

The Guilty One: A Novel

By Lisa Ballantyne

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Moving and suspenseful, Lisa Ballantyne's *The Guilty One* is a psychological thriller about the darkness in each of us. It explores how we are all tied to our pasts, and what it means to be guilty.

Solicitor Daniel Hunter is called to defend 11-year-old Sebastian who has been charged with the murder of a young boy on a London playground. While examining Sebastian's life in order to save it, Daniel can't help but be transported to his own difficult youth spent in foster care—a time when the one he trusted the most was the one who betrayed him…

Emotionally wrought, and with an abundance of twists and turns, *The Guilty One* is a character-driven novel of suspense that explores the true nature of guilt.

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The Guilty One: A Novel By Lisa Ballantyne Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Author One-on-One: Deborah Crombie and Lisa Ballantyne





Deborah Crombie is the author of the best-selling Duncan Kincaid and Gemma James novels.

Deborah Crombie: First of all, congratulations on your first novel! The Guilty One is richly complex, and it gives the reader much to think about. How did this story come about? What made you start writing it?

Lisa Ballantyne: Thank you! I am always first drawn to characters, and in this case the characters of Daniel and Minnie began to “inhabit me”—I could see them and smell them. After musing on them for some time I realized that Daniel was telling the story as an adult working in London. I could see him in a suit and it was soon after that I realized he was a solicitor. It was only at that stage that I thought about giving him a very young client who would remind him of how he too had once been a very violent little boy. Sebastian is therefore there as a construct, to throw Daniel’s childhood into relief.

DC: The book shifts between Daniel’s experiences in his adolescence and the present day trial of his young client accused of murder. What made you choose this structure?

LB: I find that a book will tell me how it is to be written. It was the case with *The Guilty One*. I tried different voices and structures at the beginning, but once I stayed in Daniel’s point of view and alternated with his childhood and the trial things seemed to fall into place. It was an exciting book for me, too, to write as at the beginning when Daniel got the letter, I didn’t know what Minnie had done to alienate him, nor did I know if Sebastian would be found guilty or innocent.

DC: *The Guilty One* is so intricately plotted. I’m always curious about fellow writers’ processes: do you plot in advance, or do you write where the characters take you?

LB: Definitely the latter. I write as I live. I find it hard to plan everything out. I follow my instincts. I find that when I know a character well, the plot will come.

DC: Which of your characters was the easiest to write? Which was the most difficult?

LB: That is a good question. I found Minnie very easy to write and I loved writing Daniel. I did a lot of research to write Sebastian so he was perhaps the least instinctual of all the characters, although he was very clear to me.

DC: One of the most heartrending scenes, for me, was when Daniel has his falling out with Minnie, a character I grew to love. Was this scene hard for you to write?

LB: Yes, it was a hard scene to write and I wrote it very quickly and didn't change much of it afterwards. I could see it playing out before my eyes, like a scene from a movie. It was heartbreaking for me because I understood both of them and I also knew that Daniel would come to regret his actions.

DC: The idea of nurture vs. nature plays a big role in The Guilty One. What are you hoping readers take away from this book on that topic?

LB: I hope that readers enjoy the book and have sympathy for the characters and that it then leads them to question the causes of crime and possibly our responsibility for people who commit crime, especially children. The question of Sebastian's guilt or innocence in the book is irrelevant, because everyone in the book is guilty.

From Booklist
London criminal solicitor Daniel Hunter feels a certain affinity for client Sebastian Croll, an 11-year-old charged with murdering 8-year-old Ben Stokes, his neighbor and playmate, in a nearby playground. Just as Hunter gets Sebastian's case, he receives a last communication from Minnie Flynn, the adoptive mother from whom he became estranged years earlier, causing him to relive memories of his own difficult childhood, during which he was separated from his beloved, drug-addict mother. The chapters alternate between Hunter's youth and the strong forensic and circumstantial case against Sebastian, who's considered precocious yet "unsettling" even by his own defense team as he maintains his innocence and as his own troubled home life comes to light. This is a sensitive and insightful narrative that gradually builds suspense during Sebastian's trial and Hunter's revelations. Truth is revealed in the final pages, but Ballantyne leaves it to the reader to determine just where the guilt lies. An accomplished first novel and a good bet for book groups. --Michele Leber

Review
"Sophisticated, suspenseful, unsettling, and highly recommended: a terrific debut from an author to watch." (**Lee Child**, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author)

"Lisa Ballantyne has written a first novel that is both moving and suspenseful; richly detailed, yet with the eerie simplicity of a parable" (**Joyce Carol Oates**, *New York Times* bestselling author)

"The Guilty One offers that rare combination of a beautifully crafted story, inhabited with characters we haven't known before (but won't forget)--and a story that will keep you turning the pages late into the night." (**Joyce Maynard**, author of *Labor Day*)

"On one level, Lisa Ballantyne's The Guilty One delivers riveting courtroom drama that is unflinchingly true to its characters. At another level, its personal story resonates with love, forgiveness, and the possibility of

redemption. The Guilty One will touch your heart even as it leaves you unsettled." (**Hallie Ephron**, author of *There Was an Old Woman*)

"Thought provoking, brave and challenging, this book is an unsettling and compulsive read." (**Rosamund Lupton**, author of *Sister* and *Afterwards*)

"One of the best debuts I've ever encountered" (Daily Record)

"One of the most readable, emotionally intense novels of the year, and a debut one at that. Lisa Ballantyne pulls off the key writer's trick of getting us to care about the characters; by the end of the first chapter, you will be comprehensively on the hook." (Richard Madeley, Richard and Judy's Book Club, Autumn 2012 Pick)

"A page-turner" (Cosmopolitan (UK))

"A captivating debut" (Kirkus)

"An accomplished first novel and a good bet for book groups." (Booklist)

"A child-on-child murder drives Ballantyne's searing debut . . . [A] scalding exploration of childhood violence, adult refusal to forgive, and redemptive love." (Publishers Weekly (starred review))

Ballantyne blurs the line between right and wrong like a double-edged sword in this methodical psychological thriller. The age-old struggle between good and evil takes on new meaning through characters so jaded by life; she makes you question it yourself. (criminalelement.com)

Ballantyne hits some strong emotional beats, and fans of Vanessa Diffenbaugh's The Language of Flowers will find much to like here (Library Journal)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Diane Dean:

Now a day those who Living in the era wherever everything reachable by connect with the internet and the resources within it can be true or not need people to be aware of each details they get. How a lot more to be smart in obtaining any information nowadays? Of course the answer then is reading a book. Looking at a book can help folks out of this uncertainty Information specially this The Guilty One: A Novel book because this book offers you rich information and knowledge. Of course the knowledge in this book hundred per cent guarantees there is no doubt in it you probably know this.

Mohammad Darling:

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