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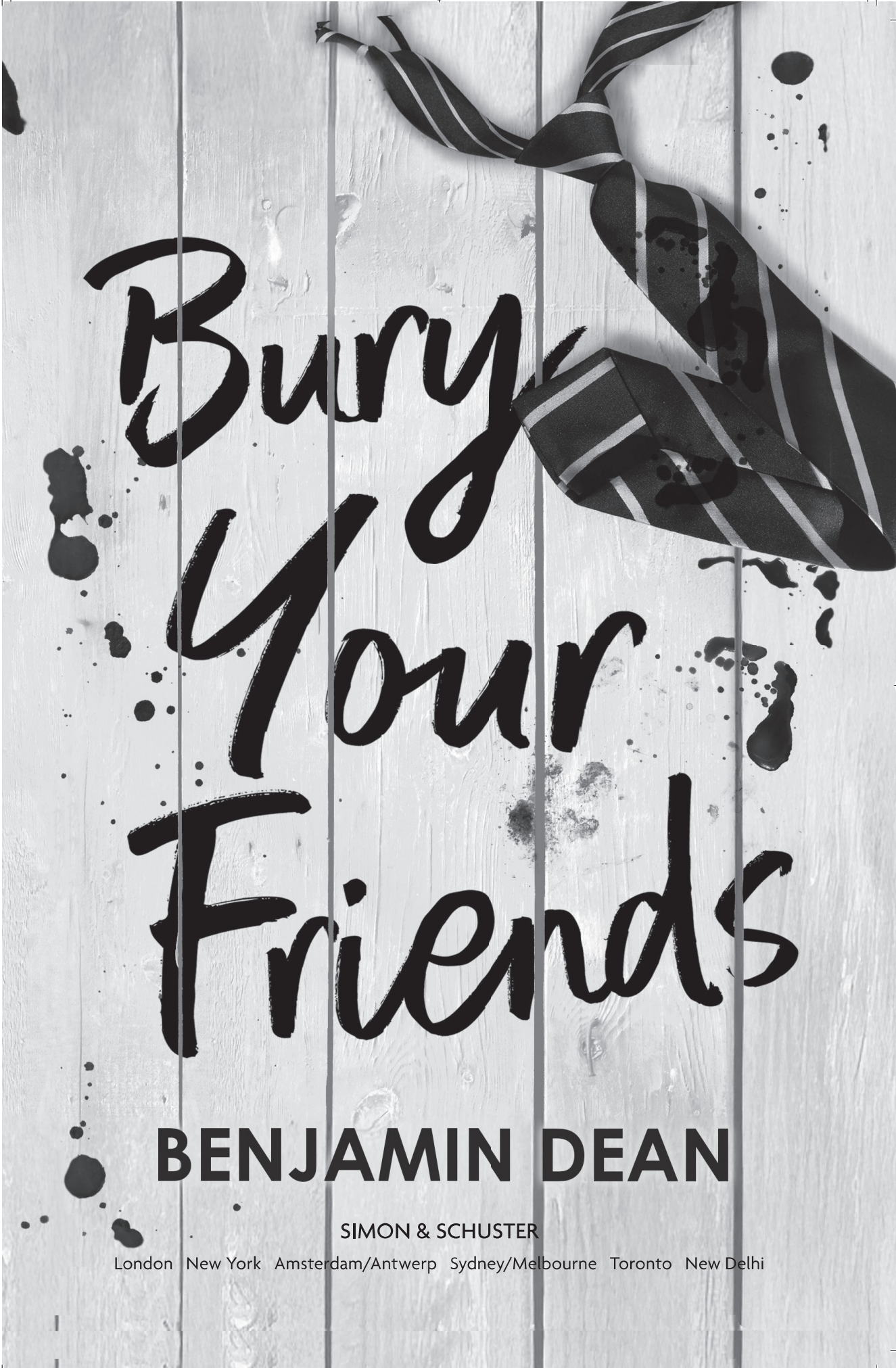


**ALSO BY
BENJAMIN DEAN**

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How to Die Famous

This Story is a Lie (World Book Day 2025)



Bury Your Friends

BENJAMIN DEAN

SIMON & SCHUSTER

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This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the
product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual
people living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

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For Freddie. This one's for you, brother.
The tennis gods would be proud of us.



‘Jesus was also a nepo baby.’





A SINNER'S CONFESSION

Murder was the easy part. But getting away with it? Now *that* was hard.

The first was an accident, I swear to God it was. But I guess it snapped something inside me, because the second . . . well, that was on purpose. And I didn't have to do it. Not really. But that's the scary thing.

