

# Claire Askew – All the Hidden Truths

**A**ll the Hidden Truths is the debut novel from Scottish writer Claire Askew. It's a literary crime novel that has taken the 'who-dunnit?' and made it into a 'why-dunnit?'.

The book opens with teenager Ryan Summers walking into the Edinburgh further education college he studies at and gunning down 13 women before killing himself. This opening isn't a gorefest but instead it is rather a skilfully crafted as you see the massacre unfold through the eyes of the loved ones of the people involved, and the law enforcement sent to try and stop the tragedy.

This novel revolves around three women, DI Helen Birch, the investigating officer, Ryan's mother Moira, and the mother of the first victim, Ishbel. DI Birch is a very personable and likeable protagonist whose mission to find out why Ryan committed this heinous crime leads to her not only fighting crime, but also her boss, the tabloid press, and men's rights conspiracy theorists.

Moira and Ishbel, are two mothers who are poignantly united in grief yet pitched as sworn enemies by everyone else in their lives. From their families to the press they are not allowed to grieve for their lost loved ones, Ishbel because everyone around her is aggressively seeking a justice that can't be brought, and Moira because she is wracked with guilt believing she could have done more to stop her son becoming a killer.

The complex, flawed, and fierce female characters in this book set it apart from many

others in the crime genre. It is also the first novel I have seen that uses such a range of chapter formats, from social media feeds to newspaper articles, to tell the story. This way of storytelling is easy on the eye and makes this book easy to devour in one or two sittings.

This is a truly captivating piece of writing that had me laughing, crying, getting angry at the immensely slimy character I won't name here – but you will know as soon as he enters the book. College shootings are very much a contemporary issue and Askew explores the motives behind this one with subtlety, and skill, keeping you on edge until the final word on the final page.

Askew grew up in rural Scotland and was a primary school pupil herself when the Dunblane massacre took place. As the book progresses, you start to understand how this context influenced the book, and how it is a warning to the whole of our society that we can't let toxic masculinity fester.

Many believe we couldn't have such a tragedy in the UK again, and I hope we don't, but while we bring up men who believe they're entitled to the world and all that is in it – we risk violence, and it is women who will be the victims.

With this debut, it would be no surprise to see Askew and Birch knock Rankin and Rebus off their perch as the UK crime fiction overlords. This novel will undoubtedly be a summer sensation and it's worth making the extra room in your suitcase for the hard back as you'll not want to be the only one by the pool to be seen without it.

