stars. She said that in the sky, the same lights have shone down on every person who's ever lived. I wish I had the same memories of Mother, but I was too young. If I try to imagine it, I can almost feel her arm around me, her finger lifting my chin to the sky. I can almost be with her, looking up at the stars, our eyes taking in light from the galaxies.

I've seen Gemini and Capricornus in the night sky, along with Sagittarius, Scorpius and most of the rest. We've got an old telescope on the balcony, and some nights, when I've done my chores and the clouds have blown out of the sky, Father will let me use it. We'll stand there for hours looking at Orion and Centaurus and Hydra, calling out the names of the stars we see, old names that feel strange on my tongue.

Father says people called Capricornus 'the Gate of the Gods'. When you run a line between the stars in the constellation, it makes a shape that looks like an opening. People thought it was the gate where our souls pass after we die. The Gate of the Gods. I wonder if that was where Mother passed. I want to ask Father, but whenever I talk about Mother, a cloud passes over his face and he turns away or leaves the room. I feel the words forming on my tongue, but I swallow them down. They go deep inside my body where they join together, packed tight into bricks made of the words I can't say. He can't talk about her and so I don't talk about her.

Out in the hall, Father's voice gets louder. It's a storm cloud rising above me. One word is louder than all the others. It stays in the air, thunder rolling around the hall. *Pregnant*. Catherine Fletcher was pregnant when she died. She was little more than a child herself, Father says on the telephone, and she was almost a mother.

Father says goodbye and drops the handset on the base. He sighs and runs his fingers through his hair. I can see the outline of

his nose, the places where it has broken and healed. A crooked line, a constellation all his own. His back is hunched. His shirt hangs loose around him.

I know I should be back in my room. I know I should lift one leg after the other, lift them up stair after stair. I can't do it. This isn't like me. I want to know more. I want to know more about Catherine Fletcher. I want to know more about Gemini.

Father told me wherever a star forms in a galaxy, a ring of gas and dust fills the space around it. The pull of the star makes those bits and pieces fall into orbit. It becomes a system, he said. The system pulls toward the star and, over time, the bits and pieces join together. Year after year, they get bigger and bigger until they become planets. That's how our planet came to be.

The way I figure it, a murder is like a star system forming. People get pulled into orbit around it. They circle the crime, side by side, everyone moving around and around that terrible thing. They can't help it.

We're about to fall into orbit around Catherine Fletcher, I know it.