

'Truly incredible . . .
I loved every damn
second of it'

LISA JEWELL

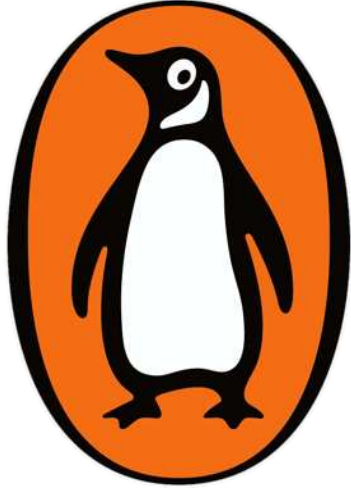
'Utterly original . . .
will grip you from first
page to last'

PAULA HAWKINS

**STRANGE
SALLY
DIAMOND
LIZ
NUGENT**



THE NO. 1 INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER



About the Author

Before becoming a full-time writer, Liz Nugent worked in film, theatre and television. Her previous four novels, *Unravelling Oliver*, *Lying in Wait*, *Skin Deep* and *Our Little Cruelties*, have each been number one bestsellers, and Liz has won four Irish Book Awards, as well as the James Joyce Medal for Literature. She lives in Dublin.

Strange Sally Diamond

‘If you are lucky enough to get Liz Nugent’s latest book do NOT start reading it at bedtime if you need to get up the next morning!’ Sharon Bairden, *Chapter in My Life* blog

‘What a brave, funny, disquieting, riveting book. By the end, I felt I knew Sally Diamond’s mind better than I did my own’ Louise Candlish

‘I finished the book and I literally had to have a lie-down afterwards. In a stellar writing career, this really is Liz Nugent’s finest hour. I put my whole life on hold for it. There are no words to say how utterly blown away I was by Sally Diamond’s world. What a character, what a story’
Claudia Carroll

‘Blown away by *Strange Sally Diamond* ... Utterly chilling and impossible to put down. Her best yet!’ Andrea Carter

‘Dark, heartbreaking, funny, brilliant – *Strange Sally Diamond* will stay with you for well beyond the final page’ Paul Cleave

‘I absolutely loved this book. Liz Nugent does not put a foot wrong. It’s tense, it’s creepy, it’s foreboding and unflinching. It’s such a joy to read a book like this, to be completely assured that you are in the hands of a brilliant storyteller and to just be able to give yourself over to a story because you know it’s going to be so good. Liz is a rare and gifted storyteller and writer, and a gift to readers – so clever, insightful and psychologically brilliant. Deeply unsettling and deeply brilliant!’ Edel Coffey

‘*Strange Sally Diamond* peels your heart with a paring knife in one continuous paper-thin coil. Dark, disturbing, utterly compelling. Liz Nugent’s books defy genre – just powerful stories, exquisitely told’
Tammy Cohen

‘Utterly addictive with a truly unforgettable heroine’ Sinéad Crowley

‘A masterpiece. I was quickly captivated by Liz Nugent’s nuanced portrait of the complex woman that is Sally Diamond. It’s dark, mesmerizing and one of the very best character-led novels I’ve ever read. Liz handles the darkness within the pages so deftly, so expertly. It was just so compelling and moving. I gulped it down and didn’t want it to end. Anyway, I could wax lyrical for days’ Fiona Cummins

‘There’s something very special about all of Liz Nugent’s novels. Character-driven stories that are real and wild at the same time. This one blew me away. Unflinching, unpredictable and unputdownable. A dark masterpiece’ Will Dean

‘To weave such a story together in one incredible arc is genius. *Strange Sally Diamond* held me from beginning to end in one weekend’ Joe Duffy

‘So, so good. Sally Diamond gets under your skin and worms her way into your heart. I didn’t want it to end’ Jane Fallon

‘If you like quirky, twisted and dark then you will LOVE this book’ Tracy Fenton, *Tracy Fenton* blog

‘Mesmerizing, shocking, yet uplifting. Sally is a character you can’t help but love. This book is destined to be HUGE!’ Debbie Hart, *Reading for Leisure* blog

‘Strange indeed ... and smart, too! Shocking, disturbing and utterly original, *Strange Sally Diamond* will grip you from first page to last’ Paula Hawkins

‘Just finished the fantastic *Strange Sally Diamond* by that twisted genius Liz Nugent – I did not want this book to end! What a brilliant character and a wonderfully woven story. So very dark and clever, and it completely broke my heart’ Susi Holliday

‘I raced through this brilliantly written, horrific (in the best way) story. This book will stay with me for a long time. I don’t even know what to say. What. A. Book. Easy 5 stars’ *Home Is Where Your Books Are* blog

