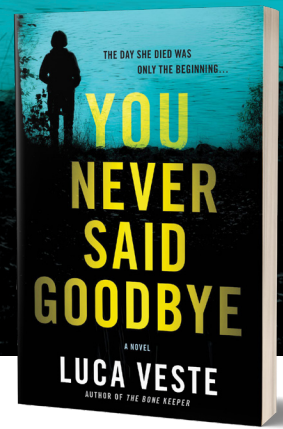


YOU NEVER SAID GOODBYE

LUCA VESTE

READING GROUP GUIDE

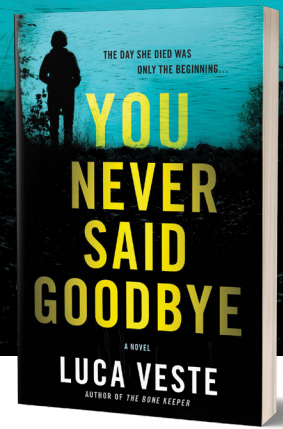


1. The events of the book snowball from Parker Rogers's DUI. How do you think Anthony was keeping track of Laurie and her loved ones so he'd be sure to hear news that could reopen the search?
2. What initially attracted Laurie to Anthony? How did she deal with the red flags in the early days of their relationship?
3. How does Sam react when he first finds out Laurie might be alive? Would you drop everything to find someone if you only had the limited information Sam started with?
4. Describe the relationship between Sam Cooper and his father, David. Besides the accident, what factors drove them apart and kept them separated? Can you imagine a way for them to reconcile if David had survived?
5. Sam has barely any memories of the United States from his childhood. Was it strange to see the U.S. described from his outsider's perspective? What stood out to you?
6. Jackson's connection to the other factions is obscured for a long time. Who did you think he was allied with? How did his childhood affect his loyalties? Why was his first attempt to talk to Sam also a kidnapping attempt?
7. Why did Anthony hang on to the idea of Laurie for his entire life? How did his motivation for finding her change over time?
8. Why did Tom save David and Sam from the river? Do you think he ever intended to reunite them with Laurie? What prevented him from doing so for more than twenty years?
9. What's next for Laurie, Sam, and Jackson? Do you think they'll be able to truly connect after so much time apart?



YOU NEVER SAID GOODBYE LUCA VESTE

A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR



What was the inspiration for *You Never Said Goodbye*? How do you prefer to start a new project?

The inspiration came from a very personal story. When I was eight years old, my mum (mom) left home. I was aware, on some level, that her and my dad were separating, but I didn't quite comprehend what that really meant. This was two days before Mother's Day, and she was supposed to come back on that day. Instead, I didn't see her for a long time. She eventually did come back into my life, but for a long time, I've wondered how I would have dealt with life if she never did. It has taken me until my eighth novel to tackle that question through fiction, but it is a story I've wanted to tell for a long time. A new project usually starts with the kernel of an idea—a what-if scenario—and *You Never Said Goodbye* was no different to this.

Between Anthony's men, Tom, Quinn, and Jackson, Sam has to contend with a lot of unknown entities. How did you keep track of whose side was whose? Did anyone's loyalties surprise you as you wrote?

Conflict is always at the heart of any novel, and Sam has to deal with a number of individuals with competing ideas—whether that's Anthony who wants to find his mother, or Tom who wants to keep a lie alive. From the outset, I knew Quinn would emerge as the character to betray Sam, and Jackson would be an unknown quantity until the end, so I wasn't surprised by anything in that regard. I generally have a character's journey mapped out.

After their first escape, Laurie and David expected Anthony to eventually stop searching for them. Why didn't he?

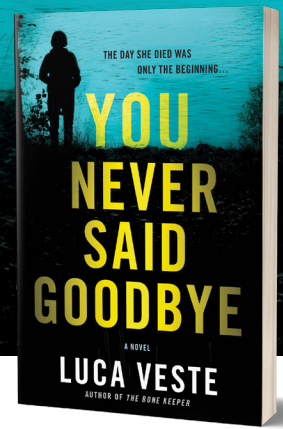
For a man like Anthony, it becomes less about the desire he has for Laurie and more about the power he holds over her as a person. He wants to be able to decide when he discards her from his life. That's his gift to give, in his opinion. Something being taken from him is not a concept he can deal with at all. He never loses. Not in business, not in his personal life. He believes that he will always win in the end.

