

REVIEWS

Author **Carrie Duffy**
CARRIE DUFFY TALKS TO JANE LAWRENSEN ABOUT HER WRITING AND THE LOCAL AREA SHE LOVES.

Carrie Duffy is the author of two novels, *Idol* and her latest *Diva*, which is set in the cut-throat world of fashion and features models and designers aplenty.

Originally from Yorkshire, Carrie has been living in London for eight years now. She moved here to go to drama school, where she attended Drama Studio London in Ealing – and has never left!

When she was eighteen she lived in Paris, which is the setting for her new novel, *Diva*, and then attended Oxford University before training as an actor. Since then, Carrie has been pursuing writing and acting. I caught up with her, despite her busy schedule, to talk to her about her life as an author and the delights of living in West London.

Hi Carrie, firstly congratulations on the publication of *Diva*, it reads like an episode of *Britain's Next Top Model*! Can you tell us a bit about your road to publication?

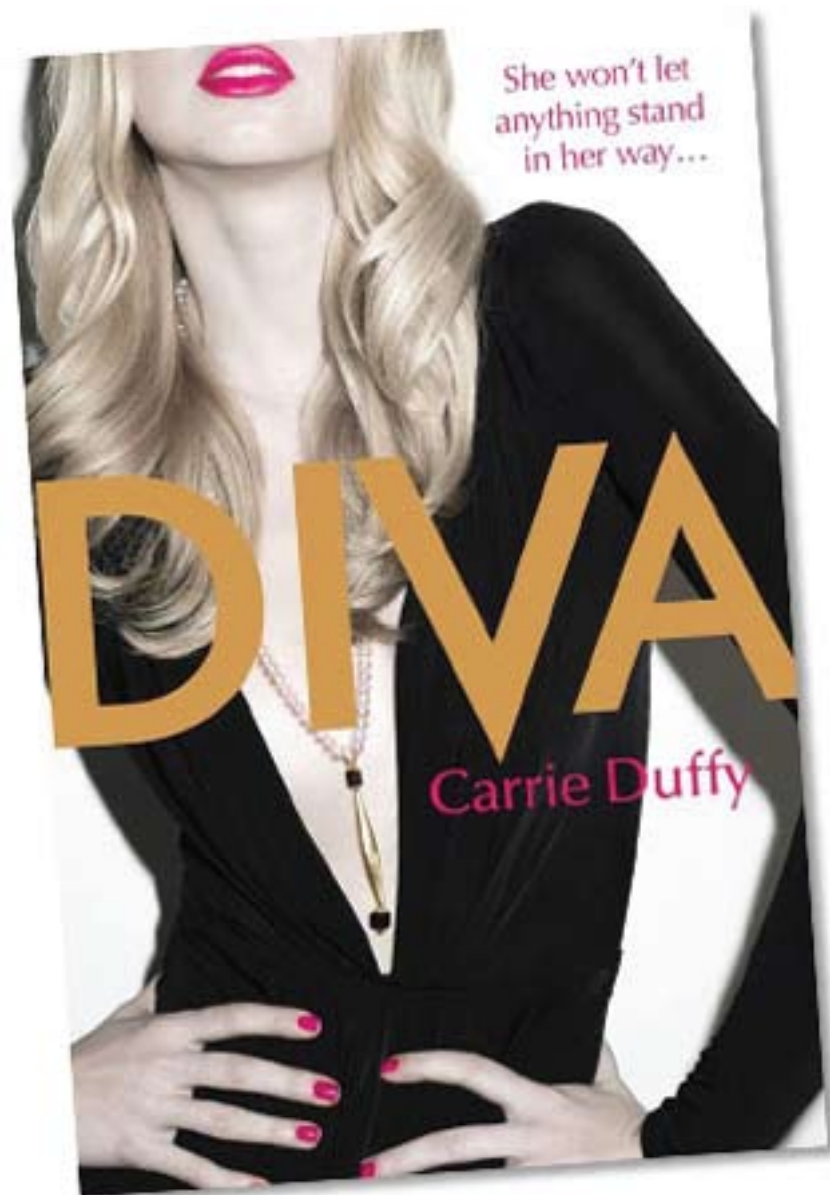
It took a very long time! I first started trying when I was at university, submitting material to agents. I was working on all kinds of stories, in different genres, and although I had some interest from agents, no one ever took the plunge and signed me. A few years ago, I noticed that bonkbuster novels (which I love!) were having a revival, so I re-worked one of the novels I'd started back in university and then signed with my agent in 2010. Six months later I had a two book deal with HarperCollins.

