

**WIN
LOSE
KILL
DIE**

“A twisty, tricky book that will leave you unable to trust anyone, including yourself. Ambition has never been so ruthless, school has never been so deadly.”

Melinda Salisbury, author of *Hold Back the Tide*

“Once again Cynthia Murphy pulls me from a reading slump, pushes me to the edge of my seat, and has me racing through the pages to see who’s still alive at the end. *WIN LOSE KILL DIE* has all the spine-tingling terror of *LAST ONE TO DIE* with even more stakes than ever before. A deliciously bloody read for all horror fans.”

Melissa Welliver, author of *The Undying Tower*

“Cynthia Murphy cleverly weaves together teen drama and the dark side of ambition in this twisty thriller. *WIN LOSE KILL DIE* will keep you up at night with its swoony romance, unpredictable mysteries and impressive body count. Witty, atmospheric and a little bit evil.”

Kathryn Foxfield, author of *Good Girls Die First*

“An explosive, blood-thirsty thrill ride with a break-neck twist you’ll be thinking about for days! Karen McManus fans will devour this.”

Kat Ellis, author of *Harrow Lake* and *Wicked Little Deeds*

“Perfect for fans of Truly Devious and 90s slasher movies, this twisty thriller has it all: a secret society steeped in intrigue, a deliciously creepy atmosphere and a plot that kept me guessing until the very end.”

Amy McCaw, author of *Mina and the Undead*

“Deadly, twisted, and toxic. Cynthia Murphy is top of the class. I’d think twice about enrolling at Morton Academy.”

Georgia Bowers, author of *Mark of the Wicked*

“*Win Lose Kill Die* is deliciously dark and creepy and keeps you guessing the whole way through. Atmospheric and supremely murder – I loved it!”

Julia Tuffs, author of *Hexed*

“I was hooked from the very first sentence. *Win Lose Kill Die* is a thrilling mix of secret societies, murder and intrigue, making it one heck of a fun ride. A wickedly good book.”

Josie Williams, author of *The Wanderer*

“With its breakneck pacing and twists that kept me guessing until the very end, *WIN LOSE KILL DIE* ticked every box on my dark academia wish list: secret society, hooded cloaks, hidden passages, and of course, a relentless string of murders. I couldn’t put it down!”

Brianna Bourne, author of *You & Me at the End of the World*

~~WIN~~ ☐

~~LOSE~~ ☐

~~KILL~~ ☐

~~DIE~~ ☒

CYNTHIA MURPHY

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This one is for the godkids . . .

Kyla Somerville

Grayson Coffey

Dominic Kelly

. . . always remember to follow your dreams.



1

I didn't mean to kill the first one.

Honest.

It was just . . . too easy, I suppose. She was already in the water, and when I plunged my hands in to help her out, I kind of . . . changed my mind.

Something inside snapped.

I held Little Miss Perfect's head down and waited for her to stop thrashing around.

It took longer than I thought, and then she just . . . floated there. Limp. Pathetic, really.

"Accidental death," according to the experts. That's nearly right. Like I said, it's not like I set out to do it.

It felt good, though.



2

I can't believe we're back here already.

Summer had passed by in a daze thanks to the bang to the head I took at the end of last term. Instead of going to beach parties with my friends and staying up to watch the sunrise like I planned, it was full of police interviews and PTSD. That last day of term had started so perfectly, and then. . .

"Liz." A sharp hiss and an elbow in my ribs bring me back to the present. Taylor is standing up straight, her gorgeous hazel eyes focused on the stage, for all the world playing the perfect mourner. I mimic her, my gaze following hers to a large easel draped in black cloth. It's displaying a large photograph of Morgan.

The girl who drowned in July.

“Pay attention.” Taylor says this out of the corner of her mouth, like one of those creepy ventriloquist’s puppets. She does it so effortlessly – not one muscle in her face moves. I guess I haven’t recovered as well as I thought, even after all those hospital visits over the summer. I try to concentrate, I really do, but my mind wanders as the headmistress’s words blur into one long sermon, each pause punctuated by the squeaking sound of rubber heels on the parquet floor. Autumn is seeping into the corners of the building already and the air smells of rain and damp, freshly laundered uniforms.

I study the picture. Morgan was pretty, in a preppy, Reese Witherspoon in *Cruel Intentions* kind of a way. She looked so sweet and unassuming, which I know was total bull. Truth is, Morgan had the personality of a venomous snake. You did *not* cross her, if you knew what was good for you; she’d make your life at Morton a total misery if she felt like it. It had been her idea to take the boat out on the lake that night, her big moment after being sworn in as head girl. She bullied most of us into it, from what I remember, though admittedly I don’t remember much. Not after the boat flipped.

Dr Patel, the headmistress, ends her monologue with the request for a minute of silence. She’s flanked by several members of the faculty – some of them are crying, dabbing handkerchiefs or tissues at their faces. Her sharp

black trouser suit is conservative, appropriate for a pupil's memorial, but super stylish and paired with some killer heels. I can't help but admire anyone who can walk in shoes that high, never mind run the country's most elite boarding school in them. The rest of the staff look frumpy in comparison. I watch the clock and sway slightly. I'm not used to standing up for so long after spending the summer in bed watching nineties movies.

Taylor ignores me, her head down, eyes closed: the perfect pupil. And mourner. Her long, naturally red hair falls like a curtain, spilling over the grey tweed of her blazer. Morton Academy's very own Cheryl Blossom, standing right next to me.

Dr Patel calls the memorial to a close and bodies start to shuffle towards the exit in silence.

