

# No One Would Do What The Lamberts Have Done

"Hugely entertaining  
and infectiously funny..."

A delight from  
start to finish."

—Alex Michaelides,  
#1 *New York Times*  
bestselling author

A NOVEL



## Sophie Hannah

*New York Times* Bestselling Author

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No One Would  
Do What  
The Lamberts  
Have Done  
Sophie  
Hannah

For Carolyn and Jamie, my dream publishers for 20 years and counting,  
with lots of love  
and for my beloved Chunk Plunkett  
Last but not least, for Chunk's furry brother Brewstie – my favourite person  
in Level 2, and forever my Star Word.

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# Part 1

# Monday 16 September 2024

## Connor

PC Connor Chantree was afraid he'd already ruined everything and was about to be sent abruptly on his way. He should have explained to Large first, and only then handed over the bundle of papers. He'd done his best to uncrush them, straighten them out, smooth away creases and brush off what dirt he could. Then he'd arranged them into a rectangular shape, which had taken far longer than he'd expected it to. He'd added two red elastic bands, top and bottom.

The result was unimpressive. It sat in the middle of Large's desk and seemed to drink in the baffled stares of both men; and yes, Connor checked with himself, those battered pages *did* look thirsty in a way those not in the room would have called impossible.

Somehow, increasing the tidiness of the bundle's presentation had achieved the opposite of what Connor had wanted. The document (was that the right name for a few hundred pages? Should he think of it as something else? A book?) looked nothing like the sort of pristine, sharp-cornered contender he'd hoped to create.

*Contender?* Words were appearing in Connor's head that he was sure hadn't been there before he'd read the... thing. Ideas too. Like this one: the spruced-up, rectangularised heap looked as if it was trying to mock convention – as if it had scuffed itself and kicked itself about a bit in an act of deliberate defiance. Even to Connor, its curator – *curator?* – it seemed to be saying, 'And your point is?', whereas the mess of maimed and defeated pages he'd seen on first opening the box had screamed a different message at him: 'Pay attention! Help! Put me together!'

There was a strong chance, of course, that he was imagining some of this. He wished he'd brought in the soggy box, exactly as he'd received it and without reading any of the contents, and simply handed it over. 'Above my pay grade,' he could have said as he'd passed the problem on to Large.



Who was he kidding? He couldn't have done that; the possibility hadn't occurred to him because it had never existed. He'd felt duty-bound to drop everything and read the thing from start to finish before doing anything else. The physical package had been left for him, marked for his attention, and with it had come a powerful sense of duty that couldn't be shirked.

'What's this, Chantree?' Large said. 'Why is the name Lambert back on my desk?'

'Sir, I think you need to read it,' said Connor. 'Fairly urgently.'

Large picked it up and removed the elastic band at the top. He spent nearly five minutes reading small sections from randomly chosen pages. 'So,' he said eventually, in the voice of one forced to consume many disadvantageous and depressing realities all at once. 'You've written a novel about the Lambert family and their recent travails. I'll admit it: I'd prefer to live in a world where that hadn't happened. And in second place – my runner-up choice – would be not knowing it had happened and never finding out.'

Connor didn't think he ought to know what the word 'travails' meant. It alarmed him that he did. 'Sir, I didn't write it—'

'Then who did?'

'—and I'm not sure it's a novel.'

'It looks like a novel.' Large kept his eyes fixed on the bundle, in the careful way a king might watch someone he suspected of being a treasonous imposter about to stage a coup. 'It has a title – one that's probably too long to fit on a cover. Just in case you were thinking of publishing it, which would have all sorts of legal...' Large broke off, but not before Connor had frightened himself even more by finishing the sentence in his head with the word 'ramifications', another one he didn't think he ought to know.

'But you say you didn't write it.' Large frowned. 'Then what is it? Where did it come from?'

'Sir, you need to read it yourself. I can't—'

'And I'm not going to do that.' Large smiled conspiratorially, as if they had both known all along they would end up here and could now unite in

celebration. ‘Tell me what you hope I’d think or do if I read it. That will move us further forward without undue suffering accruing to me.’