I'd trained as an actress, so I was pursuing both acting and writing – which, in reality, meant a lot of temping and working in offices to pay the rent. It wasn't very stimulating, and was hugely frustrating at times, so I was thrilled when I finally got my publishing deal.

Fantastic! Can you tell us how you come up with ideas for a book?

I tend to start with an industry I'm interested in, as writing gives me an opportunity to live vicariously through my characters! My first novel, *Idol*, was set in the worlds of pop music and dance, while *Diva* is based in the fashion industry.

Once I know the area I'm writing in, I think about the kinds of people you're going to find there. In *Diva*, there's Dionne, the ambitious, wannabe supermodel; CeCe, the talented, tortured designer; and shy Alyson, who is plucked



from obscurity but struggles with the new world in which she's found herself.

So, do you base your characters on people that you know?

Not directly... When I lived in Paris, I was friends with a glamorous group of girls who partied with a wealthy, international crowd in some of the city's most exclusive clubs. I occasionally went with them, and those experiences definitely informed the action in *Diva*.

There's also probably part of me in Alyson, as we both moved to Paris at the age of 18, and I drew on my own feelings of being on your own in a big city, in a foreign country, as you try to figure out who you are.

Where do you do most of your writing, Carrie?

I don't have a study – it's a dream of mine to one day have a beautiful study/library filled with row upon row of books and an enormous writing desk. But until that day, I write on a laptop and tend to move around the house whenever I need a change of scenery, alternating between the sofa, the dining table and my bed!

Sometimes, if I want something completely different and need to avoid being distracted by the internet, I'll head out to a cafe. I live just off Pitshanger Lane, and they have a great choice

of places, so I'll order a hot chocolate and get down to some writing.

Do you find yourself taking on any of your characters traits at all?

No! The writing process does get very intense, especially towards the end of a book, and I become very absorbed in what I'm doing. But I wouldn't ever say the characters spill over into real life.

How do you feel about being labelled chick-lit? Some authors find it annoying, to say the least!

I didn't originally think that my writing was chick-lit. I considered chick-lit to be a genre that emerged in the 90s, with Bridget Jones – the literary equivalent of a rom-com, with down-to-earth, relatable heroines – and I thought that what I wrote was a different strand of women's fiction: the "bonkbuster"!

It now seems that the term chick-lit has expanded to cover pretty much all fiction written by women, and I do object to it when it's used in a patronising or derogatory way.

However, there are so many fantastic reviewers and bloggers who identify themselves as chick-lit fans, and they've been lovely enough to embrace me and my books, so if writing chick-lit means I'm part of this huge, supportive community then I'm very happy with it.

When you are not busy writing, what books do you like to read?

I read a lot in this genre – I love it, which is why I wanted to write it too! My all-time favourite bonkbuster novel is *Career Girls* by Louise Bagshawe. I read it when I was sixteen, and it had a massive influence on me. It tells the story of two ambitious, determined women and it immediately made me want to write a novel of my own. I'm also a big fan of Tasmina Perry, Lesley Lokko and Tilly Bagshawe. Outside the genre I like to read literary/book club novels, historical fiction and biographies.

Can you tell us some of your favourite local haunts and shops?

As I mentioned, I live just off Pitshanger Lane, which is a lovely area. It's only a small street, but it has just about every kind of shop you could want. There are so many small, independent businesses and a very strong community spirit. For writing, I'll head to Oscars or Cinnamon, and I love browsing in the Pitshanger Bookshop, as well as the charity shops for second hand books. There's also a huge selection of places to eat, with Indian restaurant Samrat being a particular favourite.

