

KATE WESTON

MURDER ON  
A  
SUMMER  
BREAK



## Praise for MURDER ON A SCHOOL NIGHT

'This inclusive feminist tale is thrilling, twisty and hilarious...  
I'll never look at menstrual products the same way again! Fiercely  
funny, feminist and FUN! I bloody loved it' – M.A. Kuzniar

'The snappy dialogue shines and the detective duo's friendship is well  
observed and rings true' – Fiona Noble, *The Observer*

'Kate Weston's hilarious YA murder mystery is a must'  
– *Irish Independent*

'Mean Girls meets Midsomer Murders with a dash of Louise Rennison  
in this genre-blending story . . . Hysterically funny dialogue and a  
lighthearted tone. However, what really elevates the goofy capers  
and over-the-top scheming is how well Kerry and Annie know both  
themselves and each other. Secrets add depth and complexity to this  
insightful parody of teenage life. A nuanced, hilarious page-turning  
romantic mystery' – *Kirkus Reviews*

'Channeling the 1980s cult classic *Heathers* right down to the croquet  
set, Weston flaunts cozy English charm and puerile slapstick comedy  
in this propulsive mystery . . . The girls' chemistry as best friends and  
partners-in-crime-solving is energizing. Refreshing attention to sex  
positivity and period politics combined with Weston's timing –  
both comedic and plot driven—ensure a laugh-out-loud romp'  
– *Publishers Weekly*

'Laugh out loud funny, delightfully gruesome and packed with  
twists, turns and feminism. I loved every minute of it!'  
– Amy McCaw, author of *Mina and the Undead*



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For Nick Brookes x

# CHAPTER ONE

My pulse races at the sight of Annie's head poking out from behind a tree at the other end of Barbourough High Street. My best friend looks both ways from behind its trunk while I wipe away the beads of sweat forming on my forehead, the back of my neck prickling with heat and unease. The street is silent; lined with bunting that hangs perfectly still, without even the gentlest of breezes to rustle it. This is it. The calm before the storm, a sinister reminder of what's to come.

Finally, Annie steps out from behind the tree. My shoulders tense, jaw tightening as she strides towards me. I feel the air become closer, hotter. Soon this'll be over, we'll have done what we came here to do, but right now I'm sweating, my whole body fraught with nervous energy. I grip Herbie's lead tightly, holding him close to me despite its leather slipping in my clammy palm. Me and Annie lock eyes and hope washes over me. For the first time I feel like we can do this. My fingers and toes tingle, I'm restless with anticipation. The ending is within our grasp and my fight or flight instinct's telling me that we've won. Safety is coming.

‘CUT, CUT, CUT!!!’ Annie yells, waving her arms.

Taylor Swift’s ‘Cruel Summer’ comes to a stop and I skid to a halt, immediately tripping over. In front of me, Annie goes to the phone she’s set up on a tripod in the middle of the pavement. She struts with purpose in her cut-off denim shorts and pink T-shirt that says ‘Mama’s Nepo Baby’, her pink Perspex visor bobbing on her head with authority.

‘BACK UP! START AGAIN!’ yells Annie, waving her arms, halting our reunion for what is now the tenth time for the sake of social media.

I throw my head back to the sky in exasperation. She may have been away for four weeks, but at thirty-five degrees it’s far too hot for this shit. Also, I wasn’t the one that left for an internship with the Ministry of Justice, why am I being punished? She knows I’m shy. Appearing on a Reel is my worst nightmare.

‘Your eyes aren’t glistening with emotion and you’re moving way too fast for this to pack the punch of a proper slow-motion, cinematic reunion,’ she shouts.

She spins on her heel and heads back behind the tree, ready for take eleven. Sure I missed her, but after this many tries at reuniting, any emotion my eyes could have potentially ‘glistened’ with has well and truly dried up. I am an emotional husk. The most she can hope for in this dry heat, at the end of a very long morning of interning at the glamorous *Barbourough News* office, is that a rogue bit of sweat might drip from my forehead in the vague direction of my eyes.

‘Back up, Kerry! BACK UP!’ she shouts from two metres away.

Annie refuses to come any closer to ‘preserve the authenticity’

of our first embrace for her ReelLife feed. Heaven forbid we could just hug each other without a video of it being available for strangers to watch and judge on the internet.

'This is the LAST time, Annie,' I shout, realising that a gaggle of old people have now gathered by the tripod, confused and unsure how to negotiate its presence.

Old Mr Harris starts prodding at one of its plastic legs angrily with his walking stick, as if it might move out of the way of its own accord.

'Go round!' Annie shouts to him. Her instructions are combined with a frantic hand gesture, but Mr Harris just continues staring at her blankly, wagging his walking stick in the direction of the obstruction.

'GO ROUND!!!' she instructs again, even louder and with even more expressive arm movements.

Much to her continued frustration and my amusement, though, Mr Harris either can't hear her or is wilfully ignoring her. To be fair, I think he's actually quite enjoying having something new to be annoyed at. I'm about to plead with Annie to abandon this whole thing altogether and just let us spend the rest of my lunch break at the lido, catching up with our feet in the water like we'd planned, when she freezes, her lips stretching into a slow smile. I'm afraid she might have had an idea.

'What if we dance?!' she shouts, deadly serious. 'WE COULD WALTZ TO EACH OTHER!'

'You could bite me?' I reply.