Laurie was never able to move on from what she thought were the deaths of David and her sons. Why didn't Tom tell her the truth even after he realized he could never fill the void in her life?



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A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

Once you've committed to a lie, it's incredibly difficult to walk back on it. At first, he probably believed that she would eventually turn to him for more than just friendship. While that doesn't happen, too much time passes for him to come clean about the reality of their situation.

For one reason or another, Laurie hasn't had the agency to make her own decisions since she was eighteen. How did that change the way you wrote her later in the book? What do you think she'll want to do most with her newfound freedom?

Once she realizes Sam is alive, that's the catalyst for her to be more proactive. It was perhaps always there within her but beaten down by a succession of men. Giving her the agency to make her own choices, her own decisions, became wrapped up in the desire to be reunited with the son she thought was lost forever. As to what she does moving forward, that could take a long time for her to deal with psychologically. She has lost most of her life to other people's actions. I think she'll just want to try to claw back as much time as possible that has been lost to her.

At the beginning of the book, Carson is terrifyingly effective, but as he comes face-to-face with Sam multiple times, he seems to be losing his edge. How does that reflect the overall character of Anthony's hunt for Laurie after so many years?

Sometimes you can underestimate people and their tenacity to survive. He is used to carrying out work quickly and effectively. It's the classic unstoppable force meeting an unmovable object. He is so used to removing emotion from a situation that coming up against someone who is only working from that place has an effect on his ability to think his way through the problem of Sam.

Sam and Jackson are very differently prepared for the events of the book. Do you think either of them really had a proper childhood? Who do you expect to be more successful at moving on after the events of the book?

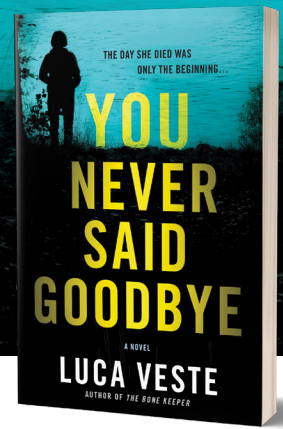
I think it's impossible to have a normal childhood with the kind of traumatic events that take place for both in their formative years. I believe they'll carry that for the rest of their lives, but like anything, it's always about how you deal with it, rather than getting over it. You don't get past those events, you just learn how to live with them. And that will be the task for all the characters who survive this story.



YOU NEVER SAID GOODBYE

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PLAYLIST



I listen to music constantly and especially when writing. I can't write in silence. Each book, I add to my playlist, which has around six hundred songs on it at this point. These are the songs that I was listening to most when writing *You Never Said Goodbye*...

Scan the QR Code to listen to the *You Never Said Goodbye* Playlist!



1. "Don't Dream It's Over"—Crowded House

A song that always invokes the feeling of loss to me but with this unerring underscored hope throughout. Something that is undercurrent for the entire novel.

2. "To The End"—Blur

Has an ethereal quality to it that I've loved for more than two decades. Blur may be better known for songs like Song 2, but this is my favorite of their backlist. This is a track I was listening to as Sam goes right down the rabbit hole toward the end of the book.

3. "Hysteria"—Muse

A bass line that is ridiculously good. A fantastic accompaniment to writing a car chase scene that occurs late in the book.

4. "Exit Music (For a Film)"—Radiohead

This song used over the end credits in Baz Luhrmann's version of *Romeo + Juliet* is delightfully melancholic. There are a fair few songs that make me emotional, and this one gets me every time. I was listening to this song when writing about Sam's utter desolation of seeing what has become of his childhood home.

5. "Take My Breath Away"—Berlin

You Never Said Goodbye is based on a real event that happened to me. When I was eight years old, my mum left home on the Friday before Mother's Day. She was supposed to come back, but it was months before I saw her again. I always wondered how I would have coped with life if she'd never returned. This song reminds me of that time, as it was one of a few songs that I had on a cassette tape. The track was the perfect way of putting me back into my eight-year-old mind, mirroring what Sam is feeling when thinking about the time he lost his mother.

