



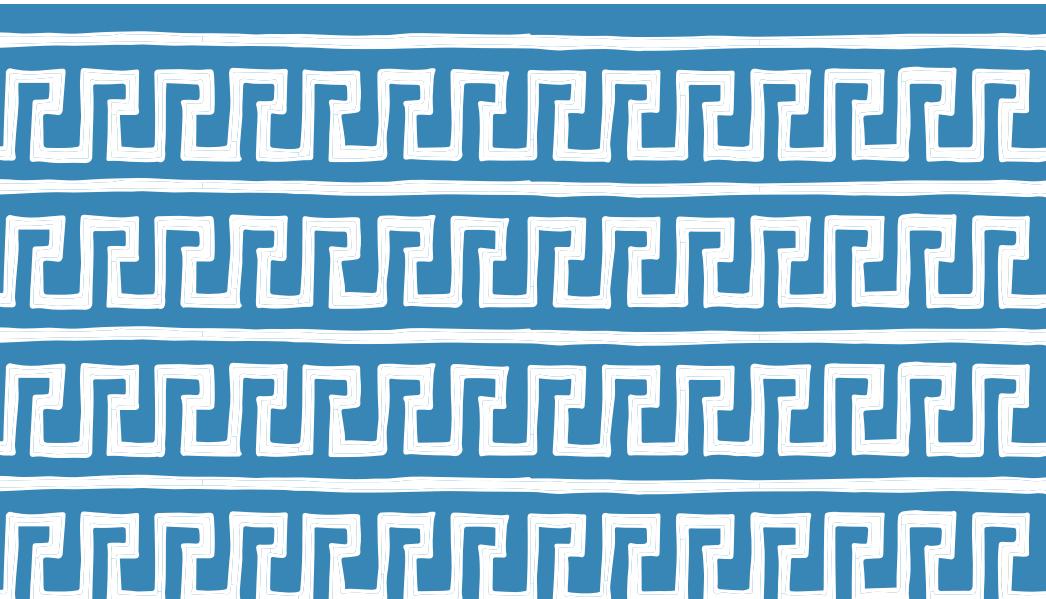
swimming lessons

Jerwood / Arvon Mentoring Scheme: Anthology Volume Four

Fiction: Sarah Hegarty // Jessica Mitchell // Stephanie Scott

Poetry: Samantha Jackson // Niall Campbell // Paul Stephenson

Playwriting: Grace Cleary // German Munoz // Yvonne Smith



Swimming Lessons

Jerwood/Arvon
Mentoring Scheme | ANTHOLOGY
VOLUME FOUR

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Paul Stephenson

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Contents

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 7 | Foreword, by Ruth Borthwick |
| 8 | Forward, by Shonagh Manson |
| 10 | Jessica Mitchell from <i>Sylvia Said</i> |
| 28 | Niall Campbell <i>Six Poems</i> |
| 36 | Grace Cleary from <i>The Hitchhiker</i> |
| 50 | Sarah Hegarty from <i>Beyond the Forest</i> |
| 70 | Paul Stephenson <i>Passwords</i> and other poems |
| 78 | German Munoz from <i>Open</i> |
| 100 | Stephanie Scott from <i>The Sentence</i> |
| 118 | Samantha Jackson <i>Ruskin Park</i> and other poems |
| 126 | Yvonne Smith from <i>Eels</i> |
| 145 | Sarah Hegarty, Jessica Mitchell, Yvonne Smith, Paul Stephenson from <i>The Shed</i> |
| 164 | Acknowledgements |

The publication of *Swimming Lessons* is a milestone in our mission to give talented writers at Arvon an opportunity to develop their writing through an intense year of mentoring. Nine writers were selected from an open submission of 230 writers who had attended an Arvon course in 2012. Mentor writers Patience Agbabi, Nikita Lalwani and playwright Amy Rosenthal chose these artists not only for their ability to write, but also for what they, the professionals, felt they could bring to each budding writer at this particular moment in their journey.

Over their year together each writer has six contact points with their mentor to receive helpful feedback on their work, and the year is bookended by a week's retreat at an Arvon centre to support the development of their writing. The year builds to a crescendo with the publication of the anthology and a live showcase at Arvon's dynamic London home, Free Word.

We are constantly seeking to refresh the scheme, informed by our learning from the previous year's cohort. An innovation this year was an opportunity to meet with leading literary agent Simon Trewin, and discuss the best way forward as writers seeking publication. We are very grateful to Simon who gave his time for free.

It is our great good fortune to have as partners the Jerwood Charitable Foundation, who understand well the value of mentorship to emerging artists. Shonagh Manson and Jon Opie are far-sighted in their steadfast support for the scheme.

Now the time has come for me to hand over to the writers. And to you, to read for yourself the fabulous work they have produced.

Ruth Borthwick
Chief Executive | Arvon

This anthology is the fourth volume published through the Jerwood/Arvon Mentoring Scheme; testament that time does fly when it comes to good things. To date this programme has supported 36 new writers, all of whom caught the attention of their mentors with their strong, individual writing and potential.

That strength (of voice and of character) is palpable in Swimming Lessons; there is so much life experience between these pages, many varied viewpoints and perspectives. Such is the beauty of Arvon's mission, which we share; to cultivate creativity and allow a diverse range of voices to reach their full potential. The Jerwood/Arvon Mentoring Scheme provides a wonderful structure for emerging writers, providing not only critical mentoring support but the time and context to build a powerful set of peer relations. This year those new relationships were explored creatively too, through an online writing process, with thanks to Chris Meade and if:book UK's support. You can read the results of this collaboration, The Shed, at the end of this anthology. It's a great example of what may not have been without the Scheme.

It's my pleasure to thank mentors Patience Agbabi, Nikita Lalwani and Amy Rosenthal for committing themselves so fully and achieving that special balance of challenge and support. Ruth Borthwick and Suzie Jones at Arvon, and the team at Totleigh Barton, continue to turn over every last stone in making sure the Scheme is the best it can be, and I'm extremely grateful for their care. And lastly again, I would like to thank and congratulate each of the writers taking part this year, whose new work you can read here.

**Shonagh Manson
Director | Jerwood Charitable Foundation**

‘The Jerwood/Arvon Mentoring Scheme is unique in bookending the year at an Arvon Centre, enabling the poets, novelists and playwrights to learn from each other. Throughout the year my poets gained confidence and momentum in privileging their writing, from both the 1-2-1 meetings and being part of a cross-genre writing community. It was an absolute pleasure to mentor on this scheme.’

Patience Agbabi
Mentor | Poetry

Jessica Mitchell was born in Lancaster in 1983, and now lives in Bristol. She studied Drama with English at Manchester University and then Creative Writing at Sheffield Hallam, where she specialised in poetry and script. *Sylvia Said* is her first novel.

Jessica Mitchell | from *Sylvia Said*

One

The problem was that the gulls had begun to sound desperate. It was nesting season. Every day when the spring sun rose they swarmed on the flat roof of Rachel's Rest B&B and stamped and stamped as though they wanted to destroy it. Never mind that it was their home too, never mind their own nests and their little eggs, all cosseted and warm; all they wanted was to see rafters and rubble and shattered tiles, to call out as the roof fell, as if they too were falling.

The guests were not happy. Congregating at reception, huddling together as if for warmth, as if the roof were already gone, they glittered with the rage of the righteous. Some of them were bird lovers. Some had come to the island with the express purpose of watching birds, only now they were too tired to do so. Those with bedrooms under the roof were suffering the worst, but sleeplessness seemed to be catching. Room 1 was on the ground floor, next to the kitchen, and yet the couple in there had snatched only an hour or two of sleep. The man in Room 2 had managed "nothing"; he tapped his binoculars to punctuate his distress. "Nothing at all."

This man had known Carrie's mother, Rachel, and, like so many others, had come back to the B&B over and over, sending Rachel Christmas cards, baseball caps, shells, pebbles, badges and buttons. When Rachel died it had taken a whole day to unpin every beer mat, birthday card and sachet of sugar from the walls of her private rooms, now Carrie's private rooms, and this man was looking at Carrie like he knew what she'd done. He'd glimpsed somehow, as the fire door swung slowly shut, the

blank walls in Carrie's corner of the house. Blank but pock-marked by pins and ageing Blue Tack.

When Carrie had checked him in, only yesterday, he had offered his condolences in a soft voice, unable to meet her eye, and she'd tried to be grateful. He was sorry, he really was, they all were, guests and islanders, suppliers and visitors, but she couldn't bear the way he smiled as he said it, as though he was giving her a present; a heavy present that he expected her to like, and which she had to shoulder up the stairs along with all his bags and his coat, tucked in the crook of her arm.

Yesterday he might have helped her with the birds, if she'd asked him. Held the ladder straight for her, or gone up on the roof himself. Now it was too late. He was tired and disappointed, and looking at her with such hard-edged expectancy that she almost wanted to be clinging to a window ledge while the ladder wobbled and the ground loomed and swayed beneath her.

She was surprised to find that getting up the first few rungs was easy. It was windy though, and the gulls were watching her over the rim of the roof: peering, like judges. The closer she got to them, the harder the wind seemed to blow, cold on her face and her forehead, cold on the sweat there.

Concentrate on the texture of the birds' sounds: the clucks that became calls, the different notes that made up the mass. Focus on the wall in front, the white wall that she had seen sandblasted once, as a child, and recognised some sort of art in it and told her mother, and her mother's friends and some of the guests, that a sandblaster was what she wanted to be when she grew up.

Her parents had only bought the place because of the extension. There had been other places available, cheaper

places that Carrie could still remember seeing, even though she could only have been about six. Neighbouring hotels with tiny attic bedrooms and picturesque pitched roofs where the gulls perched, but never rested.

The extension had given them extra capacity though. Enough to make it viable.

All the advice said that when she reached the roof she had to disturb the nesting sites and remove the eggs. The advice also said don't do it yourself, but her father had done it himself, right up until he couldn't get up the stairs anymore, and he had never removed a nest of a different species by accident and been prosecuted, or been injured by angry gulls. How he had got the nests down was more of a mystery, as was what he had done with them afterwards, but she would work all that out, just as he had.

She was almost level with the second floor windows. If she fell now she wouldn't be able to tell Mark about her dream about the hallway: all the dark varnish stripped away; her mother alive again, admiring it.

The curtains drawn across Bedroom 5 didn't quite meet in the middle. The bedspread was still smooth and clean, the tea tray untouched: like something in a case at a museum.

If she hooked the window open the nests could go on the ledge. The guest obviously wasn't going to turn up now – it was nearly three – and it would mean she could use both hands to get down the rest of the ladder.

Were birds' nests lucky? Had she read that somewhere? Maybe it would be like blessing the room.

"Hello?" called a voice, from somewhere beneath her.
"Hello!"

The missing guest had red hair, not a single piece of luggage and introduced herself as Sylvia. She was wearing a long black mackintosh that tied around the middle, black, straight-legged trousers and short man-ish shoes that laced up at the front. Her hair, which was very long, kept blowing into her eyes and over her face.

“I’m so sorry to get you down,” Sylvia said, as Carrie navigated the last few rungs. “And for being late.” She paused as they got inside the lobby, pushing her hair back over her forehead. “Is it the drains?”

“Sorry?”

“The ladder,” she said, companionably, as they climbed the stairs.

“No, I...”

No sense telling her. She might weigh in with the rest.

“No. I just wanted to clean the windows a bit.”

“Oh, do they need it? I’m not very good at noticing things like that.” She laughed, following Carrie into her room, where she exclaimed at the size of the bed, and the wardrobe and the sea view.

“It’s very sombre isn’t it?” she said, pushing back the velvet curtains and peering out past the ladder into the distance. “Very grey. I like it though, do you?”

Carrie smiled, but it was not a question she had been asked before and impossible to answer in a few breezy sentences. Not without reference to her childhood, and what it had been like coming back, leaving her life in Devon behind: the mess of the inheritance.

Probably better to deliver a passionate defence of the place, of the kind she had made in her last job, where it had been easy to be indignant when other people were proud about never having been north of Birmingham; when they asked whether

everyone on the island knew each other's business or married their cousins. She had been hot-headed, then, flouncing off to the kitchen where rage was replaced with regret: everyone else was so still and calm and spoke about their hometowns with such smoothness and irony.

The locals were never hot-headed. It was never a question of like or dislike. Even Mark, who loved the island, who knew that the pub had once been the shop and the beach had once been half a mile further up, never really talked about it. Though they had only been on a few dates. Perhaps that would change.

She was getting distracted. She still hadn't answered the question. How many minutes had passed while she'd sluiced through her thoughts, abandoning one after another, like channels on a bad TV night? Just say something straightforward, say, "Yes, yes I do."

But they had been quiet for so long now. Perhaps Sylvia had forgotten the question. She was studying the view with her head on one side. Her shoulders were broad for someone so slender, broad and globed, like a sail full of air.

Say, "Not especially." Say you have something to do downstairs.

Her mother had known how to crack open silences elegantly, to come back to an old joke, or tell a fresh one: to use her surroundings or someone else in the room. Known how to make silence useful.

"Can I... erm... get you anything?" Carrie tried.

Sylvia shook her head. "I'm thinking of buying here," she said, tapping the glass as if this passed for some sort of explanation. "I'm glad you're here. I was worried it would be full of retired types."

Again Carrie was silenced, but this time she felt elated, and when the gulls started up their crowing again it seemed almost fitting.

Would they be friends? Would Sylvia bring other friends, other guests: writers come to rest, to paint; young couples come to lie in bed all day?