‘Such a terrific read ... what an amazing character’ Anthony Horowitz

‘I’ve loved all of Liz Nugent’s novels and this was no exception. *Strange Sally Diamond* is clever, compelling, chilling, disturbing and soooooo dark!’ Diane Jeffrey

‘Holy crap, I just this minute finished *Strange Sally Diamond* and I am shook TO THE CORE! I will be calling it The Book of 2023 whenever anyone asks – a truly INCREDIBLE reading experience! I loved every damn second of it’ Lisa Jewell

‘No one gets into damaged people’s heads like Liz Nugent – I’d have known this was her writing even if her name had been deleted from the cover. Moving, thrilling, enraging and impossible to put down’ Erin Kelly

‘I’m lost in admiration. *Strange Sally Diamond* transcends genre and deserves to win literary prizes. It’s vivid, pacy, taut, but so very moving. It’s written with enormous compassion, and I LOVED the character of Sally, my heart absolutely broke for her. This novel feels *different*, it seems to me that it defies categorization. It’s dark certainly and the ending is chilling yet it’s written with incredible heart’ Marian Keyes

‘I’m struggling to find words to describe how wonderful this book is. All at once it’s dark, funny, compelling, shocking and heartbreaking, with perfect characters and unrelenting tension. The best book I’ve read in years. Just incredible’ Neil Lancaster

‘*Strange Sally Diamond* is a magnificent novel by a major talent. Liz Nugent is a treasure’ Shari Lapena

‘Dark, disturbing and compelling yet so touching, too. An amazing read’ Gilly Macmillan

‘A brilliant, brilliant book. I don’t have the skill to give this novel the kind of praise it deserves. It’s devastating. It’s beautiful. It’s mesmerizing. Clever. Surprising. Completely immersive. In total awe’ Imran Mahmood

‘A wonderfully twisted blend of light and dark; a book I couldn’t put down, a character I won’t forget. Clever, creepy, compelling, but poignant too, *Strange Sally Diamond* is going to be huge, and deservedly so’ Andrea Mara

‘F**k me, what a book. What a book! Achingly beautiful with a cast of characters that’ll remain with you long after the final page is turned. Already one of the must-read books of 2023’ John Marrs

‘Possibly my favourite Liz Nugent book so far. I LOVED IT! Strange Sally strides on to the page, fully formed and funny as hell (this is Liz: we’re talking dark funny). I was hooked from the first paragraph. I held my breath, gasped, laughed and cried. This is twisty, original and pitch-black. I’ll go anywhere with Liz – but only in daylight’ Nikki May

‘Compassionate and challenging, letting us imagine the lives that are forgotten when the news cycle moves on ... a very special book’ Val McDermid

‘Another bloody scorcher from Liz Nugent that kept me up to the wee hours to finish – one of the most intelligent, original, twisty crime writers working in the genre today’ Adrian McKinty

‘Utterly compelling. Brilliant writing and memorable characters. Genuinely unputdownable’ Dervla McTiernan

‘I absolutely devoured this. Liz Nugent has created a dark, twisted, gripping, intriguing, heart-stopping tale full of characters who, despite the horrors they inflict, are victims in their own right. Sally is a character that will stay embedded under my skin for a long time’ Sinéad Moriarty

‘One of the most original and spine-tingling books I’ve read in ages, Liz Nugent’s *Strange Sally Diamond* draws you in to the close, claustrophobic world of rural Ireland and the life of an emotionally withdrawn woman whose dark, hidden past is coming back to haunt her. Crackling with tension, this book will have you turning the pages late into the night. An absolute triumph’ Abir Mukherjee

‘Liz Nugent has outdone herself. Twisted and twisty, dark and gripping, no one will forget Sally Diamond in a hurry!’ Graham Norton

‘The queen of Irish suspense strikes again! A book that had me compelled, wanting to read on ferociously whilst at the same time being deeply unsettled at the prospect of what might befall some of the characters next. Her best yet!’ Damien O’Meara

‘Twisted, shocking and very, very dark, Liz Nugent has created a character for the ages in *Sally Diamond*’ Louise O’Neill

‘It creeped me out (in a good way). Think *Room* and *The Collector* but add a dazzling/unique main character and encroaching dread. Terrific’ Ian Rankin

‘Heartbreaking and utterly gripping on every page, clear your schedule for what might be Liz Nugent’s best – and darkest – book yet’ Catherine Ryan Howard

‘It has been six weeks since I read *Strange Sally Diamond* and still about twice a day a scene will flash before me and make my insides curdle’ Eithne Shortall

‘Be prepared for a rollercoaster ride – Sally Diamond is going to get under your skin’ Vanda Symon