6. "Anyone Who Had a Heart"—Dionne Warwick

I grew up (in Liverpool, England) knowing the Cilla Black cover version of this amazing song. I heard the original only recently, much to my delight, and it's been on heavy rotation on my personal playlist since then. I was thinking about this song when writing about Laurie as a teenager/young adult.



YOU NEVER SAID GOODBYE

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PLAYLIST



7. “Music”—John Miles

This song reminds me of my dad more than any other. Sam thinking about his father being alone when he died is the antithesis of how I feel about my own father. We’re great friends. I listen to this track, and it makes me smile.

8. “Alone”—Heart

I’m a massive fan of eighties power ballads. There’s nothing much better in life than singing very loud along to these types of songs. I had this song on when writing Sam’s arrival into the United States.

9. “Blinded by Your Grace (Part 1)”—Stormzy

Simply a beautiful piece of music that I was thinking about during the scene when Sam visits Green Grove Cemetery.

10. “The Living Years”—Mike & The Mechanics

A song that was rolling around my mind when writing the scene between Sam and his father, when the latter is lying on his deathbed. Includes the lines “I wasn’t there that morning, When my Father passed away, I didn’t get to tell him, All the things I had to say,” which perfectly encapsulates their relationship. A beautiful tune.

11. “An American Trilogy”—Elvis Presley

I think this is the only song specifically mentioned in the novel, and it’s in the opening chapter. I had a clear picture of Elvis singing this live in 1973 and wanted to have a character thinking about the later version of the king.

12. “We’ve Only Just Begun”—Carpenters

This is one of my favorite songs about love, but I do think there’s something melancholic about it. I listened to this song when writing the scene where Laurie and David first meet. The idea that there are all these amazing things they could share but how fleeting it all could be really resonates.

13. “Half the World Away”—Oasis

While not known widely outside the UK, here it is well-known for being the theme tune to one of the greatest comedies ever created—*The Royal Family*. As a nineties kid—and an Oasis fan, for my sins—this was one of the first songs I ever played live, back when I had dreams of being a singer/guitarist. I love the lyrics, which describe wanting to leave various situations but not quite being able to. This song works well for Sam’s desire to get away from the horror that is his quest to find out the truth in the later part of the book.

14. “Immigrant Song”—Led Zeppelin

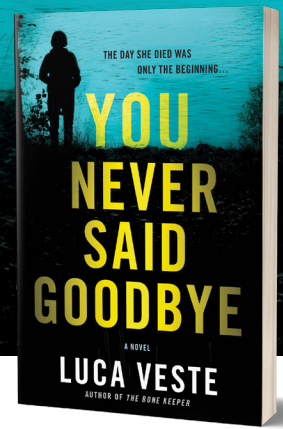
The opening twenty seconds of this song are epic to the extreme. A track that gets me in the mood for writing anything fast paced and hectic.



YOU NEVER SAID GOODBYE

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PLAYLIST



15. “The River”—Bruce Springsteen

You Never Said Goodbye features a fair few rivers, so this song is a little route one. I love songs that tell a story, and there are not many better than this track. Chasing dreams, wanting things to be real that may not be. Keeping hope alive, even as reality fights against you—couldn’t be a more apt song for the book if it tried.

16. “(Don’t Fear) The Reaper”—Blue Öyster Cult

My favorite novel is *The Stand* by Stephen King. This song is often cited by King as one of the inspirations for the book. The inevitability of death is all over the lyrics of this track, which served as my own inspiration when writing the scene when Sam begins to accept the reality of what happened to his mother.

17. “God Only Knows”—The Beach Boys

“I may not always love you”—the best opening line to a love song ever. Has that Americana vibe that was important to me when writing the book.

18. “The End”—The Beatles

“And in the end, The love you take, Is equal to the love you make”—a perfect line to end a perfect trilogy of songs to finish the *Abbey Road* album (along with “Golden Slumbers” and “Carry That Weight”). I listened to a lot of Beatles songs when editing the book, after watching the incredible *Get Back* documentary. Despite being from the same city as the Fab Four, I was sadly not a big fan of theirs. I am now. Paul McCartney is a genius.

