

The A to Z of Normal by Helen Barbour

The A to Z of Normal is the debut novel from Helen Barbour, and it follows Clare Thorpe as she battles to ensure that her blossoming new relationship can flourish and allow her to have the life and security that she's always dreamed of.

Clare is a very modern woman, successful, focussed, engaged with the world, but full of conflict about her personal relationships. She is on the verge of estrangement from her sister, and she is in love with a man called Tom, who lives far away, but who has just asked her to become his wife.

Despite all of this though, her biggest battle is to try and stop her Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) ruining her life.

Tom on the other hand comes across as relatively care free. He has a dog, a dog that leaves hair on duvets and begs for food at the table, he leaves his dirty wellies by the back door, and he can be a bit of a mess – and after he proposes to Clare, she is worried whether she'll ever be able to accept him for who he is, and whether he'll accept her for who she is.

The book is engaging from the off as it becomes quickly apparent that conflict is brewing. It's not often that I end up screaming at the page in the first few pages telling a character to do something – but that's the magic of this kind of literary honesty, you invest immediately.

As a sufferer of OCD and anxiety herself, Barbour is writing from a place of personal experience and deep knowledge about the subject of mental health. That's how she manages to portray, so sensitively, the challenges that Clare is facing.

This is a romance novel for people who wouldn't normally pick up a romance novel. It's a book you'll read over and over; the one you'll pick up when you're browsing your bookshelves and looking for something that you can really get your teeth into.



Fellside by M.R. Carey

Author of the best-selling *The Girl With All The Gifts*, M.R. Carey, continues to terrify readers with his second novel, *Fellside*.

Muswell Hill is where Jess Moulson, and her partner John, lives. They're drug addicts who utilise their light fingers to feed their habit. One night, while the couple are in the middle of a drug fuelled binge, there is a fire in their flat and Alex Beech, small boy who Jess has befriended in their block of flats, is killed.

Jess is pulled from the burning building and is accused of setting fire to the flat, and of killing little Alex. Jess can't remember a thing, but is torn up because she cared for the boy. She is swiftly convicted while a public and press outcry rings through the ears of all around.

After her conviction, Jess is taken to *Fellside* – the most notorious women's prison in the country – where she is immediately an enemy to all those inside who believe that killing a child is the worst thing you can go to prison for:

Jess seeks solitude from those out to cause her harm by staying in her cell. However, in the early hours she is visited by the ghost of Alex Beech who has something urgent that he wants to tell her.

Throughout her time in prison, Jess becomes more detached from the real world, and comes to rely on Alex for company. Even when a young solicitor takes on her case and sees light at the end of the tunnel for Jess, she can't escape her night time out of body experiences where she visits another world.

This book is utterly compelling. It's intricate and fascinating, and you realise very quickly that there is much more to the story than meets the eye.