Herbie, the little white Highland terrier we share, confirms this sentiment by barking loudly. He can't figure out why Annie keeps

teasing him by advancing towards him with a treat one minute and then backing away again the next. Really, it's incredibly harsh for him – I'm surprised he hasn't called the RSPCA with his sad little paws already.

'WHY are you suddenly so into ReelLife, anyway?' I ask, slightly dreading the answer. 'Is this a London thing?'

'Duh, I want to be popular,' Annie says. 'Plus, how embarrassing would it be if we're the only people at the Festival of Fame without any followers?'

I look at the crowd that's amassed to watch us film this reunion, my face burning. 'Yeah, really embarrassing,' I mutter. 'I mean, I don't even have a profile . . .'

'Correction!' Annie says. 'You *didn't*. Fear not, my friend! I have taken the liberty of creating one for you!'

Oh god. What's she done? I feel a bit sick and pull my phone out straight away to take a look. Finding the profile, I can see that A) she's used a photo with her in it as my profile pic, she looks great and I look bad. And B) at least she's kept the bio short, but all it says is '*The second half of the Tampon Two.*' It could be worse, I guess. And C) I have three followers: Annie, Colin and Audrey.

I should have known all this has to do with the Festival of Fame. The village has been covered in bunting and posters for it all summer. Everywhere I look I'm reminded of the impending event where fans get to meet their favourite influencers.

I would be excited, because Winona Philips, feminist influencer and our hero, is hosting, so obviously Annie and I are going. And, of course, Annie's decided we're finally going to meet her. But it means camping for three days with hundreds of other people, all



of them making constant videos. And the possibility that I – very likely, knowing me – will do something absolutely mortifying in front of said hero. I’m terrified, actually.

‘Follow my lead and soon enough we’ll have more followers than Les Populaires.’ Annie’s eyes glisten and she stares dreamily into the distance, thinking of the most popular group in school that she spent six years trying to be part of before finally achieving her goal. ‘Maybe even more than Winona Philips . . .’

‘So, you want to be an influencer now?’ I shout, trying to keep the judgement out of my voice. ‘Was it not enough for you to get the glory from solving the menstrual murders?’

‘It was a good start. But yeah, I want to be an influencer. Just not a shallow one, like those “Get Ready with Me” beauty blogger types.’ She turns her nose up at the thought as she speaks. ‘I want to be like Winona Philips. Smart! Political! Worshipped by all!’ Annie commands.

I’m trying to keep up with all this, but there’s no stopping Annie. A mean part of me remembers that it took her ten years and a murder investigation to achieve her last goal of becoming popular at our school, though. And now that Colin, Audrey and, of course, Heather finally tolerate us and allow us to be part of Les Populaires, is she saying that’s not enough for her?

‘I’ve *been* places now, Kerry; I’VE BEEN TO LONDON! Seen things! I want more! I want . . . world domination!’ Her eyes glisten, but as she says the words ‘world domination’ a pigeon flies towards her head and she ducks out of the way, petrified. She’ll not be deterred, though. ‘Besides, we’re the Tampon Two!’

I roll my eyes at the name *she* gave us after we solved the

menstrual murders last year. A name that no one else has ever actually used, and yet she continues to try and make it happen.

‘Anyway, ready for the next take?’ Annie says, seemingly recovered from her villainous monologue about taking over the world.

Reluctantly, I retake my starting position as she aims the tiny remote at her phone from behind the tree with the precision of an assassin. ‘Cruel Summer’ resumes and Annie comes dancing out from behind the tree, shaking and shimmying in my direction. The crowd has now doubled in size and their gaze moves over to me, waiting to see what I’ll pull out of the dancing bag.

I silently plead for a sinkhole to open up in the hot tarmac beneath my feet. There are so many people stuck watching our mortifying display who probably just want to get past. The air’s beginning to feel thick with embarrassment (me), impatience (them) and sweat (all of us). I start my advance towards Annie, knowing that the only way to get this over with is to power straight through it. Besides, it’s been a whole month without mortification for me. (Well, apart from when my boss at *Barbourough News* made me walk the streets dressed as a giant newspaper to boost readership.) It’s been a good run, better get back to it. The only small mercy is that my boyfriend Scott went away on tour with his band this morning, so he won’t be around to witness any of this.

Annie ramps it up, skipping enthusiastically and throwing in a couple of leaps like a ballerina racing to her long-lost forest-nymph lover. I wish I could move with such ease and confidence – instead, I’m just sort of bobbing a bit with every step, occasionally throwing a hand out to the side in a meek way when I feel jazzy.

Spoiler: I'm not really a feeling jazzy sort of person. I'm more of a feeling tired, overwhelmed and shy person. And one of the things the last year of attention has taught me, is that I'm actually OK with being all those things, thanks.

It feels like months have passed since I began bobbing awkwardly down the street, but finally Annie and I are close enough to each other that I can see an end in sight to this hell.

As our fingers touch, a tingle goes up my spine and my lungs open up, as if I can breathe more easily now she's back.

'Good vulva to you, Kerry!' Annie beams, shouting Winona Philips's famous line.

'Good vulva, Annie,' I whisper back.

We fling our arms around each other and I inhale the scent of the same strawberry shampoo she's used her whole life. The rest of the world is a blur as we stand there in our embrace, just as the pigeon flies back towards us, seemingly intent on murder.