‘Liz Nugent is a genius of an author and *Strange Sally Diamond* is one of the best crime novels I’ve read in years. Sally is a character who will initially shock you, perplex you and then win your heart. Dark, intriguing, heartbreaking and surprising, if I wasn’t biting my nails, I was smiling to myself. It’s absolutely brilliant. If this book doesn’t win every prize in 2023, I will be very surprised’ C. L. Taylor

‘Absolutely loved *Strange Sally Diamond*. It reminded me in parts of John Fowles’s *The Collector*. Highly recommend!’ Laure van Rensburg

‘Dark, compelling and deeply moving’ Ruth Ware

‘Dark, disturbing and compelling ... make sure you have a window of time to read it, because once you’re in, you’ll want to keep going’ Angela Watt, *Little Write Space* blog

‘I marvel at the imagination ... labyrinthine ... fiendish ... a great piece of work’ Bill Whelan

‘Liz Nugent dares to go where many won’t. What a compelling storyteller she is. Always challenging. I laughed out loud only to recoil from my laughter as the story unfolded. For this is wickedly dark territory. And yet

amidst the darkness, she allows a light to glimmer – that of a diamond.
Sally Diamond, to be precise' Sarah Winman

'*Strange Sally Diamond* has more heart than nearly any thriller I've read. Nugent continues to prove herself a master at eliciting empathy for her characters, even – especially – the ones you really want to hate. An absolutely brilliant concept and flawless execution. I will be thinking about this story for months to come' Stephanie Wrobel

Liz Nugent

STRANGE SALLY DIAMOND



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Epilogue: Amanda, May 2022, Auckland Town Hall

Acknowledgements

For Richard, with even more love

*Away, away, from men and towns,
To the wild wood and the downs –
To the silent wilderness
Where the soul need not repress
Its music ...*

– Percy Bysshe Shelley



Part I

‘Put me out with the bins,’ he said, regularly. ‘When I die, put me out with the bins. I’ll be dead, so I won’t know any different. You’ll be crying your eyes out,’ and he would laugh and I’d laugh too because we both knew that I wouldn’t be crying my eyes out. I never cry.

When the time came, on Wednesday 29th November 2017, I followed his instructions. He was small and frail and eighty-two years old by then, so it was easy to get him into one large garden waste bag.

It was a month since he’d been up and about. ‘No doctors,’ he said. ‘I know what they’re like.’ And he did, because he was a doctor, of psychiatry. He was still able to write prescriptions, though, and would send me to Roscommon to get those filled out.

I didn’t kill him; it wasn’t like that. I brought him in tea that morning and he was cold in his bed. Eyes closed, thank God. I hate it on those TV dramas when corpses stare up at the detective inspector. Maybe you only have your eyes open if you’ve been murdered?

‘Dad?’ I said, though I knew he was gone.

I sat on the end of the bed, took the lid off his beaker and drank the tea, missing the sugar I put in mine. I checked his pulse first, but I could tell by the waxiness of his skin. Only, waxy isn’t the right word. It was more like ... his skin didn’t belong to him any more, or he didn’t belong to it.

Dragging the waste bag across the yard to the barn was hard. The ground was frosted so I had to heave the bag up on to my shoulder every few minutes so that it wouldn’t rip. Once a month, when he was well, Dad would empty the bins into the incinerator. He refused to pay the bin charges and we lived in such a secluded spot that the council didn’t chase us about it.

I knew that corpses decomposed and began to rot and smell, so I carefully placed the bag into the incinerator barrel. I splashed some petrol over the top and set it going. I didn’t stay to hear it burn. He was no longer he, it was a body, an ‘it’, in a domestic incinerator beside a barn in a field beside a house at the end of a lane, off a minor road.

Sometimes, when describing where we lived over the phone, Dad would say, 'I'm off the middle of nowhere. If you go to the middle of nowhere and then take a left, a right, another left until you come to a roundabout, take the second exit.'

He didn't like visitors. Apart from our doctor, Angela, we had callers maybe once every two years since Mum died. The last few fixed the car or installed a computer, and then a few years later, another man came and gave Dad the internet and a newer computer, and the last one came to improve our broadband. I stayed in my room on those occasions.

He never offered to teach me how to use the computer, but explained all the things it could do. I watched enough television to know what computers could do. They could bomb countries. They could spy on people. They could do brain surgery. They could reunite old friends and enemies and solve crimes. But I didn't want to do any of those things. Television was what I liked, documentaries, nature and history programmes, and I loved dramas, fantasy ones set in the future or Victorian ones set in great houses and beautiful dresses, and even the modern ones. I liked watching people with their exciting lives, their passionate love affairs, their unhappy families and their dark secrets. It's ironic, I suppose, because I didn't like people in real life. Most people.