“Well, someone likes living here,” Sylvia said, shouting over the fierce crescendo. “You know what, I’m a bit embarrassed to ask you this, but there is something that I need.”

Carrie had never taken a guest into her own rooms before. Her mother had been dreadful for it, leaving her door wide open so that anyone might peer in wanting another towel, a fresh sheet or directions to the beach. Carrie had not wanted that, would not have it, and yet it was immediately easier between her and Sylvia in her own space. And plain though it was, unadorned as yet with prints or posters, Sylvia was admiring of it, of the light, and the high ceilings and the big windows, in a way that made Carrie excited.

“Sorry about this,” Sylvia said, as Carrie laid the contents of her wardrobe out across the bed, “I don’t know what the hell the ferry did with my case. No one seemed to know.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Carrie said, stalling over whether to add the dress she had worn to a recent christening to the pile.

“That’s lovely,” Sylvia said, noticing. “I love all shades of blue, don’t you? Sky colours.”

“Not here.”

Sylvia laughed, “I like grey too.” She picked up a green t-shirt with a campervan on the front that Carrie had brought from a festival. It was faded now and splattered with paint. “You’re such a slip of a thing though. I hope I can get into something.”

Sylvia was also a slip of a thing, more of a slip than Carrie was, probably, and the plain lines of her existing outfit reminded Carrie of pebbles on the beach, smooth and clean; and so she delved deeper into her wardrobe, hunting for something more fitting, but when she turned around Sylvia had stripped down to her bra and was pulling the green t-shirt over her head.

Flustered Carrie swung back into the wardrobe and began to pull out her shoes. Sylvia had not asked for shoes.

"This is great," Sylvia said, and there was a rustling as she turned about in front of Carrie's mirror. "See?"

It was true, Sylvia did look great in it, the red of her hair seemed to work with rather than against the green, but Carrie did not have time to say this because they were interrupted by a knock at the door. And then, as they looked at each other like conspirators in a game of hide-and-seek, another knock. Sharper this time.

It was Mrs Smithson, a white-haired woman who had been supplying Rachel with homemade soap for the guests' bathrooms for ten years. Originally from Edinburgh, Mrs Smithson's soft accent had thickened so much over the years that she sounded more local than the locals, which was perhaps why she was so intent on their chatting in Rachel's old rooms.

'No, no,' Carrie said, firmly, shutting the door on Sylvia and manoeuvring Mrs Smithson down the stairs to the kitchen, where they usually did business.

"A friend, hen?" Mrs Smithson asked, laying out each square of soap on the kitchen table as if she were creating a mosaic.

"What?"

"The lady?"

"A guest."

Mrs Smithson sniffed: "You know there's a ladder outside?"

“Yes.”

“Rachel always got Bill out for any ladder work.”

This was good, well not good exactly, but the right hook on which Carrie could pin her announcement.

“Loose tiles, is it?”

“It’s the birds.”

“You have to be careful you know, they swoop.”

Carrie cleared her throat, trying to steel herself, but when she spoke, told Mrs Smithson that there was no need to get everything out this time, it came out quieter than she meant it to.

“I know you just get what your mother always got,” Mrs Smithson said, shaking her head and sniffing one of the squares absently, “but the thing is I’ve got some new bits that I want to show you. Lavender, rose, geranium.”

“No,” Carrie said, louder now. “I mean I’m not going to buy any this time. I can’t. I can’t afford it.”

“I’ll do you a discount, as a favour to your mother—”

“—Even with a discount, I can’t afford it. I’m going to have to go to the cash and carry in future.”

“You’re full, aren’t you?” said Mrs Smithson, leaning on the edge of the table. “No vacancies?”

Carrie nodded dumbly.

“Your mother was always very supportive of local business, you know. Very supportive. She made such a success of this place.”

Carrie picked up a piece of toast from a ketchup-stained breakfast plate. It was dry and cold, and it stuck to the roof of her mouth.

“Better that you shut it up and rattle around here by yourself than carry on if your heart’s not in it,” Mrs Smithson

said, sweeping the soaps off the table into her carrier bag. “I mean that in a kind way.”

Twenty minutes later Carrie was sitting where Mrs Smithson had left her, contemplating the breakfast things and the many shades and shapes of kindness, when Sylvia ambled in. She was wearing a pair of Carrie’s jeans underneath her mac and Carrie’s favourite gold high-tops. Lots of kids on the island had the same pair, so Carrie only ever wore them indoors, on her days off. Sylvia looked better than the kids did, cooler: even the oversized sunglasses couldn’t diminish this.

“You alright?” Sylvia said, glancing around the kitchen. She screwed up her nose, “Smells a bit... floral in here.” She paused, “I’m off for a walk, down the prom. What about you?”

“Better get back to the windows.”

“Want a hand?”

“Oh no.”

“You sure?” Sylvia smiled, touching the neck of the t-shirt.
“I’m not great with heights, but...”

“No, no,” Carrie said. “You go.”

This time Carrie got right up to the roof, but even though it was flat and wide and sturdy, sturdier than the ladder, she could not bring herself to climb onto it.

The nests, fat, untidy things like scribbles in a margin, were a few metres away. The gulls were on the other side of the roof, their backs turned.

To her left the sea, flecked by tiny dots. To her right, rows and rows of rooftops, going on and on in miniature.

The front door slammed. The ladder shook.

It was Sylvia, striding down the drive. From this height, she might almost have been Carrie. A more care-free version.

Carrie forced herself to inch one foot over the guttering onto the roof. The contrast between the tiles and the rung, one solid and wide, the other narrow, wobbling slightly, was excruciating. Excruciating and then useful. It was no longer comfortable to cling to the ladder. Let go. Let. Go.

She landed on the tiles with a thud to rival the gulls' stamping, but they did not look around. It was only as she began to walk briskly towards their nests, wishing all the while that there were railings around the edge of the roof, something solid to separate her from all that sky, that the gulls waddled a few inches in her direction. There was no swooping, though. No shrieking or screaming or diving for her head. They only watched her: stared like a couple of sentries.

Each nest was surprisingly heavy, the eggs inside as white as bone.

One of the gulls began to wail, looking about him, up at the sky, at the other gull who had a gammy foot, all gnarled and scabby. Maybe that one was the mother. Maybe neither her foot nor her voice worked.

Carrie put the nest down on the edge of the roof. The wailing was getting louder. In the distance, other gulls, advancing across the sky.

How to get onto the ladder, backwards? Surely not? She wouldn't see the rungs, would have to feel for them. Better to go forwards. That was right, wasn't it? Only no one did it that way.

The birds were getting closer. Swooping down over the rooftops of the next-door-but-one hotel.

She was a kid again, stuck at the top of the slide, dangling from a rope in the gym, thinking too much. Getting in her own way.

A gull dipped low over her head, its wings outstretched, its eyes shiny as glass.

Leave it. Leave the fucking nest.

Back on terra firma Carrie's hands were still sweaty as she gripped the phone. There was a red notebook in Rachel's old desk. Full of recipes and addresses and the family trees of various guests. It had been invaluable when Carrie had arranged the funeral. She hadn't liked to look at it since, it reminded her too much of those first few difficult days, but sure enough, there in her mother's spiky capital letters was Bill's number, and beside the number the words "Gulls" and "£100.00". Bill did not recognise this figure though. It was out of date, he said. Things had changed.

"You want me on that roof then it's gonna be £250.00. The council would charge you double that."

If the figure was out of date then her mother would have changed it, that was who she was. Organised. Meticulous.

"£250.00 for each visit that is. You'll be needing three. This month. And next, May, and June. Otherwise they just set up camp again."

She hadn't been dead long enough for it date. Three months, perhaps. Three and a half. Her dad two years, almost to the day.

"This is specialist work. You can't expect me to charge cash and carry prices."

The sharp edge in his voice was clear.

"Cash and carry?" she asked, coolly, imagining his hands going up to his chest, defensive. His fat palms.

"That's right love. Down on the mainland. Cheap place, or so everyone thinks."

She put the phone down without saying goodbye. It was five o'clock. Three hours before she had to be ready for her date

with Mark: two until she could retire to her own rooms; one left of light. She wanted to paint her nails, put a wash on, deal with the remnants of the breakfast things. She ought to make some sandwiches too, just in case anyone rang down for one this evening, while she was out. She could leave them on the table in the breakfast room. A sort of apology.

She could leave a couple out for the gulls too. Deal with the nests tomorrow, when the light was better.

“Excuse me,” a voice called from reception. It was the man who had known her mother. “I’m leaving.” He paused as she scrambled to get up, and then spoke louder, shouted down the hall. “I’m going to stay down the road, at The Thistle.”

He would not stay. No matter what she promised. She had dealt with it, she said. He frowned. She corrected herself, *was* dealing, was dealing with it.

He was holding his suitcase as if it were a child, pressing it against his chest. They were still up there, he said. He could hear them. So could the other guests, who were discouraged, angry: some might even follow him to The Thistle. He blinked. Crossed his arms over his suitcase. Was she aware that The Thistle had a pitched roof? A steeply pitched roof.

She nodded as she processed his refund.

He was sorry that Rachel was dead, but this was his holiday. His only holiday.

She held the door open for him, followed him out onto the gravel. He pressed his hand over her arm for a moment. Squeezed it lightly. Then went out of his way to get around the foot of the ladder.

She waited until he got to the end of the drive before she turned around. There was a sob rolling around in her chest,

like a marble. She opened her mouth to release it, but it wouldn't come.

This was how Sylvia, returning from her walk, found her. Clinging to the ladder, trying to cry.

"I feel like a thief," Sylvia said, half way down from the roof, a nest under her arm. "No, like a killer." She paused. "There's no way we can leave them there?"

On the ground Carrie shook her head: "They'll only get noisier. It's nesting season."

Sylvia groaned. She had groaned quite a bit as she moved up and down the ladder. Had been vocal about her fear of heights, her discomfort about taking the nests. At first Carrie had been irritated, worried that the guests would hear, angry that help should always be so hard worn, and then she had done a bit of huffing and puffing of her own: her input to Sylvia's guttural melody. It was a hard job, after all, and it was high up. Why shouldn't they moan, make a fuss?

"You sure you are alright?" she asked as Sylvia passed her the nest.

Sylvia sniffed: "Good for me, isn't it. I was afraid of dogs as a child. Petrified. Then I got stuck in a house with one." She grinned. "I loved them after that."

The first nest, resting on the grass next to the budding daffodils, had only contained one egg. This, the second nest, had four: great globes of white with thin, still-forming shells that were slightly translucent.

"Probably a delicacy somewhere," Sylvia said, pulling one out and turning it over in her hands. "London. For a tenner each. Hard boiled."

Carrie was not sure about getting them out like that. They had done enough disturbing already. Sylvia must have sensed this somehow because she said, “I won’t drop it.”

“I know, but...”

Carrie gestured that Sylvia should pass the egg and then tucked it back inside the nest. There was a crisp packet in there too, and the lid off a milk bottle.

“What are you going to do with them?” Sylvia asked. She was breathing hard. Her hair all over her face again.

“I don’t know.”

Sylvia looked up at the darkening sky. “We could take them down to the beach? Lay them out on the sand. Somewhere the gulls could find them?”

Carrie looked at her watch. It had taken so long to get the nests down that she hadn’t accomplished anything else, but she liked the idea. Felt a pull at the thought of spending more time with Sylvia. She was so right to suggest something solemn and ceremonial.

“I could do with a drink actually,” Sylvia continued, her tone bright. “We could take some wine down there, for afterwards. Couple of torches. Picnic?”

She sounded like she meant it, but it was careless too. Carefree.

“I’ve got this date,” Carrie said, half-wondering if it could be rearranged, but Sylvia was quick to interrupt.

“Another time then,” she said. “No pressure.”

They carried the nests into the back garden, shoulder-to-shoulder. Sylvia seemed shy suddenly, asking quiet questions about the date, listening intently to Carrie’s answers even as they concentrated on levering their bundles onto the grass.

Carrie was half-grateful to have her hands full. She was bristling with an uncontrollable urge to push her arm through Sylvia's, lean her head on her shoulder. It was so long since she had had a conversation like this, with someone close to her own age, someone real, standing beside her, not miles away, like her few friends. Crackling voices over the phone.

She could feel her voice getting higher and more brittle. Feel herself wanting to tell Sylvia how difficult it was to find anyone on the island, lover or friend. How nice Mark was, but older, divorced. Not massively into sex.

"I'd better go around the front," Sylvia said, as they left the nests behind and headed for the house. "No really," she continued as Carrie tried to insist that she should come through the kitchen. "Have a lovely evening."

"Right," Carrie said, startled by the suddenness of Sylvia's departure. Perhaps she should have said all that stuff, been more open. "Thanks for your help," she tried, as an afterthought, but Sylvia did not look back, only raised her left arm in a kind of salute and then disappeared into the darkness.

Niall Campbell grew up on the island of South Uist, one of the Western Isles of Scotland. He has been a recipient of an Eric Gregory Award and won the Poetry London Competition in 2013. His first collection, Moontide, was produced in 2014 and is a Poetry Book Society Recommendation.

Niall Campbell | *Six Poems*

Crossing

Say that the song was never written
would it have settled there, I wonder,
on that far shore of the tongue's river,
singing itself, stubbing its heels
into the bank that is pure air?

Or would it wait for further passage?
Stood on the quay so long until
a cargo of spit and bone and light.

Am I some whistling ferryman,
trailing my right hand in the wake?

