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Broken



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe fourth Will Trent novel, from the No. 1 Bestseller. When the body of a young woman is discovered deep beneath the icy waters of Lake Grant, a note left under a rock by the shore points to suicide. But within minutes, it becomes clear that this is no suicide. It's a brutal, cold-blooded murder. All too soon, former Grant County medical examiner Sara Linton - home for Thanksgiving after a long absence - finds herself unwittingly drawn into the case. The chief suspect is desperate to see her, but when she arrives at the local police station she is met with a horrifying sight - he lies dead in his cell, the words 'Not me' scrawled across the walls. Something about his confession doesn't add up and, deeply suspicious of Lena Adams, the detective in charge, Sara immediately calls in the Georgia Bureau of Investigation. Shortly

afterwards, Special Agent Will Trent is brought in from his vacation to investigate. But he is immediately confronted with a wall of silence. Grant County is a close-knit community with loyalties and ties that run deep. And the only person who can tell the truth about what really happened is dead...ExtraitCHAPTER ONEFortunately, the winter weather meant the body at the bottom of the lake would be well preserved, though the chill on the shore was bone-aching, the sort of thing that made you strain to remember what August had been like. The sun on your face. The sweat running down your back. The way the air conditioner in your car blew out a fog because it could not keep up with the heat. As much as Lena Adams strained to remember, all thoughts of warmth were lost on this rainy November morning. "Found her," the dive captain called. He was directing his men from the shore, his voice muffled by the constant shush of the pouring rain. Lena held up her hand in a wave, water sliding down the sleeve of the bulky parka she had thrown on when the call had come in at three this morning. The rain wasn't hard, but it was relentless, tapping her back insistently, slapping against the umbrella that rested on her shoulder. Visibility was about thirty feet. Everything beyond that was coated in a hazy fog. She closed her eyes, thinking back to her warm bed, the warmer body that had been wrapped around her. The shrill ring of a phone at three in the morning was never a good sound, especially when you were a cop. Lena had woken out of a dead sleep, her heart pounding, her hand automatically snatching up the receiver, pressing it to her ear. She was the senior detective on call, so she in turn had to start other phones ringing across south Georgia. Her chief. The coroner. Fire and rescue. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation to let them know that a body had been found on state land. The Georgia Emergency Management Authority, who kept a list of eager civilian volunteers ready to look for dead bodies on a moment's notice. They were all gathered here at the lake, but the smart people were waiting in their vehicles, heat blasting while a chill wind rocked the chassis like a baby in a cradle. Dan Brock, the proprietor of the local funeral home who did double duty as the town coroner, was asleep in his van, head back against the seat, mouth gaping open. Even the EMTs were safely tucked inside the ambulance. Lena could see their faces peering through the windows in the back doors. Occasionally, a hand would reach out, the ember of a cigarette glowing in the dawn light. She held an evidence bag in her hand. It contained a letter found near the shore. The paper had been torn from a larger piece--college ruled, approximately eight and a half inches by six. The words were all caps. Ballpoint pen. One line. No signature. Not the usual spiteful or pitiful farewell, but clear enough: I want it over. In many ways, suicides were more difficult investigations than homicides. With a murdered person, there was always someone you could blame. There were clues you could follow to the bad guy, a clear pattern you could lay out to explain to the family of the victim exactly why their loved one had been stolen away from them. Or, if not why, then who the bastard was who'd ruined their lives. With suicides, the victim is the murderer. The person upon whom the blame rests is also the person whose loss is felt most deeply. They are not around to take the recriminations for their death, the natural anger anyone feels when there is a loss. What the dead leave instead is a void that all the pain and sorrow in the world can never fill. Mother and father, sisters, brothers, friends, and other relatives--all find themselves with no one to punish for their loss. And people always want to punish someone when a life is unexpectedly taken. This was why it was the investigator's job to make sure every single inch of the death scene was measured and recorded. Every cigarette butt, every discarded piece of trash or paper, had to be catalogued, checked for fingerprints, and sent to the lab for analysis. The weather was noted in the initial report. The various officers and emergency personnel on scene were recorded in a log. If a crowd was present, photographs were taken. License plates were checked. The suicide victim's life was investigated just as thoroughly as with a homicide: Who were her friends? Who were her lovers? Was there a husband? Boyfriend? Girlfriend? Were there angry neighbors or envious co-workers? Lena knew only what they had found so far: a pair of women's sneakers, size eight, placed a few feet away from the suicide note. Inside the left shoe was a cheap ring--twelve-karat gold with a lifeless ruby at the center. The right shoe contained a white Swiss Army watch with fake diamonds for numbers. Underneath this was the folded note. I want it over. Not much of a comfort for those left behind. Suddenly, there was a splash of water as one of the divers surfaced from the lake. His partner came up beside him. They each struggled against the silt on the lake bottom as they dragged the body out of the cold water and into the cold rain. The dead girl was small, making the effort seem exaggerated, but quickly Lena saw the reason for their struggle. A thick, industrial-looking chain was wrapped around her waist with a bright yellow padlock that hung low, like a belt buckle. Attached to the chain were two cinder blocks. Sometimes in policing, there were small miracles. The victim had obviously been trying to make sure she couldn't back out. If not for the cinder blocks weighing her down, the current would have probably taken the body into the middle of the lake, making it almost