Connor had read the thing twice and still had no idea what he thought ought to happen next. He had even less of a clue what Large’s response might be. He couldn’t say that, though. It was too vague, and likely to get him waved out of Large’s office.

He said, ‘You’d wonder, like I’m wondering, whether the coroner maybe got it wrong. Whether perhaps there’s reason to suspect—’

‘I see. That’ll do, Chantree. Thank you.’ Large let the manuscript fall from his hands. It landed on his desk with a thud. ‘Take it away, please, whatever and whoever’s it is. You know as well as I do: the autopsy ruled out any deliberate action. Suicide, murder – both possibilities were eliminated, happily for all concerned. Let’s not seek out further trouble, shall we?’

‘But then what killed her?’ said Connor. ‘Healthy young people don’t just die for no reason. Look, I’m not saying it wasn’t a natural death. We know it was. And there’s nothing in those pages to support a murder charge, if that’s what you’re worried about. CPS won’t touch it. But given that the autopsy found no trace of—’

‘Chantree.’

This, Connor recognised, was the point beyond which no more of his unsolicited words would be allowed to pass. ‘Sir?’

‘The Lamberts have been through enough. Don’t you think?’

‘Definitely.’ He’d heard the unspoken bit at the end too – *partly thanks to you, you stupid, gullible git* – whether Large had silent-said it or not. Connor had been silent-saying it to himself every day, at least ten times a day, since the truth had come out.

That was assuming the truth was what they all now believed it to be. And if it wasn’t, how could it possibly be down to him, Connor, to correct the mistake? The extent to which he felt chosen was impossible to ignore. Yet, who in their right mind would choose him? He was very much an ‘I do my best’ kind of person, but not at all an ‘I’m determined never to give up until I get the result I want’ sort. The difference between the two approaches, and

which camp he fell into, was made clear to him soon after he'd got married 16 months ago. He was the most useless variant of the 'I do my best' type – the sort that tended to have a wistful 'Oh well!' attached to it.

Whoever had left the box for him had picked the wrong person. They'd have done better to target his wife, Flo. Nothing fazed her. She'd have strolled into Large's office with far less trepidation than Connor had felt as he'd hovered on the threshold, not caring that she didn't work in the same building or profession.

'I trust you won't be offended if I point out that the Gaveys suffered too,' said Large.

*The Lamberts and the Gaveys.* Connor had been transfixed and now felt haunted – no, that wasn't an exaggeration – by the way the two families had been presented as a sort of entwined pair, predestined to be enemies to the death; that was what the voice in the pages implied over and over again.

Whose voice was it, for God's sake?

If only Large would read the manuscript...

'Yes, sir,' Connor said. 'All things considered, there's been an incredible amount of suffering on both sides. Lamberts and Gaveys.'

'We agree, then. No need for any more. Good.' Large sounded jollier. 'Is there anything else you'd like to say before you leave and take this malodorous clump with you?'

Connor had sprayed the pages with his wife's strongest perfume – '1996', it was called – but for some reason the scent hadn't stuck and the original pong had reasserted itself: a blend of earth and meat, as if the bundle of paper had been buried in the ground alongside a dead body, then dug up a few weeks later.

'Yes, sir.'

'Pardon?' said Large.

'There is something else I'd like to say.' He had to try. If he didn't take inspired action now, he never would. He found it alarming whenever Flo started to rant about her willingness to die on hills, but he knew he wouldn't

be able to rest easy until he'd seen the view from the one he was about to ascend. (Last week, he'd have said 'climb'.)

'Is it about the Lamberts?' asked Large. 'The very finished-and-concluded matter of the Lamberts, about which no more needs to be said, ever?'

'No, sir.'

'What's it about?'

'My sister's tattoo,' said Connor.

'Are you being serious, Chantree?'

'Yes, sir. You see...' Was he going to take the plunge? Was he a dickhead?