Kid

This is it, the true time, when little matters;
when the sun's dropped so low behind the hill
that the light fails, and doesn't mind its failing;

and art is just the kid by a now pink river
kicking stones out to mid-stream. Hey kid, dreamer,
here's a road and a tune, just whistle out

to dusk-fall – sometimes, the song carries; sometimes,
the shadow casts out longer than the man.

A Seal-Skin Tale

My Version

This time there is no rockpooled shore,
no sealskin and no sealskin girl,
and never will the man make strides
across the sands that are not there.

This time, the story has not changed
despite there being no harr or thatch
or bracken – no strand, no wedding bed
for skin or shadows to lie on.

In fact, this time, there is no sun
to rise on anything, there's just
the sea and just the dark. I do
not know what story this is telling.

Advice on Love, Over Whisky

Northerner, I say never mind
that you've stood there with a sail
and not received one kiss of wind;
and your rain-water pail

has not been touched by rain;
distil, then, in a closed barrel:
be malt, be smoke, be the threshed grain
turned dark as caramel.

Cyprus Avenue

for A

You never walked
the railway sleepers,
I'm sure. Or drank
this cherry wine

that's sung about.
But on the day
you died – I heard
this song again

and thought of you
tipping it back,
draining the bottle
that couldn't be drained

and travelling this
long route – the music
stopping, a music
carrying on.

Concerning Song/Silence

Do you remember when he wrote
his weathered book of joy – and out

went the desk-lights above our own
thin books of shame, all wick and smoke,

and at no loss. For a moment it
was simple: an ink house, an ink

tree, blown to leaf, and the strange bird,
joy, shivering in the inked gorse.

Then, the head gathered some of what
the heart already knew of quiet:

the hush, the burr, the meadow-weed,
that this is all, and this enough.

Grace Cleary grew up in Glasgow. She has a family who, between them, provided her with nine grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. When her children were self-sufficient she completed her Social Work qualification. She then obtained a Practice Teaching diploma and a BA Honours degree. All this resulted in a lifelong hunger for learning. Consequently, on the day that she retired, she applied for a Creative Writing course at Edinburgh University. Last year she was chosen, from 630 applicants from all over the world, as one of 50 emerging playwrights – ‘The Traverse 50’, formed to celebrate Traverse Theatre’s 50th anniversary. In spring 2014 she recently collaborated with Liz Lochhead, the Scottish Makar (Poet Laureate), and Tom Leonard, on a play which was performed in the Traverse, Oran Mor and The Barony theatres. During the mentoring year she completed two full-length plays - but her greatest achievement will always be her children.

Grace Cleary | from *The Hitchhiker*

CHARACTERS

GUS (46) TRUCK DRIVER

MALI (17) GIRL (*the hitchhiker*)

SCENE 1

Motorway café (1)

In a greasy spoon motorway café a heavy set, unshaven middle-aged man (GUS), wearing grubby jeans, a black vest and a red tartan shirt sits alone at a formica table/booth, hugging a white mug of tea. On the table is a plate with the remnants of a fried breakfast. A young girl (MALI), small and slight, wearing denim shorts, a white vest and a red tartan shirt approaches the man. She stops at the table and stares at him. The man puts the mug down on the table but does not look up.

MALI I like your shirt mister.

GUS piss off.

MALI you going to London mister?

GUS go away.

MALI please mister?

GUS get lost.

MALI please?

GUS fuck this (*pushes his plate away*). Who sent for you?

MALI nobody, but I came anyway.

(*Mali sits down*)

GUS who asked you to sit down?

MALI nobody, but I sat down anyway.

GUS (*tries not to laugh*) cheeky wee upstart.

MALI so hello tartan twin, pleased to meet you.

(*Mali points at his shirt and then at her own. She tries to shake his hand but he backs away*)

GUS lay off me.

MALI come on Dad.

GUS I'm not your fucking dad.

MALI no, but you could be, if you like?

GUS shut up, you... you...

MALI only kidding mister, only kidding.

GUS then go away and leave me alone.

(*Mali kneels up on the chair and leans forward*)

GUS watch those chairs. They tip up.

MALI see, you would be a good dad.

GUS I AM NOT YOUR FUCKING DAD, LEAVE ME ALONE.

MALI I cant. Us meeting here was meant to be.

(Gus stares at her, stands up, turns away and mutter to himself under his breath)

GUS get shot of her. Get shot of her.

MALI what is it. Please, please sit down.

(Gus sits down. Mali rests her elbows on the table, cups her hands around her face, leans forward and stares at Gus)

GUS will you stop looking at me?

MALI you can't abandon me, Daddy, Dad... mister?

GUS shut up. I'm not your fucking daddy, you fucking brat. If I was, I would...

(Gus lifts his knife and bangs it on the table)

MALI shake the living daylights out of me?

(Gus stands up and tries to leave)

GUS I have to go.

MALI please, please, mister. Don't go.

(Gus looks around him uneasily and sits down again)

GUS what age are you?

MALI eighteen.

GUS yeah, pants on fire.

MALI I am mister.

GUS do you know how dangerous hitchhiking is? It's stupid.

MALI I'm smart.

GUS do your folks know where you are?

MALI they don't care.

GUS what?

MALI my folks don't care. They don't care what I do or where I go. They don't.

GUS Do you not have a dad?

MALI take me with you mister.

GUS go home, go home (softly) wee girl.

MALI I can't mister. I can't go home.

(Gus mutters under his breath)

GUS get out of here. GO.

(Gus stands up, Mali grabs his hand. He pushes her away)

MALI okay, I know you're not my dad. I'm not a wee girl. I can look after myself. I just need a lift. From you. We must travel together.

GUS what do you mean?

MALI we were meant to meet like this.

(*Mali looks like she will cry*)

GUS stop that (*Gus looks around*) Stop. People are looking at us.

MALI do you care?

GUS yes I care I can't stand them looking at me. They don't know...

MALI I do. I know who you are mister.

GUS fuck off. You don't or you wouldn't be here.

(*Gus walks to the door*)

MALI DON'T LEAVE ME DAD.

(*Mali grabs his shirt*)

MALI I'm coming with you.

(*Gus looks round him frantically*)

GUS let go of my shirt. (*Gus tugs at his shirt. It rips*) Somebody will phone the police. You win, okay?

MALI so I'm coming with you. Yes?

GUS yes. I said yes. Come on, for Christ's sake.

MALI you're a good man.

GUS is that what you think you know (*Gus sticks his face in hers*) is it?

MALI you won't regret it mister.

(*Gus stops at the doorway and stares back at her*)

GUS no, but (beat) you will.

(*They both walk into the night*)

SCENE 4

Truck stopped in Motorway 2 car park.

Sun is shining and Gus is smiling to himself.

MALI you are too cheerful. Too nice.

GUS am I?

MALI you are going to leave me here?

GUS I never said that.

MALI that's your plan.

GUS look at all the trucks. You could hitch a lift no bother, smart ass.

MALI Right. I'm going into the gents to pee.

GUS carry on stupid. You're all mouth. They'll eat you alive.

MALI maybe it's you they'll eat alive. A wee lass like me, screaming and pointing at you.

GUS shut up, shut up (*Gus puts his hands over his ears*) don't do this. I'll sort it. I wouldn't palm you off with anyone. You'll be safe with Jake, he likes your music. He's cool, got a nice truck. Newer than mine. You can trust him. He's got a missus too. She loves him. Lucky man. Not many of them.

(*Gus leaves the truck and sits on a bench close to the toilets. Mali sits beside him*)

MALI I like you better. You do like me?

GUS no. You're creepy.

MALI because I can read people?

GUS read people. You must think my head buttons up the back.

MALI I told you that you had a daughter my age

GUS just a guess.

MALI will I guess some more.

GUS go on then.

MALI ask me a question.

GUS what was I before I was a trucker?

MALI you were an odd-job man.

GUS eh. How the hell...?

MALI you were the DIYMAN.

GUS shit. How? You've seen my van?

MALI no.

GUS somebody told you?

MALI no.

GUS how do you know then?

MALI because I know you.

GUS okay wee girl. You're right. I am the DIYMAN. I work alone. Mostly at night. Nobody knows me. If you did you wouldn't be here wee lass. You wouldn't be here. You haven't a clue.

(Mali stands up and goes into the woman's toilet. Gus leans back, closes his eyes and begins to breath heavily. He draws a cross in the air. Mali returns and sits down)

MALI I'm back. Now what were you trying to say to me before?

GUS I thought you knew everything? I think you're a bluffer. What jobs did I like doing best?

MALI electrics?

GUS wrong.

MALI plumbing?

GUS some guesser you. Wrong again.

MALI painting?

GUS sometimes.

MALI wall-papering?

GUS never.

MALI plastering?

GUS shut up. I knew you were full of shite.

MALI what then.

GUS I was an ace carpenter. Right, missus know-it-all, how about a bet?

MALI okay.

GUS when I was the DIYMAN what was the last job I did?

MALI you fitted a kitchen for Mrs Coleman, 27 East Gosling Street. Grey marble work-tops, pale blue units, shell shaped brass handles and Dulux satin finish on the walls. Cornflower blue.

GUS JESUS.

SCENE 5

The toilet in Motorway Café 3

Gus, looking in the mirror, is near to tears

GUS Stop crying. Stop fucking crying. What are you doing? Why the fuck are you crying? For God's sake pull yourself together. It's simple, get rid. It's as easy as that. You had it beat. You had. You were doing fine till she came along. Get shot of her. You can begin again. Yes, but not if temptation is sitting two feet away from you. Get her to hell out of your truck. Why is she still there? For fuck's sake, she's not your responsibility. You're getting soft. Last time you cried like this was when you and the wee one watched *Bambi*. Before all this. Before they went. You never cry when you should cry. Why the fuck are you crying now? Stop it. You're losing the plot. Don't let her do this to you. Figure it out. Why is she in your truck? Is it the buzz? If it is, it will finish you pal. Get another job. Where there's no temptation. You could be a gravedigger. You'd be good at digging graves. Ha, ha. Shut up. I know it isn't funny. A job where you are on your own. Where you're, in control. Leave her in the café. She'll be okay. You don't owe her a thing. You don't owe anyone. They all had choices too you know. You'll get over the rest in time. New start. No more trouble. Get her out of your fucking truck. Before... Get her another lift. Jake or Bible

Billy. Then you slip off. It's easy If you...
(BEAT)...

(Gus turns away from the mirror)

If I really want to?

But what if I don't?

'I am thrilled that the scheme exists. A scheme that offers fully funded mentoring with this kind of depth, and commitment from the writers whom I respect immensely is laudable. (I speak of my colleagues Patience Agbabi and Amy Rosenthal here). It gives us hope that diverse new voices can emerge without financial backing being a prerequisite for having some time and space to grow and develop as a writer.'

Nikita Lalwani
Mentor | Fiction

Sarah Hegarty was born in Bristol, and grew up in the North West. After graduating in Mandarin from Leeds University she worked as a print journalist, latterly as a freelance. She left journalism to start a family and studied for an MA in Creative Writing at Chichester University, graduating with Distinction in 2006. Her short fiction has been published by Cinnamon Press, Mslexia, the Momaya Annual Review and on the web, as well as placed in competitions. Her story *Something Hidden* is the title story of the 2013 anthology from Bridge House. Her first novel, *The Ash Zone*, based on her life in Beijing in 1980, won the 2011 Yeovil Literary Prize. Her novel-in-progress, *Beyond the Forest*, is inspired by the Congolese woman who appears at the end of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Find out more about Sarah's work at www.sarahhegarty.co.uk

Sarah Hegarty | from *Beyond the Forest*

The Congo, early 20th century. Lucas, wrongly imprisoned in the Katila diamond mine, has survived by being an informer. When his information causes the death of his friend Mkele, Lucas decides to escape – with a gemstone.

Meanwhile, in a village twenty miles away, Sula waits for her husband Tiko to return.

The story is told in Lucas's and Sula's alternating voices.

One

I saw it in my dreams – it framed my days and nights. The maw of Katila: a gaping wound in the burnt remains of the forest.

By day the exhausted ground echoed with our blows. At night the forest screamed and called back to us, as if in reproach.

The land had kept its secret well. Beyond the mine, trees filled the horizon; beyond that ran the Great River – and the sea.

But here, thoughts of the outside world soon disappeared. When the mine had finished with a man, only the vultures would find him.

Daylight was pushing at the mist when I made my way across the compound.

Ahead, across the flattened earth scarred with lorry tracks, past the metal gates and the perimeter fence, the forest was emerging, tree stumps visible through shifting strands of white.

Keeping to the shadows I crouched behind a wall, taking care to rub the dirt from my knees. Evidence of my effort to ask forgiveness: to mark myself out, as much as I dared. But my vigil had not eased the weight of guilt in my bones.

Now I couldn't stop my tongue probing my mouth, prodding the raw hole in my gum. String tied round the upright of a window bar had done the trick, the previous night. I would take what I was owed.

I joined the line heading towards the cages. Around us the mine was coming to life: the gates clanging open to admit lorry-loads of workers from outside; the cranes screeching, swinging between heaps of dirt like scavenging birds.

We moved forward in single file, the only sounds the slap of feet on earth and the occasional grunt. The path was wide enough for one man. Daily use had not widened it. Recent arrivals still pushed to be near the front: first to the cages; first to the pit and the wall. But dawn would soon become their hardest time here: the soft air and grey light brought no new start. At dawn, the metal doors of the city prison offered more comfort than the open sky of Katila.

Movement at my feet: the man in front had made himself shoes from wideleaf and liana twine. The detail, his effort, made me angry. Why should he try to ease his existence here?

I thought I'd found a way. Now I wished I had not.