Other songs in heavy rotation during the writing of *You Never Said Goodbye*...

19. *Without You*—Badfinger

20. *We Never Change*—Coldplay

21. *Road Rage*—Catatonia

22. *Me and You Versus the World*—Space

23. *Killing in the Name*—Rage Against the Machine

24. *This Is America*—Childish Gambino

25. *You’ve Got Time*—Regina Spektor

26. *Leader of the Pack*—The Shangri-Las

27. *Better Be Home Soon*—Crowded House

28. *In My Life*—The Beatles

29. *Us and Them*—Pink Floyd

30. *Parisienne Walkways*—Gary Moore

31. *Back on the Chain Gang*—Pretenders

32. *The Whole of the Moon*—The Waterboys

33. *Go Now*—The Moody Blues

34. *Jenny Was a Friend of Mine*—The Killers

35. *Lover, You Should’ve Come Over*—Jeff Buckley

36. *Real Gone Kid*—Deacon Blue

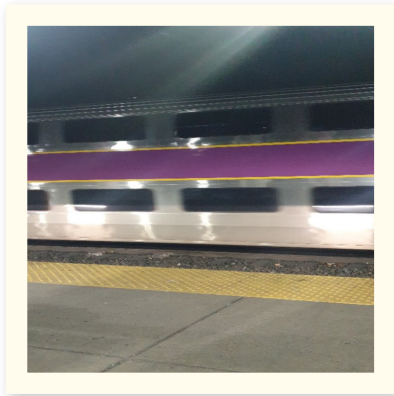
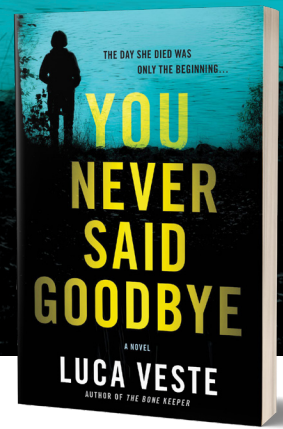
37. *Always Something There To Remind Me*—Naked Eyes



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PHOTO ALBUM



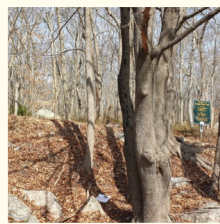
CHAPTER 16—Sam arrives in the U.S. and gets the Amtrak down to Mystic, CT. This is the best photo I managed to get of something I've never seen before...a double-decker train! This is about the moment I realized I wasn't in Kansas anymore...

CHAPTER 16—Taken somewhere around Rhode Island, these are the types of images you don't see without experiencing for yourself. I described this mural in earlier drafts of the books, but it didn't survive the edits. However, it is a great example of something I would never have known existed without the trip over.



CHAPTER 24—The blue welcome plaque is stunning in the flesh. I mention it twice in the book. The entrance to the cemetery was similarly awe inspiring. I love this kind of detail.

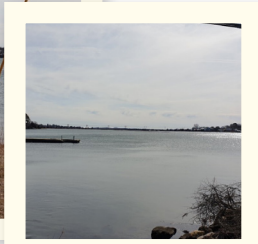
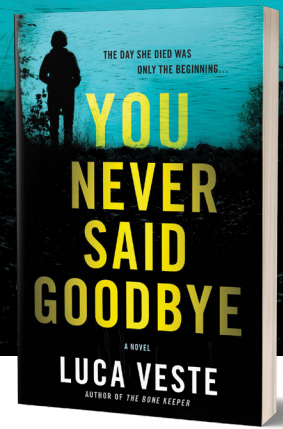
CHAPTER 50—This is entrance to woodland that inspired the setting for the final scenes of the book. I never quite found the right house for that scene, so I had to let my imagination run wild about what might be hiding behind these trees... I never would have known this existed without the trip over.



