

## THE GHOST WALK

KAREN HERBERT

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Did anyone know Dr Gabriel Beaufort better than Ruby Rose Gillespie? They were friends at high school. They are secret lovers now. And because he is also the lung-transplant surgeon who saved her life, Ruby will forever be in his debt.

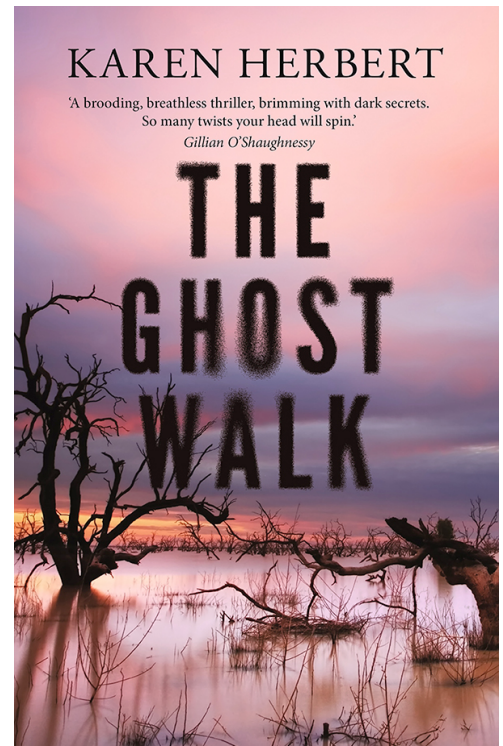
But then the body of Dr Beaufort is found in the wetlands next to the hospital, on the same day Ruby is readmitted with a sudden infection. As the crime scene investigation begins beneath her hospital window, Ruby starts to gather her own clues about her lover's last movements. But with each new discovery, she is haunted by the question of whether she really knew Gabriel Beaufort at all.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen Herbert spent her childhood in Geraldton on the Midwest coast of Australia before moving to Perth. She holds a Master of Science in Applied Psychology and has worked in aged care, disability services, higher education, Indigenous land management, social housing and the public sector, and is a graduate member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Karen lives in Perth, Western Australia, with her husband, Ross. She is the author of *The River Mouth*, *The Castaways of Harewood Hall* and *Vertigo*. *The Ghost Walk* is her fourth novel.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is this novel called *The Ghost Walk*?
2. What role does the setting play in the plot itself – and how does the hospital interact with the wetlands adjacent to it?
3. How would you describe the sleuth in this novel?
4. What is her role as narrator, and why do you think the author has chosen her to be the one to tell the story?
5. How does her condition (cystic fibrosis) provide both limitations and help to augment Ruby Rose Gillespie as a detective figure?
6. Why is Ruby Rose uniquely placed to investigate the death of Gabriel Beaufort?
7. What do you think the police investigators are doing while Ruby Rose is drawing her own conclusions?
8. What does the death of Dr Beaufort bring to light that was previously hidden?
9. What do you think would have happened to Dr Beaufort if his life had continued without the event in the wetlands?
10. Is Dr Beaufort a hero for saving lives? In the end, how do you think we are to think of him?
11. What aspects of the story does the author leave to the reader to discover for themselves?
12. Why do you think that Karen Herbert has included in the wetlands the stories of a couple of ghosts?
13. What did you learn about cystic fibrosis that you did not know before?
14. Do you think that this novel is making a broader point about people with chronic illness, and how others interact with them?



## INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

### ***Where did the characters of Ruby Rose Gillespie and Dr Gabriel Beaufort come from?***

I was inspired to write *The Ghost Walk* after my novel *The River Mouth* was published. I was having a celebratory coffee with my friend Jo Giles and we were talking about characters with disabilities in crime novels. We wondered how a disability would help or hinder the search for a killer. So, I decided to give it a go and Ruby Rose Gillespie was born. Of course, I gave her Jo's wit and intelligence. She also has Jo's deep love of humans and humanity. But Ruby is not Jo. She grew into her own self, with her own unique quirks and weaknesses. I hope everyone loves her as much as I do.

Gabriel Beaufort is every grunge-goth who walked a university campus in the 1990s. He's smart, handsome, wears black and Dr Martens, and smokes performatively. He's rakish, but doesn't quite manage to be disreputable or sordid. He can't quite bring himself to the necessary depths to achieve true infamy. I think that's because he's too driven to succeed. He wants to be admired for being a top surgeon, for his contribution to medical research, for being a virtuoso in smoky jazz clubs. He can't do that if he's a true bad boy, so he acts the part instead. The question is, does he take the acting too far?

### ***How did the limitations on your sleuth character help you as a writer in deciding what the reader finds out, and when?***

Ruby needs plenty of sleep, she has to be careful about what she eats, and she has to take her meds. She's used to spending time on her own and knows how to patiently dig down rabbit holes. She exercises, so she's fit, but she can't go around busting through doors and shouting 'on the floor!'. I couldn't push her too far. Following Ruby around as she returns to daily life after her hospitalisation made for an ideal slow reveal that worked with her life and her unique talents.

### ***What kind of research did you need to do to write this novel, and what kind of consultation?***

I did some digging about medical research, its different stages, how it gets funded, and how it gets managed on an international scale. I also spoke with medical professionals about what it means to be a surgeon, what their day-to-day life looks like, and the relationships they have with their patients.

I already knew a bit about cystic fibrosis and what it means to live with a disability or chronic illness, but I also self-checked that knowledge with other people. One of the interesting things that I already knew from living with Ménière's disease is that members of the Ménière's community are all so different in our experience of the disease. Some of us work, some of us can't, some of us struggle with the activities of daily life, and some of us have climbed (actual) mountains. I was worried about getting CF 'right' in this book, but it turns out that everyone who has CF is also different, and Ruby's experience was never going to be exactly the same as everyone else. That really shouldn't have been a surprise to me, but there you go, I learned something.

### ***What advice do you have for crime writers who are just starting out?***

Read lots and write lots. Understand the contract between the crime reader and the crime writer and look for the differences in sub-genres. Watch crime series and see how the screenwriters structure each episode and the longer arc of the story. Have fun! Let the characters tell you who they are and don't be afraid to bang a few drums about the world we live in.



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