I did it because I wanted to.





Prologue

CONFLICTING STATEMENTS



Operator: Hello, 999, what's your emergency?



Caller: I'd like to report a missing person.

The below are excerpts from transcripts of interviews with witnesses and friends concerning the disappearance of Noah Williams and Patrick Daywater on Friday 11 July 2025.

'It was just a party. There was nothing special about it, really. Aside from . . . well, you know, the obvious. How it ended.'

'It was to celebrate the end of our exams, the end of our school life, all that. Miles Bracken always knew how to throw a party, so of course he wanted to make a big deal out of it. I'm not exactly sure what he was celebrating, mind. He wrote his

name on his Maths paper, then had a nap until the test was over. When you're a Bracken, you don't have to worry about silly things like exams and qualifications – life is already set out for you.'

'The Brackens have this big house just outside a quaint little village by the river. I think Miles's dad bought it for his mum to like, cleanse her chakras or something. But apparently she can't stand the sight of too much green? Miles says it creeps her out, all that wide open space, so the place just sits empty for most of the year. But it's perfect for a party. No neighbours, really private, that kinda thing. Let's just say Miles makes a lot of use out of that.'

'Yeah, it's a great party house. Pain in the arse to get to, though. It's like, an hour out of London, middle of fucking nowhere. Terrible signal too. If the Wi-Fi's down, you're screwed.'

'Of course there was alcohol . . . it was a party! We weren't going to celebrate the end of exams with shots of water. That was it, though. There were no like, drugs or anything.'

'There were definitely drugs. Wait, am I allowed to say that? Do I need a lawyer or something?'

'Everyone knew everyone at the party, yeah. It's like that at Woodthorn Academy. We've all grown up together, our families know each other. It can feel like a bit of a bubble,

I guess. Sometimes it's easy to forget that there's a whole world outside of Woodthorn.'

'There were one or two people I didn't know, hangers-on and plus-ones, you know how it is. I think Miles even had like, *staff* serving the drinks at the beginning of the night. But yeah, there's not exactly an official guest list. If you know Miles, or even just someone who knows him, then you're in.'

'It was a good night. It just felt like there was something in the air, you know? Everyone was buzzing about the end of exams, no more school, one last summer together. Anything and everything felt possible. I just don't think anybody thought *that* would happen.'

'I must've found out the next day. Lunchtime, maybe, I don't really remember. We'd had a big night, so I was a bit . . . well, you know, hungover or whatever. But yeah, Fliss text me and asked if I'd seen Noah. Apparently, he didn't make it home.'

'Noah? I don't really know much about him to be honest. He seems nice, and he has that big group of friends, but I always wondered if they just let him in as like, charity or something. Noah isn't really one of *us*, if you know what I mean. He's not proper Woodthorn, he's just pretending to be.'

'Most people who go to Woodthorn Academy are guilty of living in a false reality. They don't know how the real world

works, they're all just nepo babies spending Mummy and Daddy's money. Porsches for seventeenth birthdays, Cartier necklaces, Rolexes for graduations. But that wasn't Noah. He was a scholarship kid who got into Woodthorn on his own talent. That kid can *act*.'

'Griffin called me, must've been the afternoon after the party, asked if I'd heard from Noah. I said I hadn't. I'd seen him at the party, obviously, but I lost track of time. At some point he was there, and then he was just gone. Nobody knew where he was. His mum was pretty worried, said his phone was off. I sent him a bunch of messages, but none of them delivered.'

'We were all meant to stay over at Miles's house. When I woke up and couldn't find Noah, I just assumed he'd got a lift home with someone else. It wasn't until his mum called that I realized he was actually missing.'

'I didn't take it seriously, to be honest. I feel bad now, knowing what happened, but you don't think your friends are just going to vanish into thin air, do you? That kinda thing happens in movies, it's not supposed to happen in real life.'

'I wasn't too worried at first. But when there was still no sign of Noah later that day, I knew something was *really* wrong. Police started searching the river, the woods. I think they assumed he'd maybe wandered off while he was drunk and had an accident.'

‘Yeah, I thought it was some kind of accident, that someone would find Noah passed out somewhere and it’d be fine, just all a big misunderstanding. Then Saturday afternoon, I found out Patrick was missing too, and I knew something bad had happened.’

‘Bit creepy, isn’t it? You go to a party and not one but two of your friends go missing out of the blue? Yeah, I thought there was something really dark going on. Proper true-crime documentary vibes. I listen to all that shit, podcasts and stuff. It helps me fall asleep. Is that weird?’