"So," I whisper as we wait our turn to file out of the hall, "how does it feel?"

Taylor looks at me as we emerge through the tall, wooden doors into the corridor, smiling with her mouth but not her eyes. "How does what feel? Being passed over for head girl? Being so close to that full-ride scholarship I could practically taste it? Great, thanks for asking."

"Oh, come on. You're deputy! That's still pretty sweet. Plus" – I lower my voice, even though everyone else has resumed their own conversations too – "you know what that means for Jewel and Bone. Being deputy in the society means you get your pick of colleges."

Now the smile reaches her eyes.

“Yes, I do. I am very excited for this year. If I can just find the right sponsor, schmooze the right rich person, then I won’t have to worry about working through university at all. Just think of all the people we’re going to meet, the events we’ll get to go to. . .”

“*You’ll* get to go to,” I correct her, smiling ruefully. “Some of the perks of the society don’t stretch past head and deputy, remember?”

“Yeah, sorry.” Taylor chews her lip and avoids my eyes. “I know that if you hadn’t helped me and Kat with the scavenger hunt, you would have finished it before us. You’d be the one being sworn in as deputy head tonight and—”

“Hello, gorgeous!” A deep voice interrupts her as two heavy arms thump down around our shoulders. I’m kind of grateful for the interruption. Marcus’s aftershave is so strong I start to cough, but Taylor immediately twinkles up at him. I duck out from under his arm and let them have a moment.

“What do you both look so serious about?” He looks good, like maybe he actually slept this summer. Lucky him.

“Oh, you know – life, death.” She waves a polished hand in the air. “How I spent half an hour choosing a shade of lipstick that didn’t clash with the funeral flowers.” Taylor glances around furtively. “Actually, we were just

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talking about my ceremony at JB tonight.” She stands on her tiptoes to kiss him. “You know your girl is going up in the world.”

“I sure do. I still think you should’ve got the top spot instead of Jameela, though. I mean if there was anything I could do. . .” He walks out of the hall with us, but I stop listening as we start up the corridor to the entrance hall.

God, I missed this place. I breathe in deeply, as though I can inhale the pure essence of Morton into my very soul. I love the feeling of belonging, being one of a handful of kids from all over the country who are invited to attend such an exclusive sixth-form college. It doesn’t matter who we are or where we’re from – we’re here because of our brains. Rich, poor, it doesn’t matter at Morton. We’re all here because we are damn clever – and the truth is that most of us wouldn’t have got the chance otherwise. It’s in the middle of nowhere and boarding is compulsory. There’s no internet access without supervision, either – that’s one of Morton’s USPs: good old-fashioned bookwork. You win some, you lose some, I guess.

I take a second to remind myself it’s all real. The stone ceiling soars over us, and our shoes tap softly on the ancient stone floor as we weave through bodies clad in grey blazers that are piped with an almost lurid acid green. The mahogany wall panels glow, sunlight streaming through the long windows that allow us glimpses of the vast, manicured gardens beyond them. We pass the

headmistress's office and start to climb the large, curving staircase that always makes me feel like I'm in a Disney film. The handrail is gleaming, so polished that it's slick beneath my hand. The whole place smells of wood and citrus and I adore it. It smells like home.

"Hurry up, Liz." Marcus and Taylor are watching me with amusement from the landing above, and I realize I've zoned out a bit. "Stop daydreaming."

"Sorry." I duck my head to hide my flaming cheeks as I take the remaining stairs two at a time, until I reach the landing beneath a huge, stained-glass window. I walk slowly, following them through the huge double doors into the West Wing. Yes, I said West Wing – that's how big this place is.

This floor is all classrooms and the science labs are right next to classics, so I watch the perfect couple disappear into their room and then enter my own class. Classics is my main subject – we all do three in total, but we have been hand-selected for these ones in particular. It's kind of like a specialism, something we will take on to university, maybe even get fast-tracked. The teaching here is the best in the country – our expectations are set high. There's hardly anyone here yet, the assembly has interfered with the timetable for the first full day back, so I choose a desk in the middle row, by a window that looks out on to a wide expanse of water.

The lake.

Morgan.

I move quickly, my flesh crawling as memories of that night once again try to claw their way to the surface. I take a pew at the opposite side of the room, as far from the window as I can get.

The classroom fills up slowly and I'm pleased we have a small group – not that we ever have large classes, with only fifty chosen to attend Morton in each year group. The teacher arrives last and I'm pleased to see we've got Professor Insoll again. The man's a legend – in the world of ancient religious artefacts, anyway. He used to teach at degree level but I guess Morton pays pretty well – plus it has to be a bonus when you have a bunch of kids who are desperate to learn rather than perpetually hungover undergrads.

We go through all the usual first-day-back motions – new textbooks, a prep schedule that looks ridiculously full, and a winter exam timetable. I'm busy writing my name on everything when a note slides across my desk.

"Pass this to Jameela," a voice hisses.

Jameela? Hmm. I wonder if it's Jewel and Bone business, maybe a note about the first of the donor meetings, where we'll get to meet prospective sponsors who will hopefully pay our way through university, but a quick glance around reveals hardly anyone else in the class would have that kind of information. I shrug and pass it on to Frank, just in case it is. I can't go handing out potential secret society

information to just anybody. “For Jameela,” I mouth, nodding to the girl with long, dark braids sitting in front of him. I go back to signing my name with a flourish and forget all about the note.

Until Jameela shoots out of her seat, screaming, and drops the paper like it’s on fire.