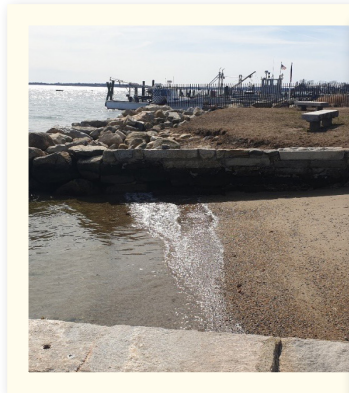
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1995—This is the river just off the road where Laurie and her family crash into. I didn't have that scene in mind until visiting this place, just outside of Mystic. I was walking along the roadside when I realized how easy it would be the drive off the road and hit the water. A beautiful spot that could lead to so much horror.



CHAPTER 21—This is where Carson and Hunter drink coffee at the edge of the water. I walked from Mystic to this point and sat on that wall, thinking about that conversation. I even got a coffee from the same place the two men do.

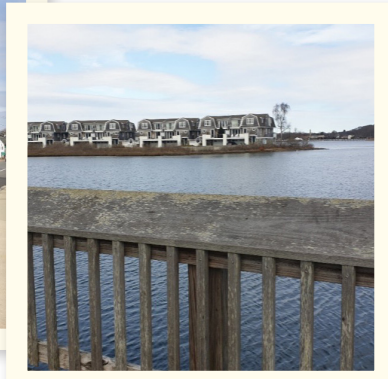
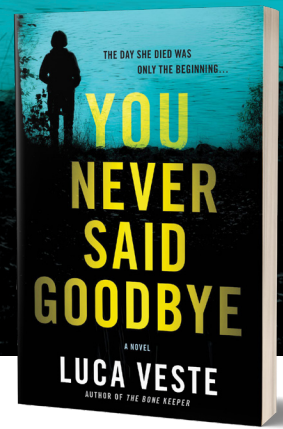


CHAPTER 45—This is the setting of a scene late in the book, when Sam is taken somewhere for a shocking revelation. I remember the quiet most about being here. How still it seemed. Out of sight is a restaurant that was closed down that I'd hoped to visit for another scene in mind, but after realizing it wasn't open, I stood and listened to the silence, and it inspired a completely different scene.

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CHAPTER 32/33—I needed a place where a car chase could occur, next to a river. I found this stretch and knew instantly it was perfect.

CHAPTER 16/17—Mystic train station/Amtrak stop. The place Sam arrives at. The smell was the first thing that hit me when I got there—something that I wouldn't have experienced if I was just using Street View! The chair outside the motel appears in the book, at the request of someone I met at the motel.



CHAPTER 18—These houses I discovered walking around Mystic. So different to the small, terraced almost cottage-like houses that Sam lived in as a child. I found these and knew this would be the first place Sam would start his amateur investigation—at the home he remembered his grandparents lived in back in the nineties.

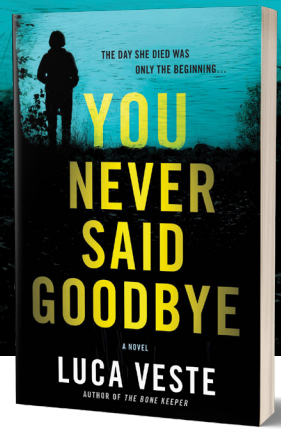
CHAPTER 28/29—The balconies to the room in the motel where Sam stays. This is the scene where he wakes up hearing a noise...



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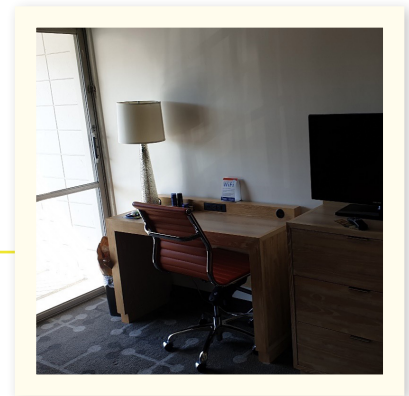
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CHAPTER 18—The diner next to the motel where I stayed. The motel is the exact same one Sam stays in, and I was in this diner every day. Everything Sam experiences came directly from my own. There’s nothing better than a diner.

This is the motel room I stayed in, which made it the one Sam stays in. I called it home for only a little longer than Sam does...



The first view of Boston and the Back Bay station.