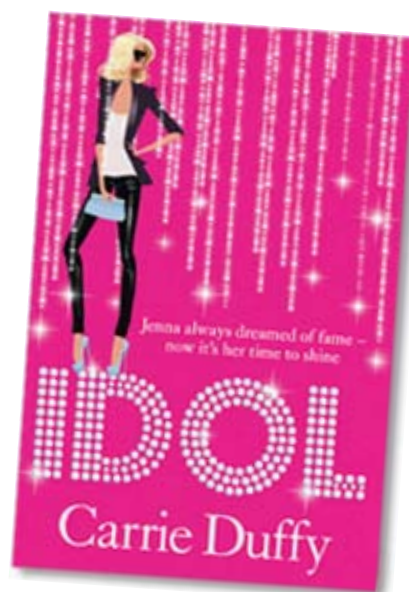
What attracted you to Ealing?

I originally moved to Ealing to attend drama school, but it's a great area and I love it here. My boyfriend was born and bred in Ealing, and his business is established locally, so we're definitely staying here for the foreseeable future. It's lovely to be in a place with so many parks and greenery, but in less than half an hour you can be in the bustle of central London.

My books tend to be very glamorous, and take place in affluent and successful circles, so west London is very inspirational and I've used areas such as Notting Hill, Holland Park and Chelsea as settings in my novels. They're all internationally recognisable, prestigious locations.

Is there a favorite local bookshop of yours?

The Pitshanger Bookshop is fantastic, and I'm very lucky to have such a great, independent bookshop nearby. WHSmith and Waterstones



in Ealing have a good selection and, heading further afield, I love Daunt in Notting Hill.

Thanks to Carrie for talking to us.

Both of Carrie's books *Diva* and *Idol* are available in all local branches of WH Smith, Asda, selected branches of Waterstones and, of course, Amazon.

REVIEWS

Book Reviews by **Jane Lawrenson**

BOOK REVIEW

DIVA By **CARRIE DUFFY**

Brought up on the mean streets of Detroit, Dionne Summers is determined that nothing will stop her from becoming the world's next supermodel. Try as she might, every agency tells her she is no good for the catwalk. Her booty and boobs are too big, they say – but Dionne has a dream and being sassy, as well as stunning her sights turn further afield. Sure that she can make it in Europe, like the other supers and going nowhere fast, she uses her savings to head to Paris.

Meanwhile in Manchester another young hopeful, the beautiful and innocent Alyson McIntyre is also desperate to escape her upbringing.

On the chic streets of Paris both girls find themselves living with a young designer, Ce Ce Bouvier. Born into a life of luxury and glamour Ce Ce wants to prove she can stand on her own two feet and take the fashion world by storm.

Written in three parts, it is such an entertaining read I found it hard to put down. The author really puts you at the front of the action and the characters are very real.

Passionate about 'making it' the girls start living the jet set lifestyle, driven around in plush Mercedes and hanging out with the cool crowd at top night spots. Alyson meets Philippe who takes her virginity but is soon up to no good. I really felt for Alyson here! She has no idea what is going on, while the reader knows exactly what Philippe is doing! Meanwhile Dionne is modelling for Ce Ce's new collection and all seems to be going great. You are rooting for these girls to get what they want, but the tension is woven in the story and you know that they will have to overcome some big hurdles.

It all starts to unravel and the girls friendship gets tested to the limit. This third part of the book zips by quickly with deception and betrayal and lots of twists and turns. Dionne finds herself in a situation that she had always dreaded, Ce Ce is struggling with her own demons and Alyson is being hailed as the next Kate Moss. Will they work out their troubles and all become friends again? Well, you will have to read it for yourself, but I can assure you that it is a great summer read which will leave you desperate to hear more from the girls and hoping that Carrie Duffy writes a sequel!

Recommended. 4/5 stars.

