



TLC SHOWCASE

Sam Genever

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Introduction to *The Day She Disappeared* by Sam Genever

The Day She Disappeared was assessed By Vicky Grut at TLC. By then I had already attended a writing course and meet-the-author evenings at the TLC and trusted that their insight would be valuable. Vicky Grut was matched as she was successful in the same genre. It was years ago now, but I still have the original assessment report. Vicky gave me priceless advice on developing my voice, characters and plot. Those days, I was writing in my spare time in coffee shops. Writing was a secret. A solitary experience that was slowly becoming lonely and isolating. I was living in Malaysia at the time, adapting to yet another working culture, out of my comfort zone and working in the exciting field of Value-Added Tax! Attending those writing events whenever I returned to London kept the spark of creativity alive for me.

When I sent my manuscript in for assessment, this extract, was essentially the real start of the character's journey, and was a good thirty pages in. I had layered in so many pages of world-building, that in fact, nothing was happening for the reader.

Ms Grut's assessment didn't go into the small details but focused on the big picture. Places I need to move the story along to keep the reader interested. I was also given the key strengths and weaknesses of my manuscript. It's always nice to hear about your strengths but I had to pause over the weaknesses and decide what I could live with, what I should cut, what I need to do better in future. I found the assessment invaluable. As a debut novelist I crippled myself with a need for perfection in every last detail. Having a big picture in mind, gave me the courage to gut about 25% of my initial manuscript.

I have since worked with editors and agents in both the US and Britain and Vicky Grut's initial advice still resonates today.

The Day She Disappeared is a layered account of life in South Africa in the 1980s through the mystery lens. No one comes out looking completely innocent or guilty.

The Day She Disappeared is Available at Waterstones, Amazon and on Audible.

<https://www.waterstones.com/book/the-day-she-disappeared/sam-genever/9781804059944>

Extract from *The Day She Disappeared*

Chapter 1

24 July 1983

Augustine didn't know where they were going to sleep tonight. She couldn't go back home with Justice. His father not knowing their whereabouts was the only advantage she had. The late morning was bright but unusually cool. The sky was a lazy powder-blue, and the streets she was walking were calm after Saturday night's mischief. She stuffed her handbag with nappies and a bottle. She threw a few things into a small backpack, picked her baby up in a hurry and ran from her boyfriend's house, while he was at the grocery store getting a roast. There wasn't enough time to search his house for money. They had to get out.

Sweat trickled down her back. Carrying Justice was like carrying a sack of hot sweet potatoes. She'd made it across town to Greenside, but now what? She'd gone into shops and offices looking for work. But with the baby, no one wanted her. Churchgoers waved *No* when they saw her. Now wasn't the time to have an ego. Getting a job as a maid was the easiest way out.

When she was at high school, she'd stash her cigarettes or outside clothes in the maintenance cupboard, and – she remembered – it was close to the toilets. The public toilets would be inside a park or sports ground. She could stash her backpack there. She walked quickly to the Botanical Gardens, following the signposts for the toilet. She changed Justice first, then relieved herself. When the coast was clear she pushed against the maintenance door and it opened with a gentle creak. As she covered the bag with reams of handtowels, she hoped someone wouldn't steal their last two pairs of freedom clothes as a prank. It looked like nothing, but right now it was almost her entire world.

* * *

She walked down Greenway, across the dying stream, and headed towards the park. The houses there were bigger; perhaps they needed household help. She knew enough about these neighbourhoods to knock on the door and then stand far back.

'Oh.' A woman answered the door, her hair frothy from blow-drying a curl into her fringe. 'Who are you?'

'Missus,' Augustine said.

The house was set back from the road; large evergreen trees were clipped into hedges. Augustine had missed the intercom at the driveway

and opened the gate that led up a path to the front door. 'I'm looking for a job.'

The woman looked at her. A film of perspiration glistened on her upper lip. 'I thought my husband had left his keys,' she said.

'Sorry, Madam. I am very good with housework, Missus.'

The woman looked over Augustine's head, as if expecting her husband to run up the path. Since the baby, his jogs had become so long she thought he was training for the Two Oceans marathon. 'We already have help.'

'My son won't be any trouble. He is a very quiet child.' Augustine hated begging, but hammed up the servitude angle. She stood a little hunched over, as if her body was burdened with decades of hard work.

'What is his name?' the woman asked, leaning to look at the baby Augustine was carrying on her back.

'His name is Justice.' Augustine flattened her accent more.

'A beautiful name for a beautiful boy.' The missus smiled, and Justice gurgled a baby-laugh at her. This pair appeared to her as a fresh conjuring. 'I can't pay you a lot of money. There is not a lot to do around here. There are only four of us in this house.'

'OK, Missus. As long as I can have a place to stay.'

'You can't bring trouble here. I don't like a commotion,' she said firmly.

'Yes, Missus. It's only me and Justice now. No commotion. I can start today.' Augustine took in the broad shoulder pads in the bright yellow dress, the tight yellow belt and white high heels, and wondered what this woman did after getting dressed like this. She definitely wasn't doing any cooking. 'I cook a really good supper, good rice and gravy,' she lied.

The woman wiped her right hand nervously on her dress and stood closer to the door. 'Well, that's always good. Better you start tomorrow. Come anytime between eight

and nine o' clock in the morning. Your job will be to help my newborn.' Her smile as she closed the door was tight, and made Augustine slightly nervous. She heard the hastened sound of keys and the lock snap, but waved gratefully as she walked down the long driveway to the road. She was sure the missus was watching her from the window.

Augustine spent the first part of the afternoon walking down the Braids, looking over the low fences at the lawns and houses. Sweat trickled down her back.

Eventually, she huffed back through the gates of the Botanical Gardens as if she had crossed a finishing line. Evergreens bordered the road and provided shade as she walked up the brick lane. She worked hard to maintain an upright posture. Her chest and shoulders hurt. She felt a strain in her neck, a thick extension cord pulled beyond its reach. Men and women jogged downhill with purpose, their shoes crackling leaves and startling small lizards. Augustine weaved through lovesick couples and picnic groups to the female toilets to retrieve her bag. This time she didn't care if the toilet was empty; she needed to get her things. Then she looked for an empty seat across from the lake where she could relax her muscles and her mind for the first time that day.

There was hardly a cloud in the sky, and a low breeze from the lake rustled through the trees. The red soil was exposed in patches, and the air smelled of both dry grass and rotting roots.

About the Writer

Sam Genever is a poet, writer and author of *The Day She Disappeared*.

Sam, originally from South Africa, worked and travelled in Britain after university on the two-year working visa scheme. Her first jobs included sorting potatoes, packing Christmas chocolates for Sainsbury's and boxing fruit in a factory in Wisbech. She retreated from her short manufacturing career as winter approached and then travelled around Britain and Europe as a solo traveler.

A professionally trained accountant, Sam has dedicated the past fifteen years to crafting crime novels, infusing her characters with realism and vitality. She has earned recognition for her work, including the Joffe Award for Crime Writing.

Sam now lives and works out of her home in Hong Kong and has recently taken up tennis, albeit not very skilfully, alongside her supportive husband and their two energetic children.

