

SIX FRIENDS TRAPPED BY ONE DARK SECRET

# THE SILENCE

A NOVEL

LUCA VESTE



## READING GROUP GUIDE

1. Even before the incident in the woods, Matt feels like long-term promises are impossible. Do you think we can make commitments without knowing how circumstances may change? If not, how do you navigate that uncertainty?
2. If you were a part of the group, would you have avoided calling for help? Would you be afraid of the authorities turning on you?
3. How do the members of the group differ in their reactions to the crime? Who handles it best? Who do you relate to the most?
4. Michelle argues that the group is getting what they deserve for the murder. Do you believe people always get what they deserve in the end?
5. How would you describe Matt's reluctance to leave the house? As he investigates the Candle Man further, he struggles less with leaving. What do you make of that change?
6. Throughout their lives, Matt and his friends always

seem to find themselves at the center of “random acts of violence”—fist fights, accidental deaths, jealous arguments. Do you think any of them found that suspicious? If you found yourself in that kind of pattern, what would you do about it?

7. As the characters discuss Michelle’s disappearance, Matt thinks, “We were delusional. All of us.” What exactly is he referencing? Do you think you could break the delusion in his place? How?
8. Matt’s insomnia haunts him at every turn. How do you think it alters his reasoning and judgment?
9. Who did you expect the Candle Man to be? Were you surprised by the truth?
10. By the end of the book, Matt thinks that he and Chris are essentially the same. Do you agree?
11. If you were to continue Nicola’s story, what would happen next?

## A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

**How did you come up with a figure like the Candle Man? Any real-life inspirations?**

He's a representation of what a media-influenced serial killer often is. A mythical figure, that bears little relation to what it usually tends to be—a seemingly normal man, whom neighbors would describe as “keeping themselves to themselves.” While I draw on real-life examples, the Candle Man is very much a fictional creation. I wanted to have this somewhat otherworldly, almost mystical apparition running through the novel, with a very ordinary explanation as to what he is in reality.

**Matt and his group of friends have been close since childhood. Do you still keep in touch with your anyone from your childhood?**

Weirdly, not many. I grew up in various housing estates where everyone knew everyone, but I don't really keep in close contact with people other than being Facebook friends with a few. It's for no reason other than moving in different directions once we became older. Many of them are very surprised I became a writer!

**If you had to cover up a crime like your characters, who would you want on your side?**

Well, I hope this never happens, but I think you want someone

trustworthy on your team. Someone who isn't going to crack under the first sign of pressure. Alexandra is my representation of that kind of person. She closely resembles my wife, who is definitely someone you want in a crisis. Plus, she knows how to dig a big hole quickly.

**There's a lot of music in the book, from the festival to Matt's various attempts to fend off silence. Did any of your go-to bands make their way into the book? Do you listen to music while you write?**

I have a growing playlist running whenever I write and a lot of nineties music is found on there. All of his musical tastes match my own. The nineties are really where I found my own music, rather than just listening to everything my dad put on when I was younger. I still love the same bands he does—Pink Floyd, Jimi Hendrix, etc., etc.—but I complemented with my own choices. I love music—it really is my first love—so I've been waiting for the right book to start listing some of my favorites in. The nineties was a great decade for music, so it was great to remind readers of some of my fondly remembered songs.

**Your books often center around detectives, but the characters in *The Silence* resist the involvement of investigators over and over again. How did that change the way you reveal the mystery to the reader? Did you have to adjust your writing process at all?**

It was a definite choice to write a book without any police characters appearing, and there were often times when I wished I hadn't done so! It's much easier when you have a character who can simply kick a door in or question people with authority behind them. It was a challenge but one I relished. Having a non-detective as the lead character possibly makes it easier for

a reader to picture themselves in that position, which means the mystery unfolds in a different way. With a detective character, it can almost seem like sometimes a reader is waiting for them to solve the clues, the puzzles, and that's the joy of the book. With this kind of character, the mystery is unfolding around you, which I hope means a more involved read. It was the most enjoyable experience I've had so far writing a story, mainly because there were so many puzzles to work out. It's one I'll be repeating again a fair few times in the future.

**What first attracted you to mysteries and thrillers? Were there any particular authors that were instrumental in capturing your attention?**

I was a horror reader as a teen, then went through a stage where I didn't read much of anything. It wasn't until I was in my early twenties that someone passed me the first novel by Mark Billingham—*Sleepyhead*—and said I should try it out. I was hooked on the genre from that moment on. I think because it's a genre in which there are so many aspects to it, you can never be bored by it. I went from Billingham to other British authors, such as Val McDermid, Ian Rankin, Steve Mosby, and Denise Mina. Then, I became a voracious reader, devouring anything I could get my hands on. Harlan Coben, Linwood Barclay, Laura Lippman, Dennis Lehane, and Megan Abbott all became firm favorites.

**What have you been reading lately?**

I'm almost finished reading an advance copy of a debut from Richard Osman called *The Thursday Murder Club*. It is spectacular. He is an incredibly well-known TV presenter in the UK, whom I've had the pleasure of meeting, so I know his love of the crime genre is very real, which really shows in the book.

**Do you have anything new in the works?**

I visited Connecticut earlier this year as research for a future novel. I stayed in a town called Mystic, where some of the action takes place and did a lot of walking (which is difficult when there aren't sidewalks everywhere!), took hundreds of pictures, and talked to some great people. And ate my way through many diner menus. The book is set in a small village in the south of England before moving across the Atlantic, with the main character searching for answers to a long-held mystery. That book has consumed me for almost a year now. It's a real departure for me with a much broader setting, being set in both the UK and USA. I can't say too much more, but I'm really excited about sharing it with readers.