

CILIPS COVID-19 Book Reviews – All the Hidden Truths

Reviewer name: Toni Velikova

Book title: All the Hidden Truths

Author name: Clair Askew

Genre: Crime

Overall Rating: Excellent

Brief Summary: The story of a tragic shooting at Edinburgh College and its aftermath. Narrated by three women in the eye of the storm - the mother of the shooter, the mother of a victim and DI Helen Birch, the detective tasked with the unenviable task of understanding why it happened. A page-turning crime novel, which grapples with tragedy, grief and the deepest parts of the human psyche.

What you liked: This book was intense from the very first page. The narrative takes you through the emotional rollercoaster of understanding the three different viewpoints. The voices of the three main characters are distinctive and the main protagonist, DI Birch, immediately impresses with the complexity of her emotions, balancing the investigation with her own existing trauma. She is very easy to like and root for, and I cannot wait to see more of her in Askew's next instalment in the series. This doesn't mean, however, that the secondary characters take a backseat; in fact, Moira, mother of the shooter, has easily the most gripping, heart-wrenching storyline I have read in a good while. Many of her experiences leave you wondering, questioning - what if this were me? What would I do? Would I be better?

The difficult subject matter of the book is handled sensitively, with a true empathetic understanding of real-life events and existing toxic online cultures. Through her brilliant writing, which often resembles poetry in prose, Askew gives the tragedy a unique human voice. Rather than the classic black-and-white representation, she paints her storyline in shades of grey, leaving the reader grappling with their own moral compass just as much as the characters are.

Even though it's classed as a crime novel, All The Hidden Truths is much more than that - it reveals a face of humanity that we'd often be tempted to turn away from. Yes, it is about the shooting, however it is also about knee-jerk reactions, about who does victimhood "correctly" and how we can all learn to be a bit kinder with each other. It feels topical and hard-hitting in these difficult times, which makes it all the more important. The investigation itself is also interwoven very well through these themes, so much so that you won't be able to rest until you read the very last page.

Who should read this book?: Anyone who has read Ian Rankin, Val McDermid or Kate Atkinson is sure to enjoy this book. Additionally, anyone who lives in Edinburgh will feel a little thrill of joy every time any of the city's iconic locations are mentioned.

Any additional comments?: Claire Askew is turning the adventures of DI Birch into a whole series and the sequel to All The Hidden Truths, What You Pay For, is just as brilliant and gripping. I would recommend checking this out if, like me, you have developed an incredible fondness for this wonderful character!