

OFF THE SHELF REVEALING DETAILS LOUISE JENSEN

I began writing in a bid to improve my mental health after an accident left me in chronic pain, which led to anxiety and depression. Through my books I'm endlessly fascinated with the psychology of my characters: why do they act in the way they do, make the choices they make?

In *The Stolen Sisters* we know that Leah, Carly and Marie Sinclair were snatched as children, and we learn at the beginning they are returned unharmed, but what I wanted to explore was the lasting effect of the trauma and whether trauma has to define us for the rest of our lives. Everyone has a secret. Can we ever really know someone? There have been times I've painted on a smile, told people I was fine, but I was far from it. I love characters with real depth that's revealed little by little. Leah, Carly and Marie initially present as one thing but we find out they are all something entirely different.

In Rosamund Lupton's *Sister* (Piatkus), Beatrice thinks she knows all there is to know about her sister, Tess, but throughout the story Lupton skilfully weaves in new details that constantly shift the narrative.

Fiona Barton, in *The Widow*, (Transworld) brilliantly portrays Jean Taylor as a confused grieving widow who isn't sure how she's supposed to feel after it's revealed that her deceased husband, Glen, is a monster. Her unravelling and the subsequent denouement is brilliant.

As well as *The Stolen Sisters* being a thrilling, twisty story I wanted to get across that struggles with mental health aren't something to be ashamed of. It's okay to ask for help. It isn't a weakness. Everyone is dealing with something and it's impossible to know from the outside of a person what's going on in the inside. Be kind.



The Stolen Sisters is published by HQ

OFF THE SHELF MALE BRAVADO KIA ABDULLAH

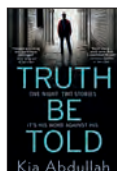
As a child, I never saw my father make tea. I never saw him change a nappy or feed a baby or wash dishes. The same can be said of my brothers. These tasks were "women's work", outside the remit of a man's concern. These strict gender roles stifled the women around me. Only in adulthood did I realise that they also stifle men. This is what inspired my novel *Truth Be Told*, a courtroom drama in which a 17-year-old survivor of sexual assault downplays his trauma to salvage his masculinity. How does a young man process something profoundly taboo in a community where the act of feeding a child can bruise one's masculinity?

Male bravado manifests in myriad forms, often with seismic consequences. Guy Gunaratne examines the pressure to show courage amid conflict in *In Our Mad and Furious City* (Tinder Press). His protagonists navigate social tensions in a city reeling from the murder of an off-duty soldier. The young men adopt bravado in various guises: Selvon in his overtures to the beautiful Missy; Ardan on the football field; and Yusuf in hiding "the ill fit [he] felt against the rest of the world".

Feelings of alienation are writ large in Fredrik Backman's *Beartown*, (Penguin) set in a remote corner of Sweden. When Amat, the runt of the hockey team, witnesses the star player rape a schoolmate, he says nothing. "You know what women are like," he's told – a jibe he accepts for the "wonderful warm feeling of being allowed to belong to something".

In *The End of Eddy*, an autobiographical novel about growing up gay in working-class rural France, Édouard Louis writes: "Every morning in the bathroom I would repeat the same phrase to myself over and over again... Today I'm gonna be a tough guy." Eddy tries to act masculine but he fails and faces dreadful consequences.

Dealing with trauma is also a theme in Wally Lamb's epic novel *I Know This Much Is True* (HarperCollins), which tackles alienation, power, abuse, devastation and, ultimately, renewal.



Truth be Told is published by HQ

Please help us find

Andrew Capon - Skegness, Lincolnshire



Andrew went missing from Skegness on 02 Oct 1998. The photo on the left is how he looked aged 37 when he disappeared. The photo on the right, how he might look today.

Andrew, please call Missing People on 116 000 or email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk for advice and support, in confidence, whenever you feel ready.

John Coleman - Edinburgh, Scotland



John was last seen in Edinburgh on 01 May 2009. He was 51 years old when he disappeared.

John, please call Missing People on 116 000 or email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk for advice and support, in confidence, whenever you feel ready.

Alessandro Severitano - Liverpool, Merseyside



Alessandro went missing from Liverpool on 22 Oct 2014. He was 40 years old when he was last seen.

Alessandro, please call Missing People on 116 000 or email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk for advice and support, in confidence, whenever you feel ready.

Christina Rack - Chorlton, Greater Manchester



Christina has been missing from Chorlton since 01 Oct 2018. She was 48 years old when she disappeared.

Christina, please call Missing People on 116 000 or email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk for advice and support whenever you feel ready.

Edele Tipping - Abersoch, Gwynedd, Wales



Edele went missing from Abersoch on 10 Jul 2019. She was 40 years old when she disappeared.

Edele, please call Missing People on 116 000 or email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk for advice and support whenever you feel ready.

Malcolm James Bagley - Doncaster, Yorkshire



Malcolm has been missing from Doncaster since 12 Jun 2020. He was 33 at the time of his disappearance.

Malcolm, we are here for you when you are ready; we can listen, talk you through what help you need, pass a message on for you and help you to be safe. Please call or text 116 000.

Call or text 116 000

Email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk

It's free, 24hr and confidential

Missing People would like to thank The Big Issue for publicising vulnerable missing people on this page.

To help Missing People bring them back to safety text FIND to 70660* to donate £5.

Our free 116 000 number is supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery.

*Texts cost £5 plus your standard network charge. Missing People receives 100% of your donation. Obtain the bill payer's permission.

**missing
people**

Registered charity in England and Wales (1120419)
and in Scotland (SC047419)

www.missingpeople.org.uk/help-us-find