

Gill Perdue on the power of a good twist and her new thriller... By Keeley Ryan

'I'M ALWAYS IN AWE OF PEOPLE

with really good twists'

For Gill Perdue, the idea of becoming a writer was something that was always on her mind. Her new book *When They See Me*, the second instalment in the Shaw and Darmody series, hit shelves earlier this month.

The thriller begins after an au pair disappears in the heart of suburbia. The case gets more complicated when her body shows up, as all eyes are on the only person to witness her abduction: a two-year-old child.

Detective Laura Shaw, an expert witness interviewer, knows that she's needed — but finds herself questioning whether she can continue with her job following the case that nearly broke her.

And while Detective Niamh Darmody, her partner and pal, is on the case, she's struggling without Laura there to rely on.

A second body is discovered, blowing all of the investigative theories out of the water — and Laura and Niamh are in a race against time to find the serial killer before they strike again.

And Gill — who is also a dance teacher — told *Chic* how writing was “always my favourite thing to do” when growing up, but her parents were “very sensibly trying to encourage me to do something that would be a job” after she left school.

She said, “I remember my dad saying, ‘well, if you do teaching, you can write in the afternoons’. Which, in theory, that’s right. But teaching can be exhausting.”

“I never really put the dream away. I love teaching, and particularly reading stories to kids. And I suppose that’s how I got there in the end, because I started by writing stories for children.”

Gill published four books for children, beginning with Adam’s Starling in 2001. The author told how the it was “quite a gritty story”, as she opened up about making the move to writing thrillers.

She said, “I had taught for ten years in a school in a disadvantaged area and before I was a teacher, I had worked on a children’s helpline.”

“My stories, they weren’t really escapist fantasies for kids anyways. They were stories of real kids facing real problems.”

“The thriller, what happened with my first story — it was called *The Interview* and then it got changed to *If I Tell* — was that it had originally started as an attempt at a children’s story where a brother and sister

were, in their minds, escaping a terrible home life full of abuse.

“They did it by inventing this fantasy land and I’d written a kind of adventure story for children.”

“I was about 20,000 words into it when I thought, ‘I couldn’t read this to a class; no parent is going to want their child to read it’. You kind of knew what was happening at home; it was a too bleak.”

“I tried to set it aside and forget it, but the character of Jenny — that’s how that story came out, because the character stayed with me.”

Gill added that *When They See Me* came from a “different beginning”.

The author told how the characters of Shaw and Darmody have become “so real to me”, and she wanted to explore the aftermath of *If I Tell* in the second book — as well as the idea of a killer hiding in plain sight.

She said, “The idea of somebody waiting for the opportunity; waiting there, watching somebody... I feel like sometimes there are people — and there must be people watching, because the crimes are still happening.”

Gill told how it hadn’t initially been the intention to turn Shaw and Darmody’s stories into a series — but that soon changed after she got an agent.

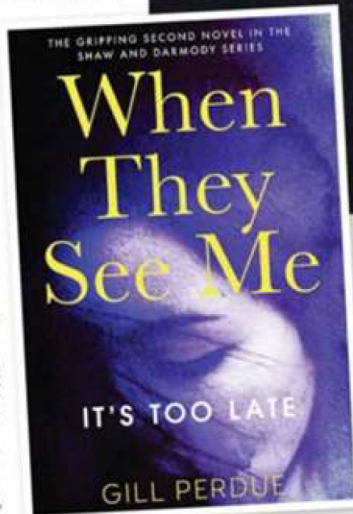
She said, “It’s funny because when I first wrote *If I Tell*, it’s not that I had intended it as a standalone — obviously, I knew you could develop it, but I didn’t have a contract. I was just

writing this story.

“From the moment that there was interest and when I got an agent and she was interested in them, I knew there was so much more [to them]. There was no need for me to kind of big myself up about how I could develop them. To me, they’re so real.”

“And when you get to be my age, you have so much lived experience like their lives — or well, maybe not like their lives as a

HIGH PRAISE: Author Gill Perdue; and (below) her new book, *When They See Me*



Garda.”

When They See Me also explores the pressures to do — and be — it all, and Gill told how she feels happy to be able to “write real women and the real juggling” that happens in day-to-day lives.

She said, “I’m so happy to be in a position to do that, as well — to write real women and the real juggling, and the fact that you have to accept that there isn’t a right answer; you just cannot do it all.”

“You can do a lot of it quite well — or you can do some of it badly, you can trade it off.”

Even if you say, “I’m going to give up the day job, I’m going to stay home full time with my kids”.

“Even then, you might be disappointing the people you work with — maybe you used to be really good at your job. What about your colleagues? What about your friends?”

“There are casualties along the way, no matter what you do — it takes a long time to realise that.”

“And I don’t know, maybe because we’re brought up through school and such, you always sort of think that ‘if I plan this, and make my lists, I’ll sort of toddle along’. But you can’t. It’s chaos, because life throws curveballs all the time.”

Gill told how it was easier to return to Shaw and Darmody for the second book, but there is one particular difficulty.

She said, “The only difficulty now — and

I’m actually working on the third — is that there’s so much more I want for them.”

“I don’t know if I’d known I was going to be doing a series, would I have done a triple first person narrative?”

“It’s quite a lot of writing and you don’t want to repeat yourself, but at the same time you want to propel the story forward. But you also don’t want to take a big digression into someone’s life and then lose the thrilling part of the thriller.”

“I’m learning more as I go along about that and how you do that.”

“But it was definitely easier to go back, because at least you have two people — two characters — that you know so well.”

Gill told how she usually goes into her books with an idea of where she wants the story to end and a “good climatic scene” — but plotting too far ahead can be difficult, especially with the twists and turns.

She recalled, “Even the other day in book three, I had a twist that I knew I had — and then, I don’t know where it came from, but I was doing something and suddenly went, ‘oh, I could do that twist’.”

“I saw another little twist I could add to the twist. I was very excited, I’m always in awe of people with really good twists — especially now, because it’s really hard to have a twist because nearly every twist has been done.”

And with more and more tales making the move from the page to the screen, Gill shared her dream cast for Shaw and Darmody.

She said, “I’m thinking Saoirse Ronan or Charlie Murphy for Laura Shaw — and Aislinn McGinnity or Niamh Algar for Niamh. I may as well put it out there in the universe.” ■

When They See Me by Gill Perdue, published by Sandycove, is available now.