

THE MILLION-COPY BESTSELLER

SUE WATSON



WANTING DAISY DEAD

THEY ALL
HAD A REASON.

ONE HAD
THE NERVE.

**WANTING
DAISY
DEAD**

ALSO BY SUE WATSON

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The Empty Nest

The Sister-in-Law

First Date

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Love,LiesandWeddingCake

WANTING DAISY DEAD

SUE WATSON

 THOMAS & MERCER

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Published by Thomas & Mercer, Seattle
www.apub.com

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EU Product Safety contact:
Amazon Publishing, Amazon Media EU S.à r.l.
38, avenue John F. Kennedy, L-1855 Luxembourg
amazonpublishing-gpsr@amazon.com

ISBN-13: 9781662523861
eISBN: 9781662523854

Cover design by The Brewster Project
Cover images: © Olena / Alamy Stock Photo; © Mazur Travel © bdvect 1 ©
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*For my friend and reader Harolyn Grant,
Thanks for saving Daisy and me . . . or is it Daisy and I?*

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The Killer Question: Who Wanted Daisy Dead?

Podcast transcript, 2025

On a cold November night twenty years ago, in 2005, student Daisy Harrington left the house she shared with her fellow second-year students and went to meet a friend. She didn't want to share with everyone who she was meeting that evening, but her housemates were busy with their own lives, and she set off alone.

It was the next morning before any of Daisy's friends realised she wasn't in her room, so hadn't come home the previous evening. Assuming she'd stayed over at her boyfriend's, they continued with their day, expecting her to turn up later. But later, when Daisy still hadn't returned home, they called her and there was no answer, so they contacted some of her friends from her English lit course, who said they hadn't seen or heard from her either. Becoming concerned now, the housemates posted on MySpace and Bebo, the precursors to Facebook, asking if anyone knew where she was. But no one had seen her since the previous evening, and so they called the police and raised the alarm.

Over the next few days, the police began a thorough investigation, interviewing anyone and everyone who'd come into contact with the young woman. Friends and fellow students posted online, handed out leaflets and tied yellow ribbons around trees, all apparently desperate to find her. As Daisy's mother was too distraught to speak to the media about her missing daughter, the five housemates stepped in. In newspapers, TV news reports and soon documentaries, they pleaded for Daisy, or whoever had her, to contact them. 'We love you and want you back,' her friends cried. Their

appearances went global, their crying faces were on all the front pages; the news on TV was filled with images of the concerned friends and the beautiful young woman who had gone missing. Tears on camera, wringing hands, running mascara, all of them begging for her return, and as fears grew of a killer on campus, there was concern for their own safety too.

It was a media frenzy, and the iconic photo of the five housemates – friends together in grief and fear – stayed with the nation for a long time to come.

The press hinted that each of those grieving housemates had a reason to kill Daisy, which was true. But only one of them had enough of a reason to actually kill her . . .

So who was it, and why did they want Daisy dead?

NOW – TWENTY YEARS AFTER DAISY’S MURDER

LAUREN PEMBERTON, DAISY’S BEST FRIEND AND HOUSEMATE

I look across the table at the tiny woman who is smiling as she attempts to eat the minuscule starter covered in foam. She looks up from her herculean struggle, and our eyes meet momentarily, before we both return to the task at hand. Lunch with my agent.

‘Do you like the new book?’ I ask, toying with a small leaf on my plate. I’m so nervous that if I actually put anything in my mouth I may choke.

It’s taken me a long time to write my second book – ninety thousand words containing my blood, sweat and tears. Not to mention the late nights and early mornings, the constant exhaustion resulting in vicious arguments with Richard and accusations of neglect from my daughter. If Finty says no to this book, then I have no future.

‘Please just tell me the truth,’ I ask her again, now putting down my fork, unable to even look at the oily leaves congealing on my plate. ‘Finty, we’ve known each other for a long time. You plucked me from that slush pile and saw promise back then . . . What about now?’

Eighteen years ago, I was the toast of the book world, with a huge bestseller and a ‘one to watch’ label from all the critics. I was feted wherever I went: queues of readers lined bookshops and pavements, waiting for me to sign the precious hardback copies they clutched like Fabergé eggs. After all

the horror and suspicion around Daisy's death, I believed this was what I deserved. It was a deliciously sweet – if short – respite from the darkness.

After the trial, when Daisy's killer was safely in prison, I finally found the courage to send the manuscript out to almost every agent in London. Finty was one of the first to get back to me. She hadn't long left Limerick, and her excitement for a bigger life made her Irish eyes sparkle. And all my doubts and fears disappeared in the champagne bubbles as she called me to say publishers were offering six-figure sums for the book.

It was like a dream – *A Day in the Life and Death* went on to sell millions, the film starring Scarlett Johansson was a box office hit, and for nearly two decades I've been living off the proceeds. But the tragedy is, I found myself unable to write a second book; readers clamoured for more, but writer's block, anxiety, panic attacks and guilt stopped me in my tracks.

But now the money has run out, and nothing focuses the mind like losing one's home. So I finally wrote book two, sent it to Finty, and I'm desperate for her to like it so she'll do her magic once more, sell it to a publisher, and I can keep my home. I'm waiting for the effusiveness, the glint of ambition and thrilling praise, just like there was for book one.

But instead of sparkly eyes in a thirty-something face, I'm looking across the table at a fifty-year-old woman with thin lips and too much Botox, whose accent has faded along with her enthusiasm.

'Your writing is . . . good,' she starts slowly, and for the first time I realise this may not be the meeting I've been hoping for.