There had been no warning. I'd seen nothing – not even the glint of steel in the fading light. Mkele had been in front of me in the line to leave the pit. If I closed my eyes, I could still see the tilt of his head, his hand raised in weary greeting.

A guard came up, and stood too close. The khaki-clothed arm moved; and the familiar figure crumpled to the dirt.

Then I saw the knife.

So much blood. It spurted and poured, false nourishment for the dry earth.

My heart seized.

I knew then that if I did not watch the whole performance I was as good as dead.

No one spoke. Instinct told us to keep away. Nothing could be done. Better to melt into the mass from whom my friend had been singled out.

'Take a good look, *messieurs!*' Duval bent to the body and turned it over, pulling off the shirt. The muscled chest was still pumping blood. He nodded at the guard.

The man stooped to the gash he'd made, and pushed his hand in. From behind me came moans of disbelief – and anger. He searched, tugged – and stood up, his bloodied palm out flat, for Duval's inspection.

Holding a filthy bandana to his face, our overseer peered at the outstretched palm and its contents; then he plucked them up between his finger and thumb, like a European lady with a lace handkerchief.

The small, bedraggled cloth bag, soaked with blood, swung from its string.

'Never thought he'd be a thief,' Duval said, shaking his head in mock sorrow. He looked up, straight at me. 'Lucas!'

I thought I had felt fear before, but in that moment I knew I had not. I willed my legs to stand. I made my stare meet his.

'Grave-digging duty.' He couldn't suppress a smile.

I stepped forward, and watched my hands grab the limp feet, while a guard took the arms. Together we carried the corpse to the place by the fence marked by a few wooden crosses.

'Going to make me dig it by myself?' The strength of my voice surprised me.

The man shrugged. ‘Orders.’ He prodded the corpse with his gun, and I flinched.

Alone at last with my friend’s body I had managed to wash off some of the dirt and blood; to re-tie the bandana at his neck; and to lay him in the ground – not just to nudge him over the edge of the trench with my foot.

No one was near enough to hear the words I’d whispered, when the last shovel of dirt had landed on his grave.

Near the crater’s edge we came to a halt. The creak of the winch and the yells of the overseers drifted up. And below that, a low murmuring – the kind of noise that passed for singing down there. Singing to ward off despair – and fear.

Behind the guards I glimpsed Duval, surveying his empire. Sunlight broke through the cloud and he squinted at us, shading his eyes with a fat hand.

I stepped forward.

His breath stank of beer. By the end of the day he would be slumped on his chair. He made a show of checking my number against his list, his actions the same as always. I had made my resolution: I dared not acknowledge any meaning in his gestures. I had only to close my eyes to see Mkele’s death, unfolding in my head.

I held my arms away from my sides. If he made me open my mouth, I had a story ready about my rotten tooth.

He waved me through, towards the cages.

I waited with the others at the edge of the drop, glad that the press of bodies blocked my view of the pit and the excavations.

With a clank and scrape of rusting metal, the cage appeared in front of us. We were herded in, and the gate

locked: too many had tried to jump. The freedom to choose your own death was a privilege.

Skin pressed against skin. Each cage held fifty men, but there were more of us here. Even at this hour we smelled of sweat, and dirt: the dribbling taps outside the sleep shacks were no use against the dust that stained us, inside and out. No one spoke. I felt hot breath on my neck; heard the sound of leaf being chewed, water swigged from canteens.

The cage swung out; out, over the mine. I looked down. The workers clambering on the red walls of the pit were as small as the biting insects that invaded the sleeping quarters at night.

We swayed for a few seconds in the air, and in that instant I knew: today the cage would smash into the wall, or hurtle to the ground. My heart hammered my ribs. I closed my eyes and tried to calm myself. I was on the ship, moving with the tide: in my head the cry of gulls; the slap of water on wood; the creak of sails. Then voices, calling after me, down the cobbled street.

The cage juddered, chains screaming, and thudded to a halt. I opened my eyes. The guard unlocked the bolt and we stumbled out. The empty cage rattled back up.

Above us rose tiers of earth, each towering step cut by men's hands. Rope ladders, bleached and frayed, led from one level to the next, where miners clung like scabs on diseased skin.

Around us on the flattened ground half-naked men bent over shovels. Further away, others squatted or knelt by a muddy bank, washing and sieving lumps of rock. Guards watched them, hands hovering at their guns.

A tall, thin man, his dark face scarred beneath his bandana, nodded at me. 'You. Wall. Go.'

He reached behind him, found a belt, and threw it at me. I buckled it on, feeling the weight of each object: a miniature

hammer; a short metal bar with a chisel edge; a small pick. Valuable weapons: guarded as carefully as we were.

Attached to the belt was a pigskin pouch. I had heard that when the mine began, pouches were filled every day: privileges awarded; sentences reduced. But the earth had been cowed too.

I followed the group heading for the wall. The lowest ladder scraped the earth face, its ropes dipping and worn. I climbed one level, then another, my old shoes slipping on the flimsy rungs. Two tiers up, I stepped off and made my way along the ledge. It was wide enough for two men to move carefully. But there were always accidents. I found a space near to where I'd seen the trace of a deposit the day before, wavering slightly as I got my balance. Sharing the ledge was Geron, the old, one-eyed man who followed me like a shadow. I recognised his stoop. He would surely die here.

I searched for a trace of the blue clay that would show the possibility of a find. I had a system: if I saw a hint of colour I eased the chisel into the wall until it stuck. Next the hammer: but only the lightest of blows. As the hammer struck the chisel head, I put my ear to the earth. When I heard the sound change, and lose its vibration, I knew: somewhere beneath the surface was a cluster of spiky treasure, nestling in its earthy hole like spider's eggs.

I never shouted or spoke; barely even breathed. I felt the faint pulse in my fingertips, almost numb from months of probing the earth's skin. And then I tapped, precisely as a sculptor: sliding and striking, sliding and striking, until the shape of the deposit was clear. Next the surrounding earth could be lifted away, and piled beside me on the ledge. Lastly I chipped out the gems. Fresh from the ground they looked like nothing: pale, dull angles of stone. But we knew better. I

admired them; rubbed them between my fingers; and slipped them into the pouch.

The mine was like a living creature: to be treated with respect. If a miner was careless, and caused a landslide, it was quick to remind us of its power: in the blink of a blistered eye the wall broke away, shifting downwards in great strands, sending up choking clouds. Work stopped. Men stood, balancing on ladders and ledges, covering their mouths and eyes against the dust. But before it cleared the miners were back, swarming through the moving air and clawing at the ground; searching, not for still-warm bodies, but for any new seam that might have been revealed.

I had learned other skills, too: if a man leaned away from the wall, dazed, he had started to see cracks and dips, scars and clefts behind his eyes; when he looked round, shapes would be darkened blurs. His pitch would soon be for the taking.

Or if he stopped, suddenly, staring at the earth, he had found a deposit, and was weighing up his chances of hiding it; or of helping himself. After that it was easy to observe his furtive movements.

That was the kind of information Duval liked. I'd thought we understood each other.

No longer. When I closed my eyes I could still see Mkele lying in the dust, blood from his slashed belly running in the earth, Duval smiling over him.

The midday whistle blew, producing a ragged shout from the workers in the pit. The ripe, sour smell of food filled the air.

In front of the platform where the food buckets sat in the sun, men were being pushed back by the guards.

'Hey, you!' One of them waved his rifle at me. 'Duval says you go first today.'

A voice nearby cursed my mother. A gob of spit landed by my foot.

I tensed, ready for the fight: but nothing happened. There was no sign of Duval. I was shoved to the front. Two men exchanged a look but were silent. I held up my food tin and the guard doled out my ration. I moved away quickly, squatting in the shade of an overhang to eat. But I tasted nothing. Something had changed. Something was brewing.

I returned to the wall, my mind racing, trying to re-form my plans like cards in a dropped deck. I fumbled for my chisel, scraping it across the earth, feeling nothing; only the swell and churn of fear through my limbs. Sweat slid on my forehead and ran into my eyes.

Next to me the old man cursed when his hammer struck his outstretched fingers. ‘Death is better than this,’ he said.

At last, under my chisel, something solid. I tapped with the hammer, straining to hear.

Grudgingly the earth gave up its treasure. When I'd released a small piece from the wall, I opened the stone with a quick blow. It broke easily, along a fault line, into nuggets and crumbs. I knew the old man was watching me. Slowly, deliberately, I took the pouch from my waist and made a show of counting the fragments into it. I folded the smallest into my palm.

The dust made us all cough. Leaning into the wall I gasped for breath, shaking and spitting. Then I gave myself over to a juddering fit, breathing in the powdery, gritty air.

The stone was in my mouth: a child's sweet. I sucked the dirt off, and pushed the gem into the hole in my gum.

The fragment slid in, and caught.

I shoved it home with my finger.

Two

My grandmother could make lightning. In her thin, strong hands she could hold the world, make it tremble and dance.

Today lightning is in my chest. My grandmother, twenty years dead, has put her magic in my heart. I'm awake before the cock crows, lying on this mattress whose straw surely turned to stones in the night. The dark hours crept by while I lay, watching the top of the wall, waiting for the gap under the roof to appear. Now daylight is here at last, showing me the small room, the hearth, and next to it the covered pot of manioc porridge. Nothing looks different, although today it should.

I sit up, and the bamboo creaks. My feet make dust and chiggers jump. I take my wrappa from the chair and tie it round me; pick up my basin and soap. On my way out I touch the mud wardrobe, where the wall still bears his fingerprints. On the shelf is a clean gourd, and a full bottle of palm wine.

Smoke from a cooking fire drifts from my neighbour's hut. Through the walls I hear the sound of voices. But no one else is about.

Under my feet the earth is cool. I cross the open space and walk into the trees, past the old manioc garden, to the river path. I move quickly, watching the sun slide through the branches, light falling in stripes across the ground.

Grandmother. When the air was heavy with the promise of rain, she called me and I followed, along the path out of the village, my heart playing its drum in my chest. Always we stopped at the same place: where the path met the top of the hill. We stood looking across the creaking tree tops. Up on the

ridge the night roared. The trees swayed. Even the monkeys and birds were silenced.

I was ten years old, taller than she was – like her son, my father. Next to me she seemed slight as a corn husk. We watched the sky. She told me to look, when no one else would. There, on the ridge, a flash – a stab of light faster than sun on a machete – split the dark.

Today I am that child again, holding her breath.

The mist is leaving the river. I walk downstream, past the hollows in the river bed where the manioc tubers lie soaking like pale, trapped fish. I untie my wrappa and step into the water, feeling its cold fingers on my skin. The riverbank is deserted. I pull off my scarf and bend to the still surface. With my basin I scoop the water and tip it over my head. I remember the story of the girl who drowned, whose bones were put back together by the crocodiles. The song of her sister brought her back to life. If only my songs had such power.

‘Sula!’

I turn away from the sound, find my wet scarf and tie it over my hair. My shaking fingers slow me down, and I struggle with the knot.

When I turn back I see Efike, with a pile of clothes. She stands and watches me, head to one side, her basin on her hip. I walk away, pushing through the river, my toes feeling for stones in the sand.

When I look back she’s put her basin down next to the old upturned boat and is dipping cloth in the water. She pulls it out as if it’s a drowned body, and lays it on the curved wood.

At last I climb out and dry myself. I take my time. Efike has small breasts and is too thin. Her hip bones stick out like handles on a cooking pot.

‘Are you well?’ She looks at my empty basin.

‘I am well. It is only hunger troubling me.’

‘Hunger is better than ill-health.’

I stand up and tie my wrappa round my waist.

‘You are washing early today,’ she says.

‘You are here too.’

‘Is it today your man comes back?’ Efike is my cousin’s second wife. She is very interested in family business.

‘Perhaps.’

She smiles, as if she has found me out in a lie. ‘You said it was today.’ She looks down, slaps another piece of wet cloth on the wood and picks up her soap. ‘It must be hard to have a man working away.’

‘It is life.’

‘It is worse because you are alone.’

I pick up my basin.

‘If he married another wife – you could worry together.’

‘Many things might be different.’

She does not need to say, And people would not talk about you. I know what they mutter: *Only a bad woman likes to be married alone by her husband.*

Now other women appear by the water. They stand gossiping and laughing, waiting for their turn at the sloping surface – it is more comfortable to lean on the wood than to bend to the stones at the river bank. They spread the wet garments on the earth to dry. The sound of their voices hangs in the air.

My husband does not want another wife. I could tell them this. But it is enough that they let me live here, and leave me alone. Enough that they do not pull off my scarf to satisfy their curiosity. They have marks, made in the name of beauty, and tradition. But my wound is different. It could never be confused with that.

And I have my uses.

As if she can hear my thoughts a woman in a yellow wrappa calls out, 'My youngest has a bad stomach.' Her wide hands squeeze water from a piece of green patterned fabric.

'Do you know what medicine to give him?' Her neighbour looks at her, but speaks loudly so I can hear. When I say nothing, I feel her impatience. At last she calls, 'Sula, what do you think? What did you give Ndoti's boy last week?'

I have to turn round. 'Use the leaves that grow behind my hut,' I call across to them. 'Cook them with manioc. Then eat it first thing in the morning.'

Yellow-wrappa woman is not sure. 'How will I know which leaves to pick?'

The other woman looks up for my answer too.

'Come when I am at home and I will show you.'

I turn away from them. Their talk of men, and children, and babies. With the slap, rub, slap, of the soap and the slap, slap, slap of the water their words rise and fall, full of their problems, always the same – problems that cannot be solved, complaints that I would long to have.

'Finished?' Efike looks up.

'I am going to the market.'

