

Q&A with Adele Parks

What was the inspiration behind *I Invited Her In*?

I get a lot of my ideas by reading newspaper or magazine articles about ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. I remember reading an article about revenge porn and the devastating effect it had on one woman whose ex had betrayed her trust by uploading a private video after they had split up. It's sad to think that something that starts with so much trust and love can and is misused to cause incredible pain and devastation. I thought it was an interesting starting point for a story and very topical. I began to think about the fact that people can do enormous emotional U-turns and that technology and social media allows dreadful exploitation and manipulation.

I didn't write a story about revenge porn but there is an element of the book which is about people finding evidence of intimacy that causes them to make huge emotional U-turns. The truth the book highlights is that we leave ourselves exposed through constantly recording our lives. We have a propensity to doubt and betray when wounded.

This is a dark tale of female friendship and revenge. Did you find it easy to write, and did you draw on friendships of your own as inspiration?

Happily, I'd say on balance my life has been deeply enriched by really splendid, supportive, funny female friends. At its best, female friendship is a wonderful thing, one of life's absolute blessings. Friends have cheered me, supported me, offered me advice, comfort, sympathy and consolation – or simply a cup of tea/glass of wine when I needed it! I hope my friends will say that I've done the same for them.

However, when female friendship goes wrong, the sense of sadness and disappointment is astounding. That's fertile ground for a novel! I think because we allow great intimacy, we are at risk of great hurt. That's true in all relationships, whether that's female friendship, romantic relationships, family or even work colleagues. When time, effort and trust is invested then disloyalty hurts. I don't think there's anything anyone can do about that, except love anyway. Abi has the exact opposite reaction to my own instinct. I'm not someone who is in the least bit vengeful. I think it's exhausting and self-destructive. I've always believed that the best revenge against anyone who has hurt you, is to live well.

The mother-son relationship between Mel and Liam is a key dynamic in the novel, and it enables you to explore themes like single motherhood and blended families. Why was this important to you?

My first marriage ended when my son was less than a year old so there was a period in my life when I was a single mum. It's a hard position to find yourself in. The fierce sense of responsibility that every parent feels is intensified when there isn't anyone to share the parenting highs and lows with. Fortunately for me, I re-married when my son was still very young and we are an extremely happy family. We love each other so much and I know I'm really lucky that I was able to give my son the benefit of living with two parents who love him and each other. However, I can't tell you how often our family comes under scrutiny or is simply made into a matter of curiosity.

We've been a family for fifteen years, but people still ask all sorts of impertinent or insensitive questions about the dynamics and mechanics of our home life and our relationships. It infuriates me so much. I hope this novel helps people to understand that single parents are warriors, blended families are just families. Maybe if we all stopped judging, assuming and classifying and started accepting, then things would be easier for all. It's time to acknowledge that we live in a world where families come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. A family is defined by how much love is in that home, not genetics.

This is your eighteenth book – does writing a novel get easier with time?

Structurally yes, it does get easier. I feel confident and competent at developing characters and plot. I think I am now very aware when there ought to be important 'beats' in the narrative, when a character needs a stronger 'voice' or if something seems unrealistic and improbable. I find I self-challenge and self-edit more robustly as time goes on.

However, as I'm currently writing my nineteenth novel it becomes increasingly difficult to come up with new plots and themes, but I absolutely pride myself on doing exactly that. I want to entertain my readers and surprise them. I never want readers to think, 'Oh yes. I know what Adele Parks will do here.' Being fresh and examining something new in each novel whilst retaining a sincere interest in the theme and characters is the challenge. But I do like a challenge!

Did you always want to be a writer?

As soon as I made the connection between the glorious book I was holding in my hand and the fact someone had written it, I was sure that I wanted to be a writer. The book was *The Magic Faraway Tree*; I think I was about four years old. Soon after that, I started to write stories about fairies and witches, my granddad paid me 10p for an 'illustrated copy'. I later realised that he gave my sister the same pocket money but it was just a way to keep me quiet and out of mischief! When my sister, who was also always a big reader, finished reading Enid Blyton's *St Clare's* and *Malory Towers* books she was feeling really gloomy. I adored being around her (as she had all the intrinsic glamour and pull of an older sister) so I told her that I knew what had happened to the characters during the summer holidays when they weren't at boarding school. She used to let me sleep in her room if I told her a story about those adventures. I felt giddy with the excitement and power of having a story to tell that was worth listening to!

Since I was a child I've always carried a notebook with me and I'd often scribble down thoughts, feelings and descriptions. I made sense of the world that way. I can't even remember how this process started, I don't think anyone suggested I ought to do it, I simply

did; writing is part of who I am, how I am. I suppose the big change is when the world recognises that you're a writer by awarding you a publishing contract. Now I write as a living, I feel incredibly fulfilled and very, very fortunate.

Can you tell us a little about what you're working on next?

I'm continuing down quite a dark route. My protagonist is married to a man who is an alcoholic. She helplessly watches as his addiction puts their family under increasing stress but she doesn't know how to stop him and finds it easier to lie to herself about how bad things have become. However, matters come to a head when, under the influence, he commits a catastrophic crime and they can't hide from the truth any longer. I wanted to look at how damaging lies can be, but how hard the truth is.

What would you like readers to take away from *I Invited Her In*?

I want people to finish the book and think, 'That was a cracking read!' because mostly, I write to entertain. However, I also write to provoke thought and discussion. I hope people do want to talk about this book: some will be shocked, some will feel Abi ought to have been more severely punished, some will feel everyone has been through enough. Discussing fictional characters is a great way to talk about real life issues such as betrayal, revenge, friendship and forgiveness. I think reading leads to a stronger sense of empathy and understanding. We need as much of that as possible in the world so if I can contribute to the big pot of empathy in any way, then I'm a proud woman.