



# Killing Daniel

*Sarah Dobbs*

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## **Killing Daniel** Sarah Dobbs

A murder mystery and an unconventional love story, Killing Daniel will grip fans of literary fiction and fast-paced thrillers.

In Manchester Fleur is drifting through life haunted by her murdered boyfriend Daniel. In Japan Chinatsu is trying to escape a passionless marriage to Yugi Hamogoshi, a man with a secret who won't let her go. Fleur and Chinatsu used to be schoolfriends. Fleur and Chinatsu had a bond. Fleur and Chinatsu had dreams. This is the story of what happens before they can be together again. A cross-cultural thriller like no other, Sarah Dobbs' KILLING DANIEL exposes the secret lives of contrasting people with unflinching insight and lyrical prose.

'A very dark and frightening novel, told in short chapters and brief sentences, that pass like the shivers of bad dreams' - MAX DUNBAR 3:AM MAGAZINE

One of the books of the year at Lancashire Writing Hub

## **Killing Daniel Details**

Date : Published November 5th 2012 by UnthankBooks.com (first published September 25th 2012)

ISBN : 9780956422385

Author : Sarah Dobbs

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## **From Reader Review Killing Daniel for online ebook**

### **Clare says**

A marvellous book. Worth reading for the writing alone and the ideas it conjures (as with all Sarah's work), but there is also a gripping story to savour. Heartbreaking, courageous and haunting, it stands on my 'favourites' shelf.

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### **Melissa Macfarlane says**

Killing Daniel is the debut novel of the lovely Sarah Dobbs and is available from Amazon. The book is a haunting tale of two old school friends Fleur and Chinatsu, who despite being at opposite sides of the world find their lives entwined in ways that even they never imagined possible. Both women have found themselves suffering at the hands of a violent partner and both women find the courage to break free. However, this isn't without heartache.

The story dances between Salford and Japan and follows the desperate journey of the two women as they try to make sense of the difficulties that life has bestowed upon them. It is an articulate and well written book with an intriguing plot that leaves the reader thirsty for more. It's a book that I struggled to put down. Both women often reminisce fondly of their old school friend but will they ever meet again?

The plot is easy to follow despite the fact it that tells two stories at the same time. The female characters are likeable it's easy to empathise with the battles that they are facing. I found it to be a very dark tale and it isn't a book that you take to the beach for an easy read. It's a story that you think about for a long time afterwards. Overall, a fantastic debut novel from Sarah Dobbs and I am looking forward to the next book already!

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### **A.J. Ashworth says**

There are two words that spring to mind with this novel - brave and beautiful. Brave because of how Dobbs handles and describes both sex and sexuality, in particular female sexuality, within the book; beautiful because of the language, which is poetic, inventive and fresh: sweat on a character's head, for example, is not just beaded; it is a page of Braille. Dobbs has a forensic eye and is able to make us stop in our tracks to visualise what she is describing. And this has the effect of slowing down time, creating a space for the reader within the parallel narratives of Dobbs' central characters Fleur and Chinatsu. In a way, the title sets us up for a story - the killing of Fleur's great love Daniel - which turns out not to be the main driving force in the book. Rather, this plotline flies like one of Dobbs' kites in the background of Fleur's story, and the novel instead becomes more an exploration of the passions behind female friendship and how those intense links can continue to resonate out into the future of those women touched - and saved - by such a connection. An interesting and thought-provoking read.

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### **David Rose says**

I found this an impressive and courageous first novel; courageous both in theme and treatment.

Its theme is evil, metaphysical and real, and the way it ramifies through time and lives, distorting the gravitational field of everyone affected.

It opens with what appears to be the primal scene of evil: the deliberate drowning in an urban pond of Daniel, a young man whose life has touched Fleur, one of the two women whose lives interconnect. Touched so deeply that the scene is in fact her re-imagining of that scene, one of many on her part through the book, as she attempts to grasp the event, come to terms with it.