I preferred to stay at home. Dad understood that. School had been horrendous. I went to all the classes, tried to avoid other girls and went straight home afterwards. They said I was autistic, even though my psychiatrist dad had told me I definitely wasn't. I joined no clubs or societies, despite Mum's pleading. When I did my final exams, I got two As and two Bs and two Cs in Honours subjects and a pass in Maths and Irish. That was twenty-five years ago, after which we moved again, to a bungalow at the end of a tiny lane, a mile outside the village of Carricksheedy.

Weekly shopping trips were always an ordeal. I sometimes pretended to be deaf to avoid conversation, but I could hear the schoolchildren's comments. 'Here she comes, Strange Sally Diamond, the weirdo.' Dad said there was no malice in it. Children are mean. Most of them. I was glad I was no longer a child. I was a forty-two-year-old woman.

I would collect Dad's pension and my long-term illness benefit from the post office. Years ago, the post office wanted us to set up direct debits to our bank accounts for our benefits and pension, but Dad said we should at least try to maintain some relationships with the villagers, so we ignored the advice. The bank was all the way over in Roscommon, eleven miles

away. There was no ATM in Carricksheedy, though with most businesses, you could pay with your bank card and get cash back.

I also collected Dad's post because Dad said he didn't want a postman poking his nose into our business. Mrs Sullivan, the postmistress, would shout, 'How is your dad, Sally?' Maybe she thought I could lip-read. I nodded and smiled, and she would put her head to one side in sympathy as if a tragedy had occurred, and then I would go to the large Texaco garage. I would buy what we needed for the week and get home again, nerves abating as I turned into the lane. The round trip never took longer than an hour.

When he was well, Dad would help unpack the shopping. We ate three meals every day. We cooked for each other. So, I prepared two meals and he prepared one, but the division of labour was even between us. We swapped duties as age took its toll on him. I did the hoovering and he unloaded the dishwasher. I did the ironing and the bins and he cleaned the shower.

And then he stopped coming out of his room, and he wrote his prescriptions with a shakier hand, and he only picked at food. Towards the end, it was ice cream. I fed it to him sometimes when his hands shook too much and I changed his bed linen on the days when he could no longer control himself and didn't make it to the chamber pot under his bed, which I emptied every morning and rinsed out with bleach. He had a bell beside his bed, but I couldn't hear it from the back kitchen, and in the last days, he was too feeble to lift it.

'You're a good girl,' he said weakly.

'You're the best dad,' I'd say, though I knew that wasn't exactly true. But it made him smile when I said it. Mum had taught me to say that. The best dad was the dad in *Little House on the Prairie*. And he was handsome.

My mum used to ask me to play this game in my head. To imagine what other people were thinking. It was a curious thing. Isn't it easier to ask them what they think? And is it any of my business? I know what I think. And I can use my imagination to pretend things that I could do, like the people on television, solving crimes and having passionate love affairs. But sometimes I try to think what the villagers see when they look at me. According to a magazine I read one time in Angela's waiting room, I am half a stone overweight for my height, five foot eight inches. Angela laughed when I showed her the magazine, but she did encourage me to eat more fruit and vegetables and fewer carbs. My hair is long and auburn, but I keep it in a loose bun, slightly below the crown of my head. I wash it

once a week in the bath. The rest of the week, I wear a shower cap and have a quick shower.

I wear one of my four skirts. I have two for winter and two for summer. I have seven blouses, three sweaters and a cardigan, and I still have a lot of Mum's old clothes, dresses and jackets, all good quality, even though they are old. Mum liked to go shopping with her sister, Aunt Christine, in Dublin two or three times a year 'for the sales'. Dad didn't approve but she said she would spend her money how she liked.

I don't wear bras. They are uncomfortable and I don't understand why so many women insist on them. When the clothes wore out, Dad bought me second-hand ones on the internet, except for the underwear. That was always new. 'You hate shopping and there's no point in wasting money,' he would say.

My skin is clear and clean. I have some lines on my forehead and around my eyes. I don't wear make-up. Dad bought me some once and suggested that I should try it out. My old friend television and the advertisements meant that I knew what to do with it, but I didn't look like me, with blackened eyes and pink lipstick. Dad agreed. He offered to get different types but he sensed my lack of enthusiasm and we didn't mention it again.

I think the villagers see a forty-two-year-old 'deaf' woman walking in and out of the village and occasionally driving an ancient Fiat. They must assume I can't work because of the deafness and that's why I get benefits. I get benefits because Dad said I am socially deficient.