‘I mean, you know Patrick’s parents, of course. *Major* Hollywood stars. Clara and Christopher Daywater aren’t small fish, even in a pond as big as Woodthorn. Didn’t they sell Patrick’s baby pictures to a magazine for a million quid when he was born? They’re the real deal. Of course it was going to make the evening news when he went missing. It was all over social media and everything.’

‘It was a bit rude that the news didn’t mention Noah was also missing until Sunday morning, but I get it. Patrick is already famous because of his parents. I guess some people might recognize Noah from TV now, but *Ethereal* didn’t air its first episode until Saturday night, the day *after* Noah vanished. Of course, once the media got wind of the fact that an actor from a TV show had gone missing, they were all over it.’

‘Look, I’m not saying I’m into conspiracy theories or anything, but *coincidence much*? Noah goes missing the night before his big television debut? Talk about timing. If you ask me, it was a PR stunt to boost ratings and, well, it worked. With all the headlines about Noah dominating the news, *Ethereal* became the show everybody was talking about. Would it have been as big if Noah hadn’t gone missing? I’ll let you answer that question.’

‘I mean, sure, the guy’s got some talent, but he goes missing and suddenly everybody’s acting like he’s the next Leonardo DiCaprio or something.’

‘I suppose it looks good that Noah is . . . well, you know, ticking the diversity boxes or whatever. Not saying that’s a bad thing. I’m all for it, personally. But, you know, *some* people would say that being a minority right now is basically a leg up. It’s good for business. Nobody wants to be accused of some kind of *ism*. Add that to the mix on top of going missing, and yeah, you’ve got a recipe for success.’

‘Patrick Daywater? Best way to describe him is the golden boy.’

‘He was a dickhead.’

‘Everybody loved Patrick.’

‘Everybody hated Patrick.’

‘It depends on who you ask. Patrick was . . . complicated.’

‘A lot of people thought he was great – teachers and stuff. Coming from the family he did, they all thought he was the perfect poster boy for Woodthorn. And yeah, I guess he was popular enough. He could be *mean* though. I know that sounds childish, but it’s the only way I can describe it. Like, he low-key thrived on being cruel.’

‘That boy lived for the drama. He just enjoyed being up in everybody’s business, knowing all the gossip, and he wasn’t exactly Fort Knox when it came to other people’s secrets. Everybody mostly kept on his good side to avoid him turning on them. I think it made him feel powerful, knowing he could ruin someone with a click of his fingers, and he had a habit of punching down, if you know what I mean. He’d never turn on someone like Miles Bracken, for example. Miles has a *name* and at Woodthorn, that puts you at the top of the hierarchy. Patrick made those people his friends, but anybody else was fair game. It was just his way of letting you know he was bigger and better than you could ever hope to be. And he got away with it, of course. Nobody believes you when you say the golden boy is a massive twat.’

‘I know there’s no good time for two people to go missing, but I wish it’d happened *before* school let out for summer. I went straight to Bali after the party and to be honest, it really ruined the vibe, having that cloud hanging over me. I just wanted to

know what was going on! I had to do sunrise Pilates every morning just to take my mind off it.'

'I heard so many conspiracy theories. My favourite was the one that said our headteacher, Mr Laplin, was behind it. Obviously it wasn't true, but I always thought there was something off about him.'

'The vigil was my idea. We didn't know what else we could do. The party was on a Friday and by Sunday morning we still hadn't heard anything. That afternoon, we all gathered in the small church in the village, like a mile from the Brackens' house. It just felt right to be as close to where they disappeared as possible.'

'We all felt helpless. Like, what are you supposed to do when your friends are missing? It was a nice vigil, made us all feel connected, in a weird way. I suppose it just felt good to be doing *something*. The vicar was a bit of a bore to be fair, though. If I ever go missing, get someone who knows how to liven things up a bit. We were sad enough already, we didn't need him making it worse.'

'The vigil was strange. It just felt surreal. And . . . well, you already know what happened next. Honestly, I wouldn't have guessed the outcome in a million years.'

‘We were all shocked. When the door to the church opened, nobody could speak.’

‘Going missing and then showing up at your own vigil, covered in mud and blood? Yeah, that’s definitely one way to make an entrance.’

‘If people are honest, they’d say the wrong boy came back. I’m sorry, but it’s true.’

‘Two friends go missing. Then one of them comes back with a gash on his head, collapses in the church, then later on says he can’t remember a thing about what happened? You have to admit, it looks a bit dodgy.’

‘We were just so happy that he was back safe and sound.’

‘But yeah, we definitely had some questions.’

‘Like . . . if you’re back, then where the fuck is Patrick?’