*Yes. Probably.* 'My mum begged her not to do it, but there's no telling our Danielle. She'll always do what she wants, and enjoys it even more if it pisses you off. So she got inked up, right, and it's... well, I don't mind tats, but it's pretty bad. Covers the whole of her left thigh, and, sir, that's not a small area.' Connor made sure not to look at Large's enormous stomach as he said this. 'And Mum thinks everyone who gets a tattoo's going to be unemployed forever or end up dead or in prison, which is obviously daft, but she's right about our Danielle's tattoo. It looks awful.'

'Chantree—'

'Sir, let me finish.'

'Are you trying to trick me into wondering whether a natural death was a murder, via an analogy involving a bad tattoo? My money's on yes.'

'It's meant to be an animal skull, but it looks like a motorbike that's been tortured to death, Mum says. I've never seen her so distraught. Couldn't stop crying for days. Absolutely gutted, she was. It's hard to explain if you don't know her—'

'Don't try,' Large advised. 'Just get on with it, if you must.'

These weren't ideal storytelling conditions, Connor thought. Ideally, his tale would unfold in a more relaxed way, and without his audience already having seen through his aim in telling it.

'Mum thought she only had two choices,' he said, 'and she hated them both: either change her mind and be fine with the tattoo – try and convince herself it wasn't the disaster she thought it was so that she and our Danielle

could still see each other and have a good relationship – or else stop seeing her own daughter, like, distance herself, maybe just see her for Christmas and birthdays, that kind of thing. Sounds extreme, I know, but, sir, you don't know how much Mum hates tattoos.'

'I'm starting to get an idea,' said Large.

'And our Danielle wore nothing but shorts that were, like, up here, to show it off. Mum was convinced she had to make this awful choice: her only daughter or her... integrity, I suppose you'd call it.'

'No need for the "only",' said Large.

'Pardon, sir?'

'Her daughter or her integrity: that's the choice. It doesn't matter how many daughters she's got. She could have fourteen.'

'No, she's only got one,' said Connor. 'It's just me and our Danielle.'

Large shook his head. 'Doesn't matter. The "only" acts as a distraction. We don't need to wonder if the dilemma would be less painful if she had some daughters to spare. It wouldn't be.' He eyed the stained manuscript. Leaning forward, he tapped his fingers on the title page, then looked up at Connor expectantly. 'Well? Go on. What did she choose?'

'Neither of the options she hated, thanks to my wife, Flo, who explained to her about the boxes and saved the day.'

Large sighed. 'What boxes?'

'It's a thought experiment,' Connor told him. 'You imagine you have two boxes, right? Both big, both empty. And neither one ever has to have any contact with the other. They can just sit side by side, quite separately, being none of each other's business. That's what Flo told Mum. She said, "There's no need to change your opinion about Danielle's tattoo, or tattoos in general. In Box Number One, you put your acceptance of all the pain and anger you're feeling, and all the crying and raging and pillow-thumping you need to do about it. You'll always hate that Danielle's vandalised her body, you'll never be okay with it – and you just, like, fully accept that. You don't judge yourself for it or try to change your thoughts or feelings about it, just stick them all in Box One. Then, in Box Two, you put all your feelings and wishes

and hopes for Danielle and your relationship with her. In Box Two, you want only the best for her, and trust her to make her own decisions and to know what's right for her. You accept all her choices and love her no matter what. In Box Two, you're just there for her." That's what Flo said, and it saved Mum's sanity and the relationship. She and our Danielle are closer than ever, because both boxes were full of acceptance. And acceptance and acceptance can't ever be at war, you see, sir. Nothing can ever be at war with itself. It's like Flo says: accepting that we don't like or want something doesn't mean we have to push anything away – either our true feelings or the thing we dislike.'

'I see. Is your wife some sort of counsellor?' Large asked.

'No. She's got her own catering company, though. Sir, speaking of boxes, this' – Connor put his hand on the manuscript – 'arrived in a box with my name on it. A big, damp cardboard box that disintegrated when I opened it. The pages had been stuffed in, no particular order – some scrunched, some folded, some flat. It took me ages to arrange them so they made sense. I think if you read it the way I've put it together, you'll have as many questions as I've got. Think of it like this: we've got Box One over here,' Connor drew a square shape in the air with his fingers, 'where we know it was natural causes because a coroner said so—'

'That's the only box I'm interested in,' said Large.