Actually, though, this is not the originating evil, although we discover at the end that it is crucially implicated. The initiating evil is the abuse Fleur suffers as a child at the hands of Derek, her mother's boyfriend. This abuse, coupled with her mother's suicide - in which Derek is also implicated - leads to a possible lifetime of self-harm and the acceptance of abusive relationships, to the point where she can only back away from tenderness when eventually offered.

But it also leads to a brief friendship with Chinatsu, a Japanese schoolgirl whose father is working in Britain, a friendship which transmutes into a strong psychical affinity, an almost telepathic attachment over distance and through time.

Chinatsu returns to Tokyo, and marries Yugi, an employee of her father's. Yugi is also abusive, cold, manipulative toward Chinatsu. He is also a serial killer, of a string of prostitutes in Manchester and possibly Japan.

This at first reads like overkill; but the same charge could be made of King Lear, and more recently, Cormac MacCarthy's 'Blood Meridian', and Dobbs' use of this doubling has the same intention: a portrayal of the way evil warps the universe by its magnetic fields, connecting on a psychic level.

This links with the paralleling of the lives of Fleur in England, Chinatsu in Japan: Fleur's relationship with the violent Marcus, whose anger leads to Fleur's loss of her baby, is doubled by Chinatsu's marriage, her turning to exploitative sex in an attempt to conceive, and the eventual miscarriage of her baby too.

There are further links in shared dreams and symbols, especially the moonflower, which acquires increasing resonance through the book.

Above all, the double strands twist together in a stunning denouement which takes all four protagonists - Fleur, Chinatsu, Derek and Yugi - by an impressively worked plot, back to that original location of Daniel's drowning, in a scene of stark (and stark naked, in Chinatsu's case) and mesmerically described brutality.

Is there no mitigation of the evil, the texture of abuse?

Four characters redress the balance. There is Fleur's maternal grandmother, Nan, with her swearing, drink and roll-ups, a down-to-earth version of no-nonsense, flawed human goodness, similar perhaps to Ida in 'Brighton Rock'.

There is Tao, a Chinaman who appears first as a sexual client of Chinatsu's, but who falls in love, coaxes her, now pregnant, to leave Yugi and intends to marry her.

There is Nick, a policeman whose non-exploitative affection Fleur has to steel herself to accept.

Lastly, beyond and above all these, is Daniel, whose physical damage - profound deafness from infection - makes him in his life an outsider, an onlooker, literally, to the evil, but whose presence after his death, as an almost angelic onlooker, in dreams and hallucinations, hold out the possibility of redemption, held out most enticingly, affirmatively, in the closing hallucination, in a flash of blue that offers glimpse of a lasting happiness, however fragile, for both Fleur and Chinatsu.

The courage extends to the writing as well as theme: Dobbs doesn't shrink from a depiction of the gritty urban textures of disillusion, dead-end jobs and raw, affectionless sex.

If this is Dobbs' first novel, I'm expecting to be very impressed by her second.

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## **William says**

The form (but not the quality) of 'Killing Daniel' is what I would describe as a "train crash". The story starts with two disparate characters, living in the same time, but separated by gulfs of distance and society. These characters are an English woman called Fleur and a Japanese woman called Chinatsu. Having met in adolescence, they think about one another and look forward to a nebulous idea of reunion. The plot advances in opposing directions, one starting in Salford and the other in Japan.

The characterisation of both Fleur and Chinatsu is detailed and fascinating. This is a profoundly female book. As some-one who is learning how to write novels, I devoured the passages which deal with Fleur and Chinatsu because I am trying to be more accurate and consistent in the depiction of female characters. Because they come from such different societies and social classes, I learnt a great deal just from reading this one novel.

Some of this depiction is portrayed in the distance and antagonism between the two women and their various male counterparts and adversaries. Despite the darkness and occasional violence of the intertwining stories, I think men come off rather lightly in this novel. I repeat that this is a female book, but I would not consider it to be a feminist one. It is a novel which simply happens to be told from the points of view of two women.

