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**HIGHLY COMMENDED: CATEGORY 8-13 YEARS: RAMONA MIDDLEHAM**

## Quite a floral murder

I was seventeen when I had my first true love.

It was when I was a student at Primrose Girls Grammar School. An avid student I was, too. I got an A+ on almost every test. A star pupil, some may say.

But I did not care about any of that.

I cared about flowers.

Roses, lilies, dandelions- you name it. Our garden was run by me, and was what I spent most of my free time looking after. Flowers intrigued me. They were so beautiful, yet so powerful and each had so many qualities of their own.

The only other thing I cared about was Alex. Brown hair, warm brown eyes and the kindest soul I had ever met. Alex joined Primrose Boys Grammar when I started year twelve. He almost immediately got into a relationship with a girl I had never been particularly friendly with. I was always very suspicious of the speed of their connection, but I decided not to question it.

Almost as immediately as he got a girlfriend, he and I became best friends. I was in love with him as soon as we started talking.

I never really had many friends. Of course, I was respected as an individual but no one really gave me any attention.

Alex seemed to enjoy my company. At my grammar school, the girls and boys got to mix at break time and lunch time, which meant optimum time spent with Alex. He was my loyal companion and I truly adored him.

His girlfriend was always giving me evil eyes though.

My birthday always fell on the first day back at school, thus meaning that I was the oldest in my class. This also meant I learnt to drive before everyone else.

My goodness, I was asked for lifts a lot, and I mean a *lot*.

I gave Alex a lift every day.

I'd drop him off at his light-blue painted cottage right by the sea. Sometimes I would stay for a while to chat and laugh about the day's events.

But his girlfriend would always ring him while I was there.

He'd pick up his red telephone nervously. Almost visibly quivering, he would speak to her for a long time. He tried to look casual and relaxed but I could see that there was tension and distress in his face and body.

"Y-y-yes-y-yeah-ok-sorry-d-don't worry- b-b-b-bye. L-love you."

The 'love you' at the end never quite sounded right. Insincere. Forced. Terrified.

"I-I think that I should do my homework now. I-it has been great having you here, Rosaline." he would say.

Homework.

"That's ok. See you later, Alex Quinterbury."

"Bye for now, Rosaline Sanderson."

The day after that particular event, he never showed up to my car. We met at the exact same

spot every day. But he didn't come, and a wave of panic swept over me. I quickly decided to drive to his house. I probably shouldn't have done, but I had to.

Rap tap tap, I bagged loudly on the heavy oak door. His mum swung open the cottage door.

"Alright, love?" she asked.

"I was just wondering where Alex is? He didn't turn up for his lift."

"He's upstairs, I think. Come in!"

"Thank you."

I walked in through the door and dashed up the stairs.

There was a shrieking coming from Alex's room. I put my ear to the door and waited. I

"Why do you keep hanging out with that *Rosaline* girl?!" shouted a familiar voice. My brain tried to process the voice. Then I clicked. It was Alex's girlfriend, Felicity.

"She's my friend!" sobbed Alex.

I heard a loud slapping noise.

"OW!" I heard Alex cry.

"You are so completely useless Alex, BUT, YOU'RE MINE, do you get that?" she cried and

Fury bubbled inside of me. I flew down the stairs and shot back out the door without another word to Alex's mother, who was looking totally bemused by this point. I ran straight onto the beach and into the sea. The tide was splashing at my feet and my socks were getting extremely wet, but I ran and I ran. Despite the cool refreshing presence of the sea against my body, I was still boiling with rage inside. I had to keep moving. I became faster and faster. Whilst I was

sprinting along the empty beach, I formed a plan.

When I had calmed myself down slightly, I walked briskly back to my car and drove to the forest near my house. My lower half was still dripping wet, but I didn't care. I knew exactly where I needed to go.

It was only a short drive, and one I was used to, but it seemed to take an eternity to get there. I jumped out of my car, abandoned it on the side of the lane and ran through the woods until I found the thing I was looking for.

Belladonna.

Deadly nightshade.

I carefully picked lots of the flowers, and quite a few of the berries. The forest was rather overgrown with brambles and ferns, fallen trees and branches scattered across the paths. It was usually a calm place. I had been here many times before, exploring the flora and fauna. Sketching and making notes - but there were no such pleasantries today. Once I had carefully extracted what I needed, I tucked them into my pocket and walked away. No real thoughts were processing in my head, just pure blazing anger.

Sprinting back to my car, I made sure that the berries and the flowers were safe and secure in my blazer pocket. I got into my car and slammed the door. Without even putting my seatbelt

on, I put my foot to the metal.

My next destination was my house. Knowing that my parents weren't going to be back from work for at least another hour, I was safe to do anything I wanted...