'But?'

'I don't know, Lauren . . . It lacks something. Your first book had so much . . . *more*.' She gazes upwards. Is she searching for words? Or avoiding my eyes?

Inwardly, I writhe in agony as she returns her attention to her plate, nibbling at a leaf like a baby rabbit.

'Some people only have one book in them . . .' She stabs me with her words.

Holding my breath, I sip my wine self-consciously, vowing not to have another in her company. I might say too much. I'll have a large one on the way home.

This book is make-or-break for me. I haven't had any luck since those heady days of my debut.

When *A Day in the Life and Death* was released, Daisy Harrington's murder was still fresh in everyone's minds and the parallels were clear. Being her best friend and housemate, it was assumed I'd written it about her, but we avoided any legal problems by stating this was a work of fiction. Of course that wasn't strictly true – it was about Daisy, though not the Daisy we knew but another, far more complex one, working through the watershed before womanhood. There was no death in the original; Finty and I just cobbled that together at the end because the publishers were clamouring for a body count.

During my first lunch meeting with Finty all those years ago, she ordered for both of us – the most expensive things on the menu, including a bottle of pink champagne.

'Your writing is refreshing and raw and beautiful,' she said then, her eyes glittering. 'You are a rare talent, Lauren. Cheers!' And we clinked our champagne saucers, and she ordered a second bottle.

Today, we drink subdued white wine in a less expensive restaurant, and she talks, using non-committal phrases like 'okay' and 'not sure' and 'the market is flooded'.

'What are you saying, Finty . . . ?' I ask, crossing my fingers.

Now there's a buzzing in my head; it's getting louder and louder and suddenly her little voice is lost in the sound, and only then do I realise it's my phone ringing.

'Sorry, I have to pick up, it's Richard. Clementine's off school with a cold.'

'Of course.' She goes back to her foam and leaves.

'Hello, is she okay?' I ask, panic and fear pumping through me.

'Who?'

‘*Clementine*, of course – isn’t that why you called?’ I try not to sound as frustrated with my husband as I feel.

‘No, she’s fine. She’s definitely going back to school tomorrow, whatever she says.’ My heart feels like it’s beating in my head. If, as I suspect, Finty doesn’t think the book is good enough to offer to publishers, then I won’t have a second book deal. And we’re careening towards financial oblivion.

‘Richard, I’m with . . . Finty,’ I say, like I’m trying to hide my irritation with a three-year-old.

‘I know. That’s why I’m calling. Does she like it?’ Richard’s been like this ever since he lost his job – bored and aimless. I feel like I have *two* children sometimes.

I try not to swear. I need to be at my very best, my most focused, in case there’s a slim chance of saving this.

‘See you later, have to go.’ I’m about to put the phone down.

‘Lauren, you’ve had a note through the letterbox,’ Richard says.

‘Okay, well, I can see it when I get home.’ *Idiot, I think. Why does he want to discuss the bloody post now?*

‘It’s an invitation to a party – a fortieth birthday party. It’s a whole weekend,’ he continues regardless.

‘Great, let’s talk about it when I get home.’ I smile and give Finty a slight eye-roll, but she doesn’t bond over annoying husbands. She’s enviably single, and doesn’t bond over anything except deals and money, and she hasn’t made *any* money with me for a long time.

I glance at the blue eyes and pencil-thin arms of the disillusioned husk sitting opposite me. I think the industry – and probably having me as a client – has sucked her dry.

I’m about to hang up so I can try to convince Finty that, if we did it once, we can do it again. But he’s still talking.

‘Richard, please . . .’

‘I called you because I think it might be a scam.’

‘Why?’ I ask, irritated.

‘Well, it’s signed “*The Killer Question* podcast” but the party is for someone called Daisy Harrington. Isn’t she . . . Isn’t she the one who was murdered?’

My blood turns to ice. I can’t speak; a panic attack is winging its way towards me. Any minute now I may have to take out the paper bag I keep in my laptop carrier and put it to my mouth and start breathing heavily in and out. And I’m not quite sure how Finty and the rest of the diners in the restaurant are going to feel about that.

‘And there’s something else,’ Richard is muttering. ‘Inside, it says—’

‘*What?*’ I reply, so sharply Finty’s head shoots up from the thimble of seafood she’s struggling to eat.

‘Is everything okay?’ she’s mouthing.

‘Fine, fine,’ I mouth back, before attempting a beaming, lying smile.

‘What does it say . . . ?’ My voice is hoarse; my head is filled with Daisy. Today of all days I don’t need this.

‘Sorry, I had to get my glasses,’ he’s mumbling. ‘You know what my eyesight’s like, Lauren . . .’ There’s an infuriating pause while he must be putting his glasses on. ‘So, it says: *Dear Lauren, you are cordially invited for a weekend to celebrate the fortieth birthday of Daisy Harrington. The birthday girl will sadly not be attending, but her friends will all be there.*’

He stops talking. I can barely breathe. What is this?

‘Richard, does it say anything else?’

‘Er, yes, it’s at your old university, Exeter. St Luke’s Campus?’

‘Yes, yes, that’s right . . . Okay . . .’ I can’t deal with this right now.

‘There’s more . . . Oh, it doesn’t make sense, that’s rather odd.’

Shit.

‘What does it say?’ I try to ask lightly, but it comes out as a squeak.

‘Well.’ He pauses, and I think I might die. ‘It says, *We know why you wanted Daisy dead – and if you aren’t at her party, everyone else will know too.*’

That’s when I knock my glass from the table, sending shattered crystal all over the restaurant floor.