impossible to find her. Lake Grant was a thirty-two-hundred-acre man-made body of water that was three hundred feet deep in places. Underneath the surface were abandoned houses, small cottages and shacks where people had once lived before the area was turned into a reservoir. There were stores and churches and a cotton mill that had survived the Civil War only to be shut down during the Depression. All of this had been wiped out by the rushing waters of the Ochawawee River so that Grant County could have a reliable source of electricity. The National Forestry Service owned the best part of the lake, over a thousand acres that wrapped around the water like a cowl. One side touched the residential area where the more fortunate lived, and the other bordered the Grant Institute of Technology, a small but thriving state university with almost five thousand students enrolled. Sixty percent of the lake's eighty-mile shoreline was owned by the State Forestry Division. The most popular spot by far was this one, what the locals called Lover's Point. Campers were allowed to stake tents. Teenagers came here to party, often leaving behind empty beer bottles and used condoms. Occasionally, there would be a call about a fire someone had let get out of control, and once, a rabid bear had been reported, only to turn out to be an elderly chocolate Labrador who had wandered away from his owners' campsite. And bodies were occasionally found here, too. Once, a girl had been buried alive. Several men, predictably teenagers, had drowned performing various acts of stupidity. Last summer, a child had broken her neck diving into the shallow waters of the cove. The two divers paused, letting the water drip off the body before resuming their task. Finally, nods went around and they dragged the young woman onto the shore. The cinder blocks left a deep furrow in the sandy ground. It was six-thirty in the morning, and the moon seemed to wink at the sun as it began its slow climb over the horizon. The ambulance doors swung open. The EMTs cursed at the bitter cold as they rolled out the gurney. One of them had a pair of bolt cutters hefted over his shoulder. He slammed his hand on the hood of the coroner's van, and Dan Brock startled, comically flailing his arms in the air. He gave the EMT a stern look, but stayed where he was. Lena couldn't blame him for not wanting to rush into the rain. The victim wasn't going anywhere except the morgue. There was no need for lights and sirens. Lena walked closer to the body, carefully folding the evidence bag containing the suicide note into her jacket pocket and taking out a pen and her spiral-bound notebook. Crooking her umbrella between her neck and shoulder, she wrote the time, date, weather, number of EMTs, number of divers, number of cars and cops, what the terrain was like, noted the solemnity of the scene, the absence of spectators--all the details that would need to be typed exactly into the report. The victim was around Lena's height, five-four, but she was built much smaller. Her wrists were delicate, like a bird's. The fingernails were uneven, bitten down to the quick. She had black hair and extremely white skin. She was probably in her early twenties. Her open eyes were clouded like cotton. Her mouth was closed. The lips looked ragged, as if she chewed them out of nervous habit. Or maybe a fish had gotten hungry. Her body was lighter without the drag of the water, and it only took three of the divers to heft her onto the waiting gurney. Muck from the bottom of the lake covered her head to toe. Water dripped from her clothes--blue jeans, a black fleece shirt, white socks, no sneakers, an unzipped, dark blue warm-up jacket with a Nike logo on the front. The gurney shifted, and her head turned away from Lena. Lena stopped writing. "Wait a minute," she called, knowing something was wrong. She put her notebook in her pocket as she took a step closer to the body. She had seen a flash of light at the back of the girl's neck--something silver, maybe a necklace. Pondweed draped across the victim's throat and shoulders like a shroud. Lena used the tip of her pen to push away the slippery green tendrils. Something was moving beneath the skin, rippling the flesh the same way the rain rippled the tide. The divers noticed the undulations, too. They all bent down for a better look. The skin fluttered like something out of a horror movie. One of them asked, "What the--" "Jesus!" Lena jumped back quickly as a small minnow slithered out from a slit in the girl's neck. The divers laughed the way men do when they don't want to admit they've just soiled themselves. For her part, Lena put her hand to her chest, hoping no one noticed that her heart had practically exploded. She took a gulp of air. The minnow was floundering in the mud. One of the men picked it up and tossed it back into the lake. The dive captain made the inevitable joke about something being fishy. Lena shot him a hard look before leaning down toward the body. The slit where the fish had come out was at the back of the neck, just to the right of the spine. She guessed the wound was an inch wide, tops. The open flesh was puckered from the water, but at one point the injury had been clean, precise--the kind of incision that was made by a very sharp knife. "Somebody go wake up Brock," she said. This wasn't a suicide investigation anymore.