She glances at my empty basin. 'Of course. Your dear man can't live off fresh air.'

The track is hard and dusty, but the air is warm. Beside me the palms reach into the sky. There are dips and ruts but I move round them, hearing my husband's voice: 'I look down for you because you walk with your head up.' He expects me to stumble. A man from the coast, he is unused to country paths. And now he is far from the sea, in that place I can only

imagine: a wide, deep, hole in the earth, full of men digging for treasure.

One memory brings another and I see his eyes, smiling at me; feel his arms, holding me. Since he went to work there I have made my coins last – even made them grow. Now, next to the palm wine in the mud wardrobe is another pot, half-full, and heavy. When he is home tonight, sitting in the hut, I will tip the pot up, and the pile of coins will shine by his feet. He will smile, and laugh, and embrace me. And he will never have to go back there, to break his body as he breaks the earth.

Traders are gathering in the market like women at the house of a bride-to-be. I find a place and set my basin on the ground. As soon as I unwrap the cloth and set out the manioc tubers, buyers come pushing round. It is still early. I can afford to keep my prices high.

I am a good trader. I invest well – I know what to buy, what to avoid; and what will sell quickly. I know when corn is good, and ground-nuts; I know where to buy the best kola-nuts. My customers come back because my dried fish is the best. Not because they feel sorry for me.

By the time the sun is high my pile of manioc is gone. Sweat runs on my skin. My money-pouch is as heavy as a fat baby on my hip.

I have my words ready for him: we can trade together. With the money I have saved, and the money he brings, we can buy a piece of land and sow manioc, beans and corn.

I can dig, I can plant; I can harvest. I can bend under the sun until my back cries out. But my hands would work faster on my own soil.

Times are better now. Not like two years ago, when the rains failed – when he said he had no choice.

The truck came to the centre of the town. It was like the trucks of the big traders, except theirs are full of boxes – loaded with oranges, yams and plantains. The traders drive slowly with their loads, so they do not damage the fruit, or lose it in the dust. But this truck was different. Instead of moving like a loaded ox, it came into the town like an angry rhino. It went too fast: it kicked up dirt when it stopped, and turned round when no one thought it would. And like a rhino, it brought danger.

It stopped by the iroko tree. When I saw that loud, dirty machine like a wild beast in the place where people sit to talk, I felt cold. It looked like an intruder that we had allowed in. But a crowd soon came.

In the front of the truck, a thin, pale-skinned man sat behind a small wheel. Next to him another man was standing, at his shoulder a long, black gun.

‘Good money,’ said the standing man. ‘Better than you can earn in the fields or the market. Leave that to the women. Come and do men’s work.’ His voice was hard and dry, like the earth under the harmattan. His arms were burnt red from the sun.

I tried to see if anyone else saw the danger, but the men were pushing closer to hear. My man let go of my hand, and stood with them. The women were watching. Some turned away.

That first time, we walked away too. But that night we argued. I tried to pull out the words that were in my heart, remind him of what he had promised when we married each other. But all he said was, ‘This is for you – and for us.’ My tongue was dry. I tried to find the spirit of my grandmother – I searched for her voice – but I could hear nothing.

The next morning he was awake before cock crow and we went together to the town. I walked as if my feet were covered in mud. But even so we were early. We waited by the tree. There was a crowd there again, more than the day before. But some of the women were quiet.

When the truck appeared, for a moment its noise silenced the men's talking. It stopped in front of us, in its cloud of angry dust, and the men crowded round. Then one climbed in, and sat down, and suddenly they were all swinging their legs over the sides, calling to others to hurry up.

My man turned to me, and touched my arm. Then he walked to the truck and climbed in too.

It was strange to see them sitting there, heads moving together. It made me think of animals that had been rounded up. But they were excited, as if they were setting off to hunt. My man looked up, and smiled at me. The truck roared, and kicked up dust.

Then it was gone.

I watched it growing smaller and smaller inside the dirty cloud, until it was a speck in the air.

And then I learned to wait, to fill my days with work, and to answer questions with smiles and shrugs. And in my chest my heart grew its own skin.

After two moons, he came back – for one night. Lines had grown on his face like the earth before the rains. He smiled, but his head was low.

I felt shy with him; my words would not come.

'How is it, there?' I asked, after a while.

'A wall of earth,' he said. 'It makes men look like ants.' He saw my surprise, and said quickly, 'the work is hard. But we are well looked after.'

I wanted to believe him, despite the bones I saw under his skin. ‘The other workers – are they good men?’

He shrugged. ‘We are all the same. We work together.’

We went out into the fields, under the moon, to play as we used to do. We sat under the kola tree, the green pods hanging like promises in the soft air. I looked at his hair, where silver was creeping like a pale shadow over his head.

I was hungry for his touch. I had waited so long. But there was something different between us. The tenderness, the softness I needed was gone.

Afterwards we were quiet. We sat together, the way we always did: my head in his lap, him stroking my hair. I looked for the moon, but she was hiding in the clouds.

I pictured the precious stones, stuck in the earth until my man found them. I imagined sunlight catching them, making the ground bright, like the forest after rain.

I waited for him to speak, words buzzing in my mouth like angry bees. At last I said, ‘Will you bring some stones, one day?’

He smiled. ‘Perhaps.’

I sat up. ‘Think how much land we could buy,’ I said. ‘How everyone would envy us. We would be the talk of the village.’ I thought my words would cheer him.

But he just said, ‘We are used to that,’ and the sound in his voice reminded me of Efike’s talk.

Before I could speak again he said, ‘Anyway, I have a plan.’ His voice was low.

‘You will come back soon?’

‘It will not be long.’

I took his hand. ‘Then we can work together.’

He looked at me and smiled, and my heart grew soft.

But when I asked him more, he would not say.

Perhaps tonight he will tell me his plan.

I pick up the empty basin and my money-pouch bangs my hip, as if to remind me that daydreaming will not buy smoked fish and bitter leaves, and fresh oil.

Tonight I will cook for two.

Tonight he will be here.

Paul Stephenson was born and grew up in Cambridge. He studied modern languages then European Studies, living in France, Spain and the Netherlands. His poetry has appeared in many UK magazines as well as the anthology *Adventures in Form* (Penned in the Margins, 2012). His poem 'Round the Block' was awarded second prize in the 2013 Café Writers Open Poetry Competition. He has been highly commended twice in the Bridport Prize. Recently he completed the Sheffield Poetry Business Writing School. He lives between London and Paris and works as a university teacher and researcher.

Paul Stephenson | *Passwords*
and other poems

Passwords

I avoid the house I grew up in,
keep away from my mother

and father's birthdays: calendar
opposites, June and January.

I steer clear of my brother's
crash, rule out the hot summer

I left school, graduated, went off.
I adopt different characters,

mix upper and lower case.
I do my utmost to never

choose when I was born.
Mine take years to crack.

Simultaneous

‘Many interpreters actually wind up
on psychiatric wards,’ said the interpreter.

‘I was an interpreter in Washington
for the State Department,’ said the interpreter.

‘We spend a lifetime finding words
for other people’s words,’ said the interpreter.

‘After forty years we have nothing
to show for our career,’ said the interpreter.

‘I found myself in nuclear weapons
but the work ran dry,’ said the interpreter.

‘One day the Cold War ended.
There was nobody left to disarm.’

Round the Block

My default was anti-clockwise:
fourteen minutes on go-slow
but under ten when legging it.
Straight down the crazy paving
and first base the Post Office
to check on ads for babysitting,
past the village Memorial Hall
where they held the whist, bingo,
fête, fruit and vegetable show,
then the Blue Seat by the nettles
at the far edge of the rec' and
in through the heavy latch gate,
passing alongside Grandad who
loved his jazz, a quick squizz
for fresh-dug mounds of earth
and flowers among the molehills,
loping the loud gravel sloping
entrance of St. Nicholas' church
and out at the Old People's Flats,
taking in Whitethorn's dark thatch,
peering into the Victorian primary
school, Mr. Lamper's junior class,
skirting the fence at Mrs. Bulgar's,
always ninety-three or ninety-four,
to Oulton House and Iceni Cottage,
the slide, the swings and roundabout,
not forgetting the short dinner lady's
wonky table of pickles and chutneys,
her deck chair and rattling jam jar,
curving left at the grass triangle
that gave distances to next places,
clocking the carved wooden sign
with its hare and pheasant staring

out against the cornfield relief
each side of Queen Wilburga,
and further, back to the Roman
Road, Butt Lane, mud and cow
parsley running wild for miles,
to catch Dad standing there,
the tan leather of the leash
dangling, the dog long gone.

Lost City (Madrid Perdido)

Where on earth did they get to, my dwarves and cripples,
the witches, the old men, their fights with cudgels?

And my kids in Chueca sharing calimochos,
sucking on cheap red wine mixed with Coca-Cola?

What of my post office: The Palace of Communication,
and butcher's shop parading as The Ham Museum?

Any news from Cibeles, my own Greek goddess,
her two lions roaring at the foot of Recoletos?

Are my goths still gloomy in the shadows of a pharaoh,
my punks puffing *chocolate* in the Plaza Dos de Mayo?

Does my team in green overalls from the Ayuntamiento
still spray away the piss at dawn with high-pressure hoses?

Is the distance the same as then to reach *Kilómetro Cero*,
Saturn done devouring his son, and since other children?

The Apprentice

Dear Lord Sugar, Alan if I may, I know how important beetroot has been to you, how you started out humbly boiling beetroot as a whippersnapper, lifting these really humungous beetroots into old tin bath tubs, then cooking them up for the beetroot man at market. You cut your teeth, so to speak, on beetroot.

I've repeatedly seen the way you go bright purple as a beetroot when you have to fire people who wouldn't know a beetroot from a turnip, like the backstabbing women in glossy beetroot lipstick and men in naff off-the-peg clobber like spotty beetroot sock or ties; cocky young apprentices not worthy of beetroot.

We all still miss Margaret. I wonder if she'll find any beetroot referred to in the papyrus manuscripts she's studying. Beetroot probably wasn't eaten in ancient Egypt. Pharaohs and beetroot, I don't know, though wouldn't rule out the notion of beetroot having a hieroglyph, which they likely painted using beetroot!

You ever suggested to the producers to incorporate beetroot into one of the tasks? Like having to market a new beetroot-scented perfume, or scour wholesalers for some rare beetroot extract, or travel to a muddy organic farm and dig up beetroot to flog to hob-nob gaffs for extortionate Borscht from beetroot.

I bet there's still quite some mileage to be had from beetroot. Actually, I have drawn up this small business plan re: beetroot. My idea, and it will make you millions, is to be true to beetroot by pioneering a car that runs on beetroot juice, bringing beetroot mobility to new audiences who only know beetroot as beetroot

German Munoz grew up in Tijuana, Mexico, and it is here that he will always call home. He wrote his first play when he was 13 and it was pretty bad. Nonetheless, seeing it performed by his class caused him much exhilaration. When his mother dragged him to see Edward Albee's *Three Tall Women* he realised how powerful and moving theatre could be. His short plays have been produced in London at The Bush Theatre, Arcola Theatre, and Theatre503, as well as in Canada and the US. He was commissioned to write a short play for Papercut Theatre's XY (*Hopelessly Devoted to You*) which was seen at the Edinburgh Fringe in August 2013 at the Pleasance Courtyard. His first full evening of work, *Straying in Seattle*, premiered at The White Bear Theatre in January 2014. He is very appreciative of the support and encouragement he received from Amy Rosenthal this year and has agreed to worship her for life.

German Munoz | from *Open*

TOBY Male. Late 20s.
ROGER Male. Early 30s. Toby's boyfriend.
HELENA Female. Late 20s. Toby's best friend.

Text Notes

When a character has a (*) in front of their name, it means that while they are meant to be on stage somewhere, they are not physically in the scene with the other characters.

A () means the next line interrupts at that point.

Act One, Scene One

Seattle, USA. It's November 2012, the day after President Obama's re-election and the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Washington State. We see the living room/dining room of Roger and Toby's apartment. It's a nice place, modern and simple, located in the Capitol Hill neighbourhood of Seattle, which is trendy but starting to gentrify. They have an Obama "Hope" poster framed on the wall. ROGER is prepping a nice dinner table. He's in his early thirties and is dressed casually. He exits to the kitchen. TOBY enters, he is in his late twenties, a little younger than Roger, but not much. Toby is dressed business casual and has a man-bag.

TOBY: (*Takes off jacket and gets comfortable*) Do you know how many people came in late today? Roger! It was No-Man's-Land this morning. Roger? I wish we had gone out and celebrated. Everybody else did. There was a

picture of the corner of Pike and Broadway. The people from Neighbors put the speakers from the club on the roof and they had music blazing all over the intersection. People were dancing and singing in the street. When do you see that?

ROGER: *(Off)* What?

TOBY: I said I wish we had gone out. Partied into the early hours.

ROGER: *(Enters)* Yesterday?

TOBY: I wanted to go.

ROGER: We have jobs.

TOBY: Nobody else cared. It was- historic.

TOBY exits to the bedroom. He's left the newspaper on the couch.

ROGER: I was fine seeing it on TV, thank you very much.

ROGER looks at paper, turns a page. A moment. Proudly looks at their framed "Obama" poster.

Yeah. He did it.