'—but there's also Box Two, the one I found sitting between my car and our garage door a few days ago, with this... book, thing, inside it, but all jumbled up. And in that box what happened was—'

'Inside or outside?' Large interrupted.

'Huh?'

'Your garage.'

'Outside,' said Connor. 'There's no room for the car inside the garage. It's still full of unopened boxes from when we moved.'

'Always unpack straight away, Chantree, or you'll never get the job finished.'

'Yes, sir. Sir, in Box Two, there's a murder.'

‘I don’t like Box Two.’

‘A description of one, anyway,’ Connor pressed on. ‘It’s one that’ll be impossible to prove because nothing physical happened. So, we still get to keep our Box One, because there’s no evidence—’

‘What do you mean, “nothing physical”?’ asked Large.

‘Please consider reading the... thing, sir. If whoever wrote it is telling the truth... Though I don’t think they can be...’ Connor felt obliged to interrupt himself with this caveat.

‘If it’s a pack of lies, I don’t need to read it,’ said Large.

‘But I don’t think it’s that either. It feels very... true.’ It was the only way Connor could think to describe it. ‘Sir, I’ll be honest: I’ve got absolutely no idea what it is, who wrote it or who left it for me. And it contains the most unflattering portrait of me – looks and personality – that anyone will ever write, I hope, but it’s still important that you know what’s in it, and nothing I can tell you about it could convey the full... effect. You need to see it for yourself. Just... please forget the horrible description of me as soon as you’ve read it, if you wouldn’t mind. And don’t share it with anyone if you can help it. Not even as a joke.’ *I’m feeling bad enough about myself as it is*, Connor considered adding, just in case appearing as pitiable as possible might help the cause.

No need. Large was reaching for the smelly bundle of paper, removing the second of the elastic bands.

**No One  
Would Do  
What The Lamberts  
Have Done  
by me**



# 1

Mum didn't think I was on her side. Not at the start, and not for a long time.

That doesn't mean she thought I wasn't. It just means she didn't know I was, or how passionately I was, and so it didn't occur to her to think it. I don't blame her for that. I could easily have made it clear – maybe I should have, since trying to protect her from the truth was pointless and she ended up finding out anyway – but I chose not to. Also, it's just the way most people are: they don't think or believe a thing unless they already know it, which is a shame. Actually, it's one of the biggest, most possibility-limiting shames humanity has to contend with, but that's hardly Mum's fault.

If she'd known from the beginning that I was on her side, and especially if she'd known what I'd be able to achieve once I put my mind to it, she could have spared herself a lot of suffering. She'd have been so much happier on The Day of the Policeman, for a start.

That wasn't the start, though. That was the middle, and on that day, 17 June 2024 at 4.45pm, I was also unaware of... yes, I'm going to call it what it is, or was: my own brilliant potential. In fact, I could just as easily call 17 June The Day of the Potential, because there was so much of the stuff swirling around – for greatness and for harm, both equally strong at that point and all mixed up together, billowing through our house, gushing down the street, covering the village green so that you couldn't see it anymore. (I mean, not really, since none of those things were observable events, but also: yes, really).

This is what happened in the conventional sense of the word 'happened' – the bell rang. Mum opened the door, and there he was – the policeman. I heard a male voice followed by Mum's, but didn't pay much attention. I was in my room, letting Champ win a series of tug of war games with the knitted carrot toy. Even after he'd lolloped off downstairs to see who our visitor was, I didn't start to listen deliberately. I was a bit irritated that Champ had ditched me, and said something sarcastic like, 'Right, great. Let's *race* to the

door. This is Swaffham Tilney, after all, so it's bound to be someone *thrilling*.'

Then I heard Mum sounding worried and restrained, not at all her usual welcoming self. And I noticed she wasn't inviting the policeman in, which was odd because she normally tried to pull everyone into our house and give them treats and what she called 'the full tour', as if we lived in Buckingham Palace and not a converted hayloft that used to be a dilapidated outbuilding belonging to The Farmer (who's actually the only person in Swaffham Tilney whose name I don't know; he must have one, but everyone calls him The Farmer).