CHAPTER TWO

Frank Wallace never smoked in his county-issued Lincoln Town Car, but the cloth seats had absorbed the fug of nicotine that seeped from every pore in his body. He reminded Lena of Pig Pen from the Peanuts comic strip. No matter how clean he was or how often he changed his clothes, the stench followed him like a dust cloud. "What's

wrong?" he demanded, not even giving her time to shut the car door. Lena shucked her wet parka onto the floorboard. Earlier, she had thrown on a jacket with two shirts underneath to help fight the cold. Still, even with the heat blasting, her teeth were chattering. It was as if her body had stored up all the chill while she was standing outside in the rain and only let it out now that she was safely sheltered. She held her hands up to the vent. "God, it's freezing." "What's wrong?" Frank repeated. He made a show of pulling back his black leather glove so he could see his watch. Lena shivered involuntarily. She couldn't keep the excitement out of her voice. No cop would ever admit it to a civilian, but murders were the most exciting cases to work. Lena was so pumped through with adrenaline that she was surprised the cold was getting to her. Through chattering teeth, she told him, "It's not a suicide." Frank looked even more annoyed. "Brock agree with you?" Brock had gone back to sleep in his van while he waited for the chains to be cut, which they both knew because they could see his back molars from where they were sitting. "Brock wouldn't know his ass from a hole in the ground," Lena shot back. She rubbed her arms to coax some warmth back into her body. Frank took out his flask and handed it to her. She took a quick sip, the whisky burning its way down her throat and into her stomach. Frank took a hefty drink of his own before returning the flask to his coat pocket. She told him, "There's a knife wound in the neck." "Brock's?" Lena gave him a withering glance. "The dead girl." She leaned down and searched her parka for the wallet she had found in the pocket of the woman's jacket. Frank said, "Could be self-inflicted." "Not possible." She put her hand to the back of her neck. "Blade went in about here. The killer was standing behind her. Probably took her by surprise." Frank grumbled, "You get that from one of your textbooks?" Lena held her tongue, something she wasn't used to doing. Frank had been interim police chief for the last four years. Everything that happened in the three cities that comprised Grant County fell under his purview. Madison and Avondale carried the usual drug problems and domestic violence, but Heartsdale was supposed to be easy. The college was here, and the affluent residents were vocal about crime. Even without that, complicated cases had the tendency to turn Frank into an asshole. Actually, life in general could turn him into an asshole. His coffee going cold. The engine in his car not catching on the first try. The ink running dry in his pen. Frank hadn't always been like this. He'd certainly leaned toward grumpy for as long as Lena had known him, but his attitude lately was tinged with an underlying fury that seemed ready to boil to the surface. Anything could set him off. In the blink of an eye he'd turn from being manageably irritated to downright mean.

Revue de presse Addictive . . . Slaughter is a terrific writer, and she keeps the emotional tension high throughout. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution This chilling mystery is just begging to be read in one sitting. Cosmopolitan Move over, Catherine Coulter Slaughter may be today's top female suspense writer. Library Journal (starred review)