Diva by Carrie Duffy is published by Harper Collins and is out now. ISBN 978-0-00-742153-4

RRP £7.99 UK available from all good bookshops. Find out more at www.carrieduffy.com

THE BODY COLLECTOR BY **FRANK HINKS**

A great new book for children and parents, ideal for this spooky Halloween season.

Charlie Stench collects bodies and turns the heads into floating skulls with evil powers but in the case of Boris, something went wrong. Boris is not evil at all and all he wants is his body back! He makes a deal with the witch Griselda; if he saves her from being eaten by the evil skulls, she will get his body back for him-but Griselda keeps her fingers crossed so her promise will not count. When Boris and Griselda visit the body collector nothing works out as expected.

A great book that pulls together all the classic elements in a great story to keep children interested, boys especially will love this. Parents will love it for its hidden themes of love and family and girls will love Boris, a character who is easy to identify with and feel for.

Told in a simple style *The Body Collector* is

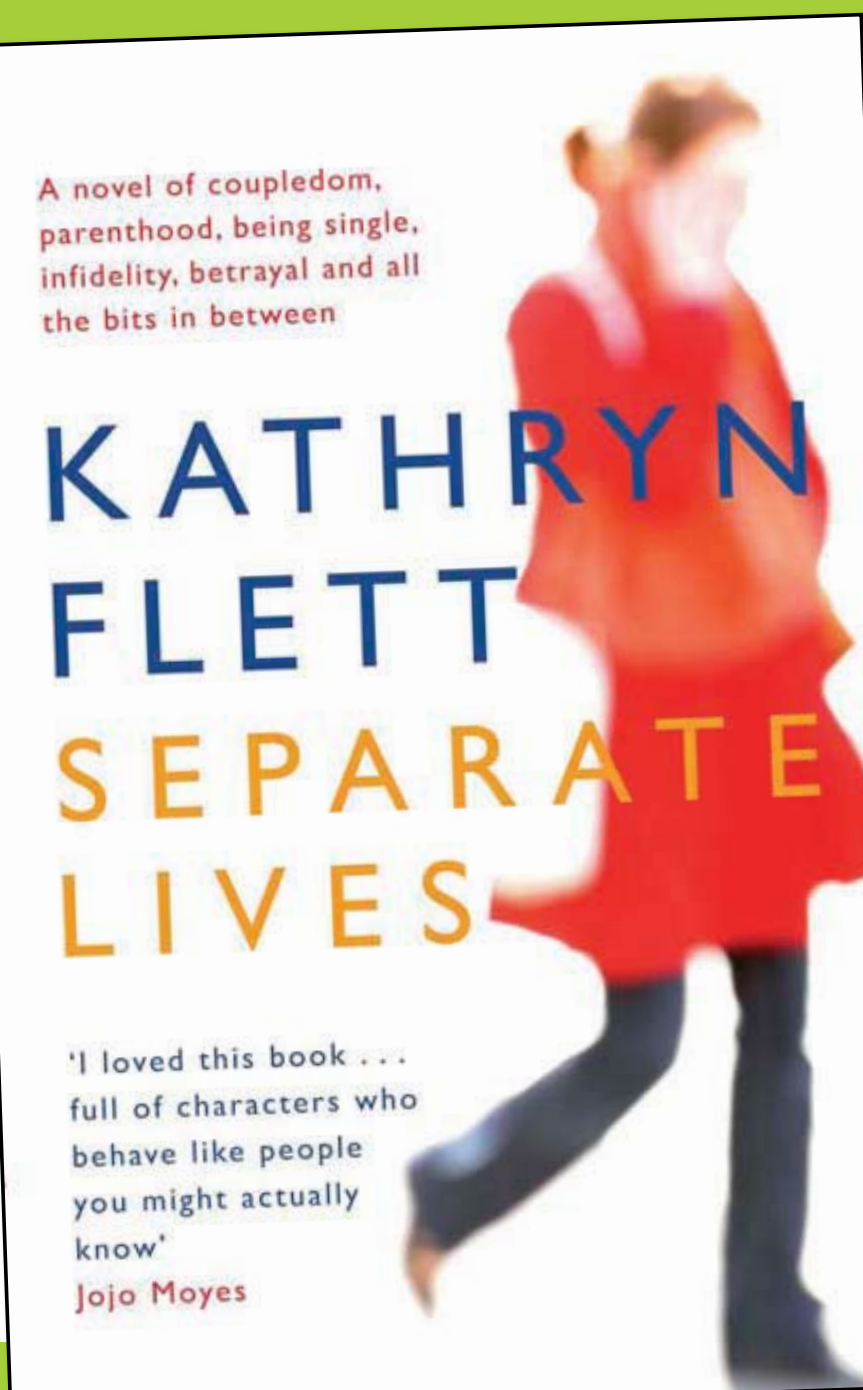
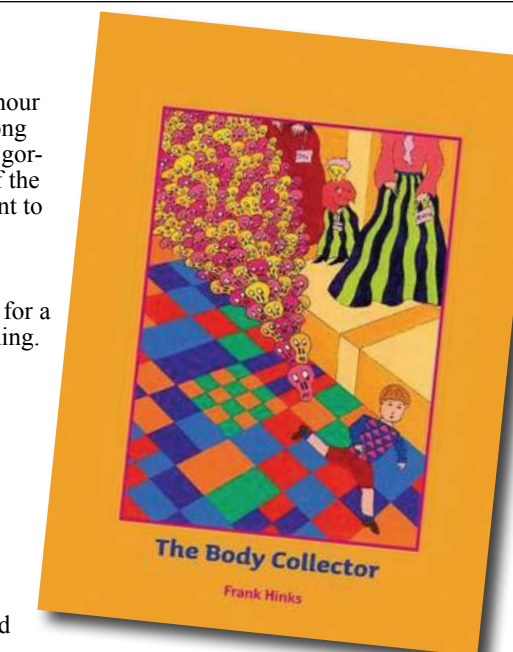
easy to read and has a good mix of dry humour and adventure to keep the story moving along nicely. The illustrations (by the author) are gorgeous. They are bright and literally leap off the page at you, this is a book that you will want to keep and collect.