The narrative (third person, limited omniscience) contains quite a few rhetorical questions. I thought these had been banned by an international treaty in the 1970s. A few of them irritated me, but they all served the useful purpose of showing the self-doubt, guilt about the past and anxiety about the future felt by the main characters.

The men in the book, with the exception of Chinatsu's husband, are shallow in comparison to the women, but this is also handled in a controlled manner. One of the subtlest and most finely-worked aspects of the story is the relationship between Chinatsu and Tao, her Chinese paramour. This relationship, and its misunderstandings and miscommunications, infuriated me in a way that made for compelling reading.

The settings, as well as the characters, are completely convincing. I have never been to Japan. Most of what I know about Japan is derived from studying the economic and military history of the twentieth century, but all the Japanese details seemed consistent. I also appreciated that they were introduced in order to flesh out character and bring scenes to life, and definitely not to boast, "I've been to Japan".

If I had been born female and capable of having written this book, the ending would have been very different, but I will leave you to decide about that for yourself.

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## **Sonya Alford says**

I was sent this lovely book to review by Unthank Books. 'Killing Daniel' is a psychological thriller based mainly in Manchester and Tokyo. It explores two very different cultures and women.

Manchester – As a child, Daniel went to the same school as Fleur where he developed a crush on her. Then he was diagnosed as deaf. When Chinatsu, a Japanese girl starts at the school she and Fleur strike up a friendship and they develop a very strong bond. Years later, Fleur finds herself stuck in an abusive

relationship, which ends up with her being put in hospital. She goes through everyday life haunted with memories of Daniel who has been murdered.

Tokyo – Chinatsu is married to Yugi Hamugoshi, a very oppressive man. He has a big secret and he doesn't want Chinatsu to know about it. He is not all he seems as she discovers.

Will their situations bring Fleur and Chinatsu together again? Will they get the chance to rekindle their friendship?

This is a superbly written book. It is fast paced and very gripping. Within the first few pages I was hooked and when I wasn't reading it I found myself thinking about the characters and the storyline. I couldn't wait to find out what happened next. The ending was great too. Well done, Sarah.

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### **Jean Mead says**

A superbly written novel which I really enjoyed.

The description of both East and West were vivid and fascinating.

The two very strong female characters are well-drawn and stay with you after the book is finished.

I expect this author to make a great success of her chosen path.

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### **Michelle (Clover Hill Book Reviews) says**

<http://cloverhillbookreviews.blogspot...>

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### **Martin says**

I've seen this book described as a crime novel, and a thriller - I'm not sure I'd call it either. Instead, it seems to me simply about how messed up people become when the person they are, by nature, and the person they are forced to become, by circumstance, are wildly divergent... but I guess that is not an easy genre pigeonhole.

This is also a book about dichotomies: east (Tokyo) and west (grim Northern towns); men and women; the past and present; lust and love; love and sex... and sex, and sex.

Most of all, it's a book you need to read. Sarah Dobbs has a distinctive narrative voice, a powerful way with words and a neat line in similes. A debut novel from a fledgling publisher, and one of the best things I've read in the last twelve months.

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### **Etienne Delport says**

Received as a Goodreads giveaway.

Slightly disturbing but well written and enjoyable.

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## **Jo says**

Thoroughly enjoyed this book. Dark, sinister and disturbing.

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## **David Cook says**

First off - This is a superbly written book. And not the sort of one I normally would read but I'm trying to read other genres unlike my preferred to increase my skills as a writer - especially strong female characters.

It is fast paced and gripping and within the first few pages I was hooked.

I almost consider this to be a book called 'Opposing Lives' or 'Opposing Forces' due to the 'looming' reunion aspect and living in two very different countries and what keeps them apart/shifting of timelines etc. This was well handled and well written. Beautiful prose.

I couldn't wait to find out what happened as the story progressed. Sarah has the natural ability of a writer that hooks and delivers.