The policeman eventually tried to invite himself into the house, saying it might be easier to speak inside. Mum said no, it wouldn't be, not for her. I couldn't see her – I was on the upstairs landing by now, hovering at the window above the front door – but I could see the policeman standing on the pavement, shifting from foot to foot, looking as if he wasn't enjoying himself, or perhaps he needed to go to the toilet. He was young, with a long, oblong head that reminded me of the brush from the dustpan and brush set in our utility room cupboard – rectangular and bristly. He had a way of speaking that made it sound as if he was leaning heavily on each word.

Then I heard him say horrible things that I knew were lies, one after another. Quickly, I ran through a truncated version of the meditation I learned with Mum in Abbots Langley, hoping it would have an instant calming effect:

*Praise Ricky, Thank Ricky, Ricky loves me.*

*Praise Ricky, Thank Ricky, Ricky loves me.*

I knew that wasn't how inner peace meditation ought to be done, but what about when an unforeseeable emergency happens and you need instant tranquility or else your heart will explode? That was how I felt. If you have to be calm first in order for a calming mantra to work, that's a problem.

It didn't work. And then Champ started to bark and I thought I might be sick, except there was nothing in me to throw up. He's normally quiet when people come to the house – usually the only thing that sets him off is when

he hears dogs barking on television – but he could sense Mum was terrified, so he got scared too. I didn't blame him. What made it extra chilling was that Mum's never frightened or sad. She's always cheerful. Only a week or so before The Day of the Policeman, I heard her tell Champ that, after listening to the latest episode of one of her two favourite podcasts, she'd finally realised her purpose in life at the age of 53. 'Shall I tell you what it is, Champy?' she said. 'It's Enjollification, with a capital E. Do you know what that means? You don't, do you? No, you don't. You're a gorgeous boy, aren't you? Yes, you are!'

While she hugged him and stroked the fuzzy hair under his chin, I worked out what 'Enjollification' had to mean, and felt pleased with myself when Mum confirmed it: 'It means making people feel as jolly as possible, including me. I invented the word today, but it's always been my purpose, and do you know what, Champy? It's so useful and... enlightening to know that about myself.' By the time she'd finished explaining, I'd downgraded my achievement in guessing correctly – the meaning would have been obvious to anyone, probably – though not to our policeman visitor, who didn't sound clever or perceptive. He sounded like a 'This is just the way it has to be' person. (Anyone intelligent knows that nothing is ever just the way anything has to be.)

Mum had decided, understandably, that the policeman didn't deserve to be Enjollified. I glared down at the top of his head, beaming all my viciousness at the points I decided were his most vulnerable: those tiny pink patches between the light brown bristles that sprouted from his skull. I remember hoping I'd carry on feeling as savagely vengeful as I felt at that moment. Believe me, it's a less horrible emotion to grapple with than pure terror. The current of vindictiveness running through me was proof that I had power, even though I could have done so much more in the moment. I could have sent the policeman running from our home, screaming, never to return, but I was neither quick-thinking nor brave enough on 17 June.

Anyway, then he said it, as I'd known he would from the second I'd started to concentrate on what was going on. He said the dreaded name –

Gavey – and the inevitability of it felt like a double layer of something stifling wrapping around me, inescapable, as indoors as it was outdoors, as stitched into the earth of every flowerbed and plant pot in Swaffham Tilney as it was blown into every cloud in the sky and dissolving into every drop of the water in the lode by the path where Mum and Dad walk Champ – and spreading from there to all the other lodes in the surrounding fenland. As I eavesdropped from the landing, trying to take in every word the policeman was saying, trying not to panic, I felt that sticky inevitability coating the walls and carpet and ceiling around me as well as every inch of what Dad likes to call ‘our special little corner of ancient England’.

*The Gaveys.*

Of course this disruption to an until-now-happy day in the life of the Lambert family turned out to have the Gaveys behind it.