The Body Collector is number 15 in the Ramion Series Collection and would make for a lovely present for any child who loves reading.

Recommended. 4/5 stars

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Key Ages: 7 upwards
£12.99HB
Published by Perronet Press
79 pages with 36 full colour illustrations
Available from www.perronetpress.com and www.ramion-books.com



'Your partner of ten years and the father of your children receives a text. You happen to see it.'

Reading this on the back page, you know you are in for a good read. It may look like chick-lit, but after reading it I can tell you that although funny in parts, this is no lighthearted, uplifting quick read. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Being at a 'certain' age, with a vaguely similar lifestyle/set up, this could have easily been one of my friends keeping a diary.

Susie and Alex have been together for ten years. Mostly happy with two beautiful children, good jobs and a lovely house in London, a text message leads to misunderstanding and consequences larger than anyone involved could have imagined. It is a very real story of a relationship under pressure in the times we live in. Its main themes are family, divorce, children, clothes and lots of adultery!

Written in a chatty, readable style, narrated by Susie, this is a story of modern day life that most people can relate to on one level or another.

I liked the way that we find out about Alex through his emails to his brother, and Pippa (The dreaded P, in the text message) comes through in a letter to her mother. It is very middle-class, very 'London' - full of people who could and would, live on the same road as you, if you lived somewhere like Notting Hill. Lots of publishers and creative types who most of us would recognise in some guise or another.

To the authors credit she knows what she's talking about! This feels like a very real take on life in our times, when old university friends, once out for a good time, have had the big wedding and christening parties and real life sets in as mid-life approaches. Everyone in the book seems to have had an affair at one point, which annoyed me slightly, but talking to friends, I was (slightly) surprised at how common it was!

All in all, it is pretty heart-breaking. A great read though for a slice of modern life.

4 out of 5 stars.

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