

JN LIFE

KILLER INSTINCT

Thriller writer Victoria Selman lets *Beatrice Sayers* in on the inspiration for her latest addictive read

A conversation with Victoria Selman is entirely upbeat and no-nonsense. The psychological torture appears only in the pages of her crime fiction, and there is plenty of it, along with intelligent writing, natural dialogue and superb observation.

Her latest novel, *Truly, Darkly, Deeply*, was published in paperback in February and made the *Sunday Times* bestseller list as well as being a Richard and Judy Book Club pick. It was her fourth book in four years, and her fifth, *All The Little Liars*, is due out in the autumn. How does she do it?

"I always wanted to be a writer," Victoria says, "right from the very beginning," joking that she wrote her first 'novel', which ran to two pages of A4, at the age of seven. It wasn't until she was in her 30s, however, and with two pre-school children, that she started to write properly. "I love reading and I think it's a natural progression... you then want to write what you love."

With encouragement from her husband, Tim, a lawyer, she took herself off to writing classes at City Lit in central London and began with short stories, one of which was published in an anthology of crime stories,

Afraid of the Shadows.

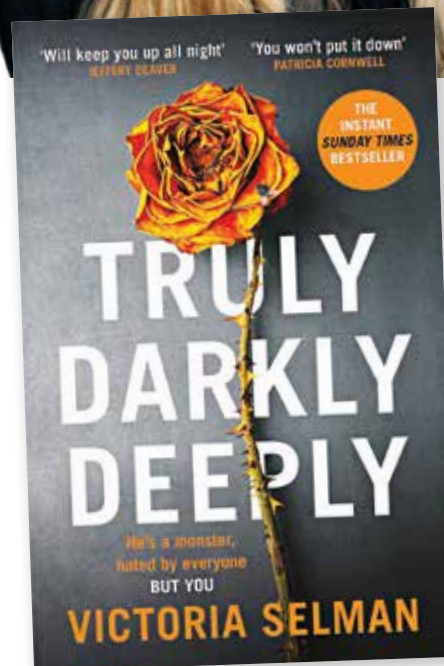
Her first novel, *Blood for Blood*, was shortlisted for the 2017 Debut Dagger Award. It introduced an intriguing female protagonist, Ziba MacKenzie, who is an ex-special forces criminal profiler.

An addictive read, it was swiftly followed by two more, *Nothing to Lose* and *Snakes and Ladders*. After completing the final book in the trilogy, Victoria said she wanted 'a break', which many people would understand to mean a rest. But for her that meant a break from Ziba, and a new challenge. "I wanted a different perspective. And I've always been fascinated by true crime and really interested in serial killers, the idea of otherness, particularly. What began to intrigue me wasn't so much the serial killer, him or herself, but rather the victims they leave behind."

And so, with her sons now at secondary school, she began to read and think seriously about serial killers, in particular Ted Bundy, the American who kidnapped, raped and murdered young women and girls in the 1970s. What caught her attention was that he had a relationship with a single mother during some of that time.

The book that came out of that reading was *Truly, Darkly, Deeply*. It is narrated by Sophie, who with her mother, Amelia-Rose, has moved to London from the United States. Amelia has a tumultuous relationship with the handsome Matty, and every time another woman is found dead, Matty is away. "It's not about Bundy, it's drawn from a number of different serial killers," Victoria says. "But that was my jumping off point." She takes something that is already there and asks 'What would it have been like?' and 'What if...' "A lot of my stories are inspired by true crime," says Victoria, who has a degree in history from Oxford. "But I'm fictionalising it and maybe that's part of the historian in me."

The book, an instant bestseller, is grip-



Victoria and her serial killer novel

ping. Victoria describes how she developed the plot, writing what she calls a "road map" for the novel. "I was very aware it looked like an 'a or b' route. But I thought there had to be a third way, a different solution." She found it, and there is a chilling twist.

Have Victoria and Tim's teenage sons, both of whom have had barmitzvah ceremonies at New London Synagogue in St John's Wood, read her books? "Max would be old enough," she says; but it is clear that that delight awaits them. When her sons do read her thrillers, they will find that their mother, who attends shul

most Shabbats, puts a Jewish character or two, usually a cameo, in each of them. It feels natural, she says. "It's very much part of my identity."

Discipline is also part of her character as a writer, and she appreciates having a regular, and finite, window in which to create. "I have the whole school day," she says. "I walk the dog in the morning and then I sit down and I write, and I write until the end of the day when I pick them up and it's quite a nice chunk of time."

Victoria is keen to encourage female writers to embrace a genre that has traditionally been very male. "You think about all the big brand names, Michael Connelly and Lee Child and Jeffery Deaver. They're all males, right? But now we have a lot of wonderful women breaking through and it's a brilliant thing to celebrate.

"I think they bring something unique to the genre, a different way of looking at things. We're not just focusing on the gun-slinging male. We're more interested in the psychology of crime, of the victims. As women we obviously have a sense of vulnerability, a natural vulnerability that men just don't have. And that comes through in the writing as well."

What also comes through in Victoria's writing is her superb imagination and ability to keep the reader truly engrossed.

Jewish News is offering readers the chance to win one of five signed copies of *Truly Darkly Deeply* along with bookmarks and signed postcards of Victoria Selman's forthcoming thriller, *All The Little Liars*. For your chance to win, visit: www.jewishnews.co.uk/trulydarklydeeply

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