Highly recommend this one!

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## **Martin Mcareavey says**

Killing Daniel resonates with reality, pulling at dark heart-strings and reminding the reader that we carry with us echoes of feelings and fantasies from our early development, which can sometimes surface with dreadful and painful consequence in later life.

The style is lyrical, deeply engaging and sometimes shocking - that is, causing sudden reflection and the need to go back immediately to re-read the words to check, "did it really say that, did it mean that....?"

I found the coarseness and almost sociopathic attributes of some characters quite realistic - perhaps I know or have known people like that in my life too (though people couldn't really be like that could they?) - whatever! - it was real and I was consumed by the events that unfolded over time and distance.

I loved the interplay of dark and light, from the language to the settings, the narrative, the themes of love loss and rescue. I wanted it to go on, but was glad in some ways when it came to a (slightly saccharine!) end..

Can't wait for the next book!

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## **Sujoy De says**

Killing Daniel is a well written evenly paced saga that is at times both disturbing and touching and delightful all the while. Sarah Dobbs shines when she explores the moral dilemmas of her two protagonists. It makes the reader pity them while being completely perplexed by the complexity of the life-situations that they find themselves in.

Her two protagonists are extremely relatable despite the many flaws and errors of judgements that is tearing their lives apart. Perhaps it is these very flaws that endear them to the reader and makes him root for their escape from their (often self-inflicted) agonies and start afresh. Fleur's emotional stone-walling of her loving grandmother (Nan) is perfectly understandable given the sordid nature of her life experiences. One feels empathy towards her predicament primarily because of the way Sarah handles her internal conflict. While the death of a potential love interest (Daniel) drives her anger towards the situation she finds herself in, it appears to be somewhat incidental in the overall scheme of things. It is basically a woman's decision to seek out her well-wishers and improve her own life that propels her to finally take a stand and hold the people responsible for her morbid present accountable.

Same stands true for Chinatsu (the other protagonist) as well. Her understanding of marriage as a moral obligation contingent on her unquestioning servitude towards her husband stands in stark contrast to the strength she displays when she takes the decision to seek out a way to finally beget progeny and further escape the tyranny of her affectionless marriage to a man of questionable character, given the fact that her feelings were never reciprocated (quite evidently). The past events that shaped these characters and the current happenings that makes them reconsider their life decisions are woven together nicely throughout the course of the book.

To the male readers the explicit description of the physical discomfort endured by women forcefully handled may at times be extremely disturbing and at times a tad too much to handle, but this again works in favour of the overall narrative as it does a good job thoroughly convincing the readers about the gravity of the mistreatment being handed out to the two women.

One minor grouse that I had with the book is the fact the initial graphic and detailed description of the sexual lives of the two characters does turn a bit distracting especially at those times where it made me wonder if this was just another shallow attempt to cater to a section of the audience desperate for these. Although the narrative picks up once certain events gets the plot moving, one feels the book (an excellent work otherwise) never needed to delve into so much detail to get across its point of sexual abuse or deprivation. Another issue that I had (and a much minor one at that) is the abrupt and a tad serendipitous turn of events towards the climax.

But all of this does not take away the fact that Sarah Dobbs has debuted confidently and shows promise in the way she weaves the story that she so earnestly wants to tell.

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## **Josie says**

I will start by saying how surprised I was with where this book came from. It's an ex-library book from my home town in northern England. I received it from a US Bookcresser! How crazy is that.

Now the book, what a strong debut novel this is.

The story is splits you between Manchester UK with Fleur and Tokyo Japan with Chinatsu, 2 girls who meet as children and spend their adult lives wondering after the other after losing touch.

Both women are in abusive relationships and at times the story delves rather unforgivingly into this, taking it far from "cosy mystery" realms - be warned.

I loved how much power the author wrote this book with, and also the confidence to be so bold.



Two very strong female characters who stay with you after you have finished reading the book.

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