- TOBY: (Off) What?
- ROGER: I admit I wasn't always sure Obama could pull it off. I'm still relieved.
- TOBY enters wearing a regular T-shirt.*
- TOBY: What?
- ROGER: I said I was relieved / that-
- TOBY: Oh God, me too! I wasn't sure it was gonna happen.
- ROGER: Yeah. Glass of wine?
- TOBY: But it did. I really wish we had both been there. It was all over the paper this morning.
- ROGER: I saw. Wine?
- TOBY: Wine?
- ROGER: Yeah. Chablis.
- TOBY: Chablis? I love Chablis.
- ROGER: I know. (*Pours*)
- TOBY: French?
- ROGER: *Oui.*

TOBY: Wow. Is that the only bottle?

ROGER: *Non.*

TOBY: What is this, Christmas? Holy cow.

ROGER hands him the glass. TOBY sees the table setup nicely.

TOBY: What's all this?

ROGER: Nothing. Just- you know. Thought we'd have a nice dinner.

HELENA appears, off to the side. She is in her late twenties, casually dressed.

TOBY: Just- because?

ROGER: Yep.

ROGER exits to the kitchen. TOBY inspects the table. He looks at HELENA. They are both impressed. He is about to pour himself more wine from the bottle when:

(Off) Don't.

TOBY puts the bottle back. ROGER enters with their plates of salad.

Let's take it easy. Really enjoy the wine.

TOBY: OK...

ROGER: For our first course we're having-

TOBY: First course?

ROGER: Yes. We're having pear, walnut and goat's cheese salad.

TOBY: I love that! (*Sits*)

ROGER: I know. Thought we'd have something, you know, special. (*Sits*)

TOBY: (To HELENA) Oh my God!

*HELENA: Oh my God!

TOBY: Oh my God!

*HELENA: Oh my God!

TOBY: Dinner. Wine. More than one course.

TOBY/*HELENA: Oh my God!

TOBY: (To ROGER, normal voice) Could you pass the vinegar?

Roger passes the vinegar.

TOBY: So. Darling. How was your day at work?

ROGER: Fine.

TOBY: (To HELENA) "Fine". Please!

*HELENA: I know!

TOBY: (To ROGER) That's lovely. That's simply-lovely. You know, I love our life.

ROGER: Really?

TOBY: Yes. I do. I really do. Every moment. And I love you. I mean it. I. Love. You.

*HELENA: A bit much.

TOBY: (To HELENA) My moment. Shut it. (To ROGER) And, you know, since yesterday, we're in a new world now. A new world order.

ROGER: I wouldn't say that-

TOBY: No. It is. It's-

ROGER: I hope things will be different.

TOBY: Yes!

ROGER: I have to admit, I am pretty "hopeful".

- TOBY: Uh huh. (To HELENA) No shit.
- *HELENA: Yeah.
- ROGER: You know, speaking of new starts.
- TOBY: Yes???
- ROGER: I've been thinking. A lot lately.
- TOBY: You don't say?
- ROGER: Yes.
- TOBY: What about's?
- ROGER: Us.
- TOBY: Really? (To HELENA) I was still playing dumb at this point.
- *HELENA: You are a natural, hon.
- TOBY: (To ROGER) So what did you think? About us?
- ROGER: This has been on my mind for while now.
- TOBY: It has?
- ROGER: Yeah.

- TOBY: How long?
- ROGER: A few months, to be honest.
- TOBY: Well, now I'm really intrigued. My curiosity is piqued. Do tell...
- ROGER: Toby, I think- I'd like us to- (*Drops his fork*)
 Oh...
- ROGER reaches down for the fork.*
- TOBY: Oh my God!
- *HELENA: Oh my God!
- TOBY: Roger!
- ROGER: (*Raises head*) What? (*Roger is really kneeling now*)
- TOBY: Yes, Roger! YES! This was such a surprise.
 Oh my God! You've made me the happiest man on Earth! You don't know how long I waited for this. I mean you really took your time and- where's the ring?
- ROGER: Toby...
- TOBY: (*Kneels down to look for it under the table*)
 Holy shit, did you drop it?

- ROGER: Toby...
- TOBY: You big dummy...
- ROGER: There's no ring.
- TOBY: My darling little- (*Gets up*) No ring? That's- uh- well... OK. OK. Not a problem. We'll get it later.
- ROGER: I'm- Toby. I'm- Oh God.
- *HELENA: Oh no...
- TOBY: That way I get to choose it myself!
- ROGER: No. No. It's- I think there's been a misunderstanding.
- *HELENA: Oh no...
- TOBY: Misunderstanding? What?
- ROGER: Toby. Champ. This- this isn't what you think it is.
- TOBY: This- what?
- ROGER: Oh God...
- TOBY: You're not proposing.

- ROGER: No.
- *HELENA: No!
- TOBY: No?
- ROGER: What gave you that idea?
- TOBY: You were on one knee!
- ROGER: I dropped my fork!
- TOBY: Well it was pretty convincing!
- ROGER: Why would you- when have I ever wanted to get married!
- TOBY: I don't- I thought you had changed your mind! It's- we were just talking about it!
- ROGER: About what?
- TOBY: Gay marriage!
- ROGER: When?
- TOBY: Why do you think people were out last night in the fucking street celebrating!
- ROGER: Obama.

- TOBY: No!
- ROGER: His re-election.
- TOBY: No no NO!
- *HELENA: Oh, Jesus...
- TOBY: (*Shows Roger newspaper*) This! Today! Gay marriage! It's finally legal in Washington state!
- ROGER: So what?
- TOBY: Roger, oh my God, this is- it's huge!
- ROGER: There was already- you know-
- TOBY: Domestic partnerships?
- ROGER: Yeah. Those.
- TOBY: Ugh! Don't- just don't-
- ROGER: What's wrong?
- TOBY: Domestic partnerships were not marriage.
- ROGER: They were close.
- TOBY: They were a glaring reminder that we were second class citizens. Don't you understand?

We're finally being let into the mainstream
and it's today. That's why- I thought this
meant something to you.

ROGER: It does. It's- it's great. But-

*HELENA: But what?

TOBY: But what?

ROGER: I don't want this.

*HELENA: What did he want?

TOBY: What do you want?

ROGER: Something else.

*HELENA: What?

TOBY: What? What was all this for?

ROGER: Forget it. We can talk about it later.

TOBY: No. No. No. I really want to hear this. And it
better be good.

ROGER: No.

TOBY: Spill it.

ROGER: You're already in a mood.

- TOBY: I am not.
- ROGER: See. Mood.
- TOBY: No. No mood. Please. Enlighten me.
- ROGER: We can talk about it later.
- TOBY: Roger. Tell me.
- Roger prepares.*
- ROGER: I thought- I think... I think we really should talk about this later.
- TOBY: Tell me, please.
- ROGER: I've been thinking about the future as well. About us and the future. About what I want.
- *HELENA: And?
- TOBY: And?
- A moment.*
- ROGER: I'd like us to- I think... Champ. Things have been a little rough between us for a while.
- TOBY: (To HELENA) Oh shit.

- *HELENA: Oh shit.
- TOBY: Oh fucking fucking shit. (To ROGER) No. No they haven't.
- ROGER: It's been rough between us.
- TOBY: No.
- ROGER: For a while now.
- TOBY: We're fine.
- ROGER: I know you know it.
- TOBY: Everything's fine! (To HELENA) FUCK!
- *HELENA: Fuck!
- ROGER: We haven't had sex / in ages...
- TOBY: I'm sorry. I'm- I'm tired.
- ROGER: No.
- TOBY: I've been working late.
- ROGER: That's not what / I mean.
- TOBY: I think it's those new biker shorts.
- ROGER: It's not / that.

TOBY: They're cutting off my circulation.

ROGER: Champ.

TOBY: I'm serious, I could be sterile.

ROGER: We're in trouble.

TOBY: No!

ROGER: Yes. We are.

TOBY: Roger, please-

ROGER: When you're in trouble after seven years, you have to make a decision. You either try and do something about it, or you call it quits.

TOBY: Oh my God.

ROGER: Toby...

TOBY: I can't breathe, I can't-

ROGER: Champ. Hold on / a sec-

TOBY: I think I'm- I think I'm having a heart attack. I can't feel my arm.

*HELENA: A bit much...

- TOBY: (To HELENA) Shut it bitch!
- ROGER: Champ. I'm serious.
- TOBY: I'm serious too. You are murdering me right now. Literally.
- ROGER: Toby. We're not calling it quits.
- TOBY: We're not?
- *HELENA: Then what?
- TOBY: Then what?
- ROGER: We're going to try and fix things.
- *HELENA: How?
- TOBY: How?
- ROGER: I have a proposal. (*Realises what he just said*) Sorry.
- TOBY: Wow.
- *HELENA: Fucker!
- TOBY: (To HELENA) I know!

- ROGER: I have- an idea. I think- I think we should experiment. With a new model. A new relationship model.
- TOBY: What kind of model?
- ROGER: I'd like us to- I think we should try- opening up the relationship.
- *HELENA: Whoa.
- TOBY: (To HELENA) Yes. (To ROGER) OK. So. Let me see if I understand. Not only do you NOT want to marry me... you also want to fuck other people.
- ROGER: We are not in a good place, champ.
- TOBY: No.
- ROGER: We haven't been in a good place in a while.
- TOBY: No Roger. I've told you this before.
- ROGER: You're not even considering it.
- TOBY: Not interested.
- ROGER: Have you ever considered it?
- TOBY: I can't believe you. This is the worst day of my life.

TOBY grabs the bottle of Chablis and takes a huge swig.

ROGER: Come on, champ.

TOBY: No. I'm serious. This is the worst day of my life. (*Drinks more*) Please do me a favour and lock up the medicine cabinet. I don't know what I might do.

ROGER: Toby...

TOBY: (*Holding bottle tightly*) You've broken my heart. You've really done it this time.

ROGER: Please tell me you'll think about it. Please...

'The Jerwood/Arvon Mentoring Scheme launches a new raft of playwrights with genuine promise. It has afforded my mentees a year of encouragement and collaboration, during which I've seen their voices strengthen, skills develop and ideas take wing. Their commitment has been rewarding and I'm proud to be a part of their process. Mentoring such talent under the warm auspices of Jerwood/Arvon is a gift of a job.'

Amy Rosenthal
Mentor | Playwriting

Stephanie Scott was born in Singapore. She graduated in English Literature from the Universities of York and Cambridge and worked in investment banking in New York, London and Rome before leaving finance to write full-time. Her debut novel, *The Sentence*, is set in modern Japan. In 2012 she was awarded the Toshiba Studentship for her anthropological work on Japanese culture, a Distinction for her M.St in Creative Writing at Oxford University and the A.M. Heath Prize for New Writing. Thus far, Stephanie's fiction has focused on East and South East Asia where she grew up: a poem on the Death Railway in Thailand was one of the winners of the Fish International Poetry Prize 2011, and her prose on the bombing of Hiroshima was shortlisted for the Bridport Prize 2012 and 2013.

Stephanie Scott | from *The Sentence*

Prologue

Sarashima is a beautiful name; a lone name now that it belongs only to me. I was not born with it, this name, but I have chosen to take it, because before me, it belonged to my mother.

I believe it is customary upon meeting someone to explain who you are and where you come from, but whether you realise it or not, you already know me and you know my story. Look closely. Reach into the far corners of your mind and sift through the news clippings, bulletins and other snippets of information there. You will see me. I am the line at the end of an article; I am the final sentence ending with a full stop.

Wakaresaseya Agent Goes Too Far?

By Yu Yamada Published: 18.30pm, 1993/05/31

The trial of Takashi Nakamura, the man accused of murdering 30-year-old Rina Satou, began today at the Tokyo District Court.

The case has attracted international attention due to the fact that the defendant, Mr Nakamura, is an agent in the Wakaresaseya or so-called ‘marriage break-up’ industry, and has admitted that he was hired by the victim’s husband to seduce Rina Satou and provide grounds for divorce.

Nakamura claims that he and the deceased fell in love and were planning to start a new life together. If convicted, Nakamura faces a possible 20-year sentence for murder.

Rina Satou’s father told reporters:

'I will never forgive my former son-in-law for bringing this man into our lives, or the industry itself. A profession that preys on the lives of people should not be allowed to function in Tokyo.'

Rina Satou is survived by a daughter of seven years old.

When did you first read this? Can you remember? Were you at home at your breakfast table or in the office, scanning the morning news? I can see your face as you read about my family: your brows drew together in a slight frown, a crinkle formed above your nose. You shook your head and reached for a slice of toast – cold – it had hardened on the plate while you were reading the article. The smell of coffee was strong and reassuring in the air. Eventually, you smiled, and turned the page. The world is full of strange things.

Wakaresaseya was not common in Japan when Takashi was drawn into my mother's life. The industry emerged out of a demand for its services, a demand that exists all over the world today. Look at the people around you: those you love, those who love you, those who want what you have. They can enter your life as easily as he entered mine.

When did we first meet, you and I? Was it in *The Telegraph*, *The New York Times*, *Le Monde* or *The Sydney Morning Herald*? My story stopped there in the foreign press. Later articles focused on the marriage break-up industry and the agents who populate it; none of them mentioned me. Lives to be rebuilt are always less interesting than lives destroyed and even in Japan, I disappeared from the page.

What I Know

I was raised by my grandfather, Yoshi Sarashima.
I lived with him in a white house in Meguro.
In the evenings he would read to me.
He told me every story but my own.

My grandfather was a lawyer; he was careful in his speech. Even when we were alone together in his study and I would sit on his lap, tracing the creases in his leather armchair; even then, he had a precision with words. I have kept faith with that precision to this day.

Grandpa read everything to me – Dickens, Austen, Dumas, Basho, tales of his youth and duck hunting in Shimoda and one book, *The Trial*, that became my favourite. The story begins like this: “Someone must have been telling lies about Josef K.”

When we read that line for the first time, Grandpa held me close and explained that the story we were reading was a translation. I was ten years old, stretching out my fingers for a world beyond my own and I reached out to the yellowed page, stroking the *kanji* that spoke of something new. I formed the sentences in my mouth, summoning the figure of Josef; a lonely man, a man people would tell lies about.

As I grew older, I began to disagree with my grandfather about *The Trial*. He told me other people fought over it too, they fight about it even today – over the translation of one word in particular – “verlumdet”. *To tell a lie*. In some versions of the story, this word is translated as “slander”. Slander speaks of courts and accusations, of public reckoning, it has none of the childhood resonance of “telling lies”. And yet, when

I read this story for the first time, it was the use of “telling lies” that fascinated me.

Lies, when they are first told, have a shadow quality to them, a gossamer texture that can wrap around a life. They have that feather-light essence of childhood and my childhood was built on lies.

The summer before my mother died, we went to the sea. As I look back on that time, those months hold a sense of finality for me, not because it was the last holiday that my mother and I would take together, but because it is the site of my last true memory.

Every year, as the August heat engulfed Tokyo, my family piled their suitcases onto a local train and headed for the coast; we went to Shimoda. Father remained in the city to work, but Grandpa Sarashima would accompany us and in the women’s carriage on the train, Mama would turn to me and ask me what I would like to do by the sea, just her and I, alone.

Our house on the peninsula was old; its wooden gateposts warped by the winds that peeled off the Pacific. As we climbed the rocky promontory at the top of the hill, the gates, dark and encrusted with salt, signalled that the house was near; our home overlooking the bay, between Mount Fuji and the sea.

My country is built on mountains, its people are piled up in concrete boxes, cages. To have land is rare, but the house in Shimoda had belonged to my family since before the war and afterwards my grandfather fought to keep it, when everything else was lost.

Forest sweeps over the hills above the house. I was not allowed up there alone as a child and so when I looked at my mother on the train that summer she knew immediately what I

would ask for. In the afternoons, Mama and I climbed high on the wooded slopes above *Washi-Kura*. We watched the tea fields as they darkened before autumn. We lay back on the rocky black soil and breathed in the sharp resin of the pines. Some days, we heard the call of a sea eagle as it circled overhead.

Grandfather knew the forest, but he never found us there. At four o'clock each afternoon, he would venture to the base of the hillside and call to us through the trees. He shouted our names: "Rie!" "Sumi!" Together, we nestled amongst the pines, giggling, as grandfather's voice wavered and fell.

I often heard Grandpa calling before Mama did but I always waited for her signal to be quiet. On our last afternoon in the forest, I lay still, feeling the soft and steady puff of my mother's breath against my face. She pulled me against her and her breathing quieted and slowed. I opened my eyes and stared at her, at the dark lashes against her cheeks. I took in her pallor, her stillness. I heard my grandfather begin to call, his voice thin and distant, I snuggled closer, kissing her face, pushing through the coldness with my breath. Suddenly, she smiled, her eyes still closed and pressed a finger to her lips.

We no longer own *Washi Kura* in Shimoda: Grandfather sold it many years ago. But when I go there today, climbing up through the undergrowth, I can feel my mother there beneath the trees. When I lie down on the ground, the pines needles sharp under my cheek, I imagine that the chill of the breeze is the stroke of her finger.

In Atami

Rina stood in the garden of her family home and looked out over the *Amagi Renzan*. The Izu Peninsula, on which *Washi Kura* was built, was formed from the lava flows of these mountains; the plates which created them converged at Mount Fuji, their collision causing a land of volcanoes, earthquakes and hot springs to rise from the sea.

Fuji-san is still active. On a clear day you can see smoke curling above its snow-covered peak, hinting at the new peninsulas, islands and plateaus waiting within. It is restless geologists say. But, that summer, as Rina watched the slopes before her turn gradually from lime green, to pomegranate, to rust, she did not think of what was to come, she thought about her daughter kneeling beside Yoshi at the side of the house, digging into the dark soil of the azaleas with her trowel, her face turned sullenly away from her mother. Rina looked up at the mountains watching over them and beneath their quiet gaze she climbed into her red fiat and drove to Atami.

Rina stopped at the crowded beachfront and looked for a space to park. Atami had become a place for pleasure-seekers. Salarimen flocked to its beaches, eager to supplement their existence in Tokyo with summer condos, shopping malls and karaoke. Hotels capitalised on the natural hot springs and buildings replaced the trees. Soon, the forests of camphor and ferns that had once surrounded the town were cut back until little trace of them remained. Rina left her car at the end of the beach. She walked back along the waterfront, shading her eyes against the glare of the sun as it glanced off the concrete.

“You came.”

At the sound of his voice, Rina turned. Takashi was making his way across the beach towards her, walking barefoot in the sand. She raised a hand to him and watched his slow, loping stride. He smiled when he reached her, his gaze open and happy, but there was something else in his eyes as well – surprise. Surprise that she had come.

“I was afraid you’d stood me up,” he said.

“You weren’t afraid.”

“I am when you’re not with me,” he replied.

Rina laughed and they began to walk towards the yachts bobbing against the blue of the sea. She stopped by an ice cream stall advertising *azuki*, red bean. Passing his sandals from one hand to the other, Takashi reached into his pocket and drew out some change.

“Just one, *onegai shimass.*”

Rina smiled at him. “My daughter loves these,” she said as she bit into the ice cream, savouring the caramel sweetness of the beans. “I wish I could take some home.”

Rina lowered her gaze as she felt Takashi’s eyes upon her, the increasingly familiar nearness of him. She shook her hair away from her face, pushing it behind her ears.

“We can bring Sumiko here,” he said.

“Impossible.”

Rina shifted as he stepped behind her. She felt the warmth of his chest as he drew her back against him, resting his chin on her shoulder

“We can do anything, Rina,” he said. “Yoshi won’t notice if we took her for an afternoon.”

“But what will I tell her when this ends?”

“It won’t end Rina.”

He held her as she dug her toes deep into the white sand, feeling the grains sift between her red sandals and her skin.

"I should go," she said, but her sentence ended in a shriek as he lifted her into the air and over his shoulder.

"Oh my god," she hissed, hitting at him with her fists. "What are you doing?" Rina gasped as her ice cream fell into the sand.

"There are too many people here," he said. "We can't talk."

"Put me down! What are you, a child?"

Takashi grinned against her, "You bring out the worst in me."

"People are staring."

"I don't care." And it was true, she thought, he really didn't.

They reached his car and he put her down. Rina could feel the blush rising in her cheeks – people were still staring at them. Takashi reached out and took her head between his palms, smoothing out the lines on her brow. Gently, he touched his nose to hers. "Rina, you're with me today. Try to concentrate."

She took a breath. "I don't have long."

Rina caught glimpses of the view as they drove up into the hills above the town, following a narrow road that weaved between the pines. The sea was a deep blue against the concrete of the bay and along the slopes she could see the cypresses and cedars settling along the fringes of Atami, as though they would one day reclaim it.

They drove to a parking spot where a stone path led up into the hillside. Rina brushed out her hair and tied it back with a handkerchief to protect it from the wind, then she joined Takashi on the slope. He took her hand and they climbed up to an orchard of *natsumika* trees, the giant oranges hung low and heavy against the dark green shells of the leaves. Takashi found a spot for them in the grass and spread out the mackintosh he had brought from the car. It was beige in the

mould of New York detectives and Rina grinned, she liked to tease him about it. A few moments later, however, as she sat on the silk lining, feeling the cool of the breeze brush against the back of her neck, she began to feel uneasy. She had committed herself by coming with him, of that she was sure. Rina shifted on the coat as Takashi dug into his satchel.

Takashi looked up at her and Rina thought he must have seen the uncertainty on her face, but he just smiled, his right hand reaching to the bottom of the bag.

Rina pressed her nails into her palm.

“I brought this for you,” Takashi said.

She turned to look at the object he held in his hands: a Canon A-350. She’d seen it in the back streets of Akihabara, looked at it in catalogues, but she had never held one.

“Go on,” Takashi said. “Take it. I thought we could do some work while we’re up here.”

“Work?”

“Don’t you think it’s time?”

Rina looked away. He brought this up persistently – the possibility that she might now return to the career she’d once planned. But she was afraid: if you neglected something for long enough it died.

“I read your monograph, Rina,” he said. “The one you published in *The Workshop*? ”

Rina looked up in surprise, she started to smile but then she bit her lip. “That was experimenting.”

“It doesn’t read that way,” he said.

“I wrote it after I left the law programme at *Todai*. Father hated it. He threw every copy out of the house.”

“I can get you a copy.”

“No need,” she said and she looked at him then. “I remember it.”

Silently, he handed her the camera.

They moved quietly through the orchard and lay down on the sheets of leaves. Rina watched Takashi as he peered through the viewfinder of his camera, his fingers were nimble as they slid across the bevel on the lens, adjusting the apertures and shutter speeds, accentuating the natural palette before them. He finished the colour film and then, gauging the light and shadows of the afternoon, switched to monochrome, drawing the shapes of the leaves out through the filters of black and white. For the first half hour, Rina watched him; she loved the speed of his movements, the steadiness of his hands. Slowly, she eased down beside him, raising the viewfinder of her Canon to see what he could see.

They worked steadily and silently for most of the afternoon. Rina listened to the rapid click of the shutters, she felt the cool weight of the camera in her palm. Eventually, she turned to find Takashi propped on his elbow beside her. He was watching her, waiting for her to take her shot. She narrowed her eyes at him and he smiled, lifting a new lens out of his bag. She looked at his hand supporting the camera as he twisted the existing lens off and set it to one side, fitting the new one with a soft click. She leaned towards him and he showed her cylinder of glass, explaining how it would capture the light as it slowly drifted down to them through the trees.

The breeze rustled through the hillside and Takashi plucked an orange from a branch, handing it to Rina. They sat companionably on the grass, whilst she split the thick green pith of the fruit open with her thumbnail, watching as tiny droplets of zest were released into the air. She pulled it apart and handed half to him, sucking the sour liquid off her palm. As the sun sank lower on the horizon she leant against his

shoulder, resting her cheek against the ridge of his collarbone and watching the light flickering between the trees.

A droplet of water fell onto Rina's hair followed by two more. It was not until the shower broke through the leaves that she rose to her feet. The storm had crept up on them. It was that way in the mountains, the undergrowth beckoned to the moisture in the air.

Takashi threw his coat over both of them and they scrambled down the slope, muddy and awash with wet leaves, to the car. Laughing, they climbed into the warmth and watched as streams of water cascaded down the windows and a white fog materialised over the hills, flattening the mountains into two dimensions and, finally, rendering them invisible. Neither of them turned the radio on; they sat in the silence as Takashi took her hand, interlacing his fingers with hers.

"I came third in the Yamaguchi photography prize," he said, "they're going to feature one of my pieces in an exhibition. Will you come?"

"Where is it?" Rina asked, turning her head to look at him.

"A warehouse in Akiba. If the art isn't to your taste I can always take you to *Kanda Yabu Soba*."

Rina smiled: he was so cunningly aware of her obsession with food.

"Don't mention the duck soba," she said, lifting her hand to ward him off.

"It would mean a lot to me if you would come," he said.

Rina looked at him and the laughter faded from her eyes. "Then I will."

The rain slowed to a drizzle and stopped as the evening drew on. They got out of the car and, as they approached the rails lining the road, they could see the sea emerging through the wisps of mist that lingered on the hillside.

Rina felt Takashi put his arms around her, rubbing her arms to ward off the chill. "I should go," she said, but this time she was reluctant to leave. "Kash," she said and she turned towards him, "about today..."

"You don't have to say anything."

"Thank you."

He brushed her hair away from her face, untying the damp handkerchief that held it in place. Rina watched as he put it in his pocket and she let him take it.

"I love you," he said.

Rina shifted in his arms and tried to say something, but Takashi placed his fingers over her lips.

"I do."

Tokyo

My mother was a photographer, before she became a wife. Each year when we went to the sea, Grandpa and Mama would walk and play with me on the beach taking roll after roll of film. They would send these off to be made into Kodachrome slides. In the autumn, as the leaves darkened and we left Shimoda, my mother would open a bottle of Coca-Cola in Grandpa's house in Tokyo and we would watch the slides, all at once, on the projector.

I still have them, these home movies of sorts; they are in the basement of the Meguro house, filed in narrow leather boxes. Sometimes, I go down there to look at the slides. They are beautiful; each one a transparent square, encased in white card. I can see my mother in miniature, biting the cone of an ice-cream; me in the sand with my red bucket, my costume damp from the sea; Grandpa sheltering under an umbrella, even though he has already positioned his chair in the shade.

I have other memories too, but I do not think they are of Shimoda. These appear to me as glimpses and flashes. In my mind's eye, the line of the coast straightens, the rocky inlets of Shimoda are replaced by an open harbour and I hear the slap of my feet on concrete as I run and run. There are moments of clarity, liquid scenes: I see a yacht on the waves, its sails stretched taught; I feel strong arms lifting me into the air; I turn away from the flash of a camera lens in the sun; a man's hand offers me a cone of red bean ice cream, a man with long, slender fingers dusted with black hair, a hand that does not belong to my father.

I have never found these images in my grandfather's basement, nor have I seen that harbour in any of our photographs. But, sometimes, I wake in the night to the caramel scent of red beans. A breeze lingers in my hair and there is an echo of people talking in the distance, but perhaps it is only the whir of the ceiling fan and the scent of Hanne's *azuki manjū* left to cool in the kitchen.

I asked Grandpa once about these memories of mine. He said I was remembering Shimoda. When I continued to look at him, *Ojisān* laughed, motioning for me to sit beside him on the stool at the foot of his armchair. He reached for a pile of books stacked on the edge of his shelves, his fingers tracing the hardbacks, paper, leather. "Which one will it be today?" he asked.

I was in Grandfather's study when the lies around my life began to unravel. I was due to give a talk on constitutional law to the third years at *Todai* and I had lost my notes. I was standing in my blue suit, my hair pulled back from my face, my stockings immaculate. I was late. I leaned over Grandfather's desk, casting all of his papers into disorder. I thumbed through the files, litigation, corporate law and then crossed to the old arm chair in the corner. In the evenings, after work, I often fell asleep reading there; in my efforts to stay ahead of the other trainees I volunteered to assist in extra cases, but the lack of sleep was catching up with me. I was kneeling on the floor, my hand outstretched towards a sheaf of papers that might have been my notes, when the phone started to ring.

My life was in that room: my certificates from school; acceptance letters; the framed newspaper article about Grandpa's most famous case; the folder of articles that he kept for me on current events. Each morning, Grandpa would sit at

the breakfast table, sipping his cold noodles and cutting clippings from the day's news, so I would not get caught out. I had read every article, every story in that room, except mine. I was so caught up in the search for my notes that I almost didn't hear it.

"Hello?"

"Good afternoon" the voice said, it was hesitant, female.
"May I speak to Sarashima-san?"

I was distracted and so I mumbled into the phone, glancing around the room. "I'm afraid he's away at the moment what is this regarding?"

"Is this the home of Yoshi Sarashima?"

"Yes," I repeated. "I am his granddaughter, Sumiko. How can I help?"

"Is this the household and family of Rina Satou?"

"My mother is dead," I replied.

There was a silence on the line. For a moment I thought that the person with the hesitant voice had hung up, but then I heard her take a breath. Over the earpiece she said, "I have news from the Fuchu Prison Service. I am very sorry to tell you Miss Satou, my call is regarding Takashi Nakamura."

"Who?" I asked.

As my voice travelled into the silence, the line went dead.

Samantha Jackson was born in Yorkshire and now lives in London, working as a commissioning editor for Penguin Random House. She has a degree in English Literature from the University of East Anglia, where she experienced her first creative writing workshop, taught by Esther Morgan. After focusing on a career in publishing, she came back to writing in 2006, completing a Creative Writing Certificate at Birkbeck, University of London, followed by an MA in Creative and Life Writing at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her work has appeared in UK poetry magazines and anthologies, including Ambit, ARTEMISpoetry, Iota, Lung Jazz: Young British Poets for Oxfam, The Frogmore Papers and The Rialto.

Samantha Jackson | *Ruskin Park*
and other poems

Ruskin Park

I carry her on my shoulders, her hands hooked
beneath my chin as she talks, not to me, not to anyone,
her mind roaming over this seashell, that teddy bear,
the biscuits and spaghetti she might have for her dinner,
stars, owls, boats, fragments of song. We walk through
drifts of pale leaves, across split seedpods squashed on tarmac,
new conkers gleaming inside. Her voice ripples into
the evening air; and the sky, just as the sun has sunk,
is luminous, streaked with a brilliant pink.

In the taxi to the hospital

as my mother presses a plastic bag to
her mouth, curls towards the open window,

I should be holding her hand, saying,
like someone else might say, it's going to be okay

we'll be there soon. I stare straight ahead,
the driver darting looks in the mirror,

his perfect leather seats, the long space between us—
my useless fingers clenching keys, lip salve,

anything in my pockets. Sometimes I kiss
my own daughter too much, squash her cheek

into my cheek, cup her foot inside my hands.
Later, as the antibiotics kick in, a new wave

of nausea sends her sideways; I catch her,
take my mother for the first time in my arms.

At the Supermarket

Although she can't recall the baked beans
she ate for her lunch, or any number
that comes after ten, she remembers exactly
where the teddy-bear-shaped crisps are
in this labyrinth of aisles and shelves. Here,
under the timeless glare of yellow strip-lights,
our two wills meet. She is fearless, fixed
as a star in the pursuit of her goal; I am
uncertain, faltering, too aware of the man nearby,
swerving, the choice of my words,
too firm, too weak. As she collapses her body
onto the floor, arms, legs, swimming about her,
I can't help but marvel at this act against
reason, this wildness she displays, like the sudden
descent of a snow storm, terrifying and yet
exhilarating.

Swimming Lessons

As the other children sing and splash,
run laughing in and out of the water,
she clings to your shoulders like a life raft,
teeth chattering, blue lips shouting *No*.

The next time you think you've cracked it,
and even she's convinced, chest puffed,
parading the little wet suit like a party dress
around her room. But when you get there

it's as if her fear was sealed in further,
she won't even put a toe in the water,
her face pressed against your neck.
And you, happiest diving headlong into

surging waves, salt bite of the Atlantic
sparkling in your throat, on your skin,
can't understand it, why she's more like me
than you.

Pink grapefruits

halved, sugared, segments loosened
with a knife, an assortment of cereal packets
and my grandfather, tea towel slung
over one shoulder, wafting in and out
taking our orders. A silver plate of bacon
and tomatoes in a swirl of oiled water,
toast resting in a rack. What brings him
finally to sitting are the scones he releases,
still warm, in the middle of the table.
Ooze of jam-slurred butter on our fingers,
as we sit in silence, swilling each bite back
with milky tea. Here now, I sit at the head
of the table, too many empty seats,
a plate of scones not quite risen. I bite into
the bittersweet of currants caught in the cooking,
a double taste of comfort and discomfort,
and my daughter, persistent as a drum,
asking for more.

Yvonne Smith grew up in Croydon and studied literature at the University of Leeds. She works in the field of legal research and trade union education. She has had several short theatre plays performed at venues such as Theatre 503, the Etcetera Theatre. She has also worked with the Red Room Theatre Co on an optioned play *'Field'* and had a rehearsed reading for Paines Plough. Yvonne has reached the final shortlist of the Verity Bargate Competition. She has used the mentoring year to focus on completing her full-length play.

Yvonne Smith | from *Eels*

The play is set in a small town in Essex near the mouth of the River Thames. Derek is 50, he runs a small eel fishing business. Michael is 20, Polish. He has been in England for two years and he works for Derek. Leigh is 17, she is Derek's daughter.

Scene One

Estuary shore, late morning. The tide is out but coming in. Michael in waterproof waders, kneeling, engrossed with a crate of eels. He is plunging them into bucket of ice. Leigh wearing new four-inch white platform high heels, denim mini skirt, bare legs. She is balanced on a large raised stone near the water edge. Michael is at her feet. Her position in precarious but she is expert and confident.

MICHAEL Going out?

LEIGH No.

(Pause)

What's it to you?

(Michael continues to work.)

LEIGH Do I look like I'm going out?

(Pause)

MICHAEL S'nothing to me. Just if you were...

LEIGH I'm not.

MICHAEL Just thought...

LEIGH Keep 'em to yourself.

(*Pause*)

I don't wanna hear 'em.

(*Silence. Michael working.*)

MICHAEL Nice shoes.

LEIGH Whaddoyouknow about shoes?

(*Pause*)

LEIGH Stop looking at my shoes.)

MICHAEL Can't help it. They're in my eyeline.

(*A large wriggling eel causes splashes on Leigh's shoes.*)

LEIGH Mind!

MICHAEL All right on there?

LEIGH I was born on this beach, remember?

Practically.

MICHAEL Slippy today. Seaweed's up.

LEIGH 'Seaweed's up'! What does **that** mean?

(*She speaks to an invisible person.*)

He makes it up. Pretends he knows things.

Watch yourself. Tide's coming in.

MICHAEL Got...

(*He looks at sea, calculates.*)

... five minutes... forty... two seconds.

LEIGH Well, I've got...

(*Looks at her watch*)

... exactly four minutes, thirty-five seconds
and ten milliseconds before I go talk to
someone interesting!

MICHAEL Three minutes in those shoes.

Thought you weren't going anywhere.

(*Pause*)

Anyone I know?

LEIGH I said "interesting"!

Your only friends are fat, slimy and live in
buckets.

(*Michael looking lovingly at eel.*)

MICHAEL Look at this lovely boy.

(*To eel*) Isn't he a lovely fat fella?

- LEIGH Freak.
- MICHAEL He's got to eat, hasn't he? Or he wouldn't get to be such a lovely fat boy...
- LEIGH Urgh!
- They eat shit. Bottom feeder!
- MICHAEL He won't eat anything.
- LEIGH Bottom feeder! (*She cackles*)
- MICHAEL How can you not think it's amazing?
- LEIGH Oh, God, not the Sargasso...
- MICHAEL They all set off

(They speak simultaneously.)
- LEIGH They all set off from the Sargasso Sea and they swim to every lake and river in Europe...
- MICHAEL But and then...
- LEIGH And then when they want a shag, they have to set off all the way back!

(She laughs.)
- (Pause.)*
- MICHAEL It's a miracle.
- LEIGH You know what makes them the most stupidest things ever?

MICHAEL Not stupid

LEIGH That they're born in this brilliant warm sea in the Caribbean and of all the places in the world they could go, they choose... Essex.

When they could stay there and have a piña colada.

MICHAEL I came.

LEIGH Exactly.

Except the Sargasso Sea's probably a shithole.

MICHAEL It's not.

LEIGH So it's a home from home.

MICHAEL I'd like to go.

LEIGH I'd **love** you to go!

(Leigh cackles.)

LEIGH Can you imagine?

Massive clear sea. A huge blue clear sea and you're looking at it thinking "This is paradise". And then you see something move. Then a few black things. A few wriggles. And then you watch and thousands of wriggling rubber snakes start shooting out, in and out and moving like one thing and you realise the whole sea is just a sea of black wriggling load of eels with eyes and fangs and...

(She is appalled by the image.)

Urgh...! Disgusting.

(She does a jerking dance of disgust.)

MICHAEL They're transparent there.

LEIGH That's worse! Invisible!

MICHAEL They're your future.

LEIGH If I thought he was my future, I'll slit my throat right now.

(Leigh gives the bucket a shove with her shoe.)

MICHAEL Don't. They've already been upset.

LEIGH Upset! Listen, how do you tell an upset eel?

MICHAEL Shut up.

LEIGH It looks like this.

(She pulls a grotesque face.)

(An eel wriggles from the bucket and falls on her shoe.)

(Leigh grabs the eel, throws it on rock, steadies herself and before Michael can stop her, digs her heel into the eel. Michael tries to grab it. Leigh launches more attacks on it.)

MICHAEL Oi!

LEIGH You're killing them anyway!

MICHAEL Not like that!

(*Eel isn't dead.*)

LEIGH Jesus! Ugh.

MICHAEL It's suffering.

LEIGH Oh, kill it!

Kill it!

Michael, kill it! It's horrible!

(With dignity, Michael finishes off eel by plunging into the ice, it gradually subsides. The area is covered with dark liquid. He lays the dead eel outside the bucket. He then crouches back down and slowly carries on his work.)

(*Leigh is subdued.*)

LEIGH Why don't you put him in?

(*No response.*)

LEIGH Was that organs?

MICHAEL Was only a youngster...

LEIGH It was you saying "he was my future".

(*No response*)

LEIGH He's better off dead.

He doesn't have to be an eel no more.

MICHAEL His friends were in that bucket.

How'd you like to be bludgeoned to death by a
shit shoe with your friends watching?

(Pause)

LEIGH That shoe cost...!

(Grumpily) They don't bloody have friends.

Like you.

(Still no response)

God!

Sorry, all right?!

Wasn't very nice for me, you know!

You kept on about...

(Sighs) I'm sorry I bludgeoned the eel...

(Michael looks at her.)

LEIGH ... to death...

Looks at him

... with my shoe. *(Picks at her shoe.)* Oh, shit!
Paint scratched!

Look, buy you a drink. I'm sorry.

MICHAEL Don't drink.

LEIGH Come on.

MICHAEL Where you going?

LEIGH Nowhere I shouldn't.

Just wanna go **somewhere**, go to a shit bar,
have a shit drink.

(*Michael picks up buckets, starts walking away.*)

LEIGH Oi, we've got...

(*She looks down at watch, sees the water lapping around the rock. The tide is coming in quickly.*)

Eh...?

(*Leigh stands stranded on rock, not wanting to spoil her shoes.*)

LEIGH (*Shouts*) Michael! My shoes!

It's slippy...

Seaweed's up...

(*Shouts*) Michael! Please!

(*Michael stops. A long pause while he thinks. Then he wades back through the water, picks her up, throws her over his shoulder like a sack, trudges back through the water.*)

Scene Two

Michael inside large shed, preparing eels for washing, freezing, bagging. Derek enters.

DEREK Where's my fucking daughter?

MICHAEL Don't know.

DEREK Like fuck. You'll never get in there.

She can't stand you, that's all there is to it.

She goes for blokes like me... dangerous... mysterious, exciting.

(Derek throws himself down in a chair, scratching and massaging his large stomach.)

DEREK Can't do nothing about it. It's fate. Get used to it. I had to. Men like me, we're just attractive to birds and twats like you ain't.

(He does a large burp.)

MICHAEL *(Not phased)* OK.

DEREK Woman was looking at me this morning matter of fact.

MICHAEL Yes?

DEREK Pulling the nets in. Had me vest on. Spose she saw me muscles.

(Pulls up shirt sleeves, flexes his muscles, considers them.)

Eh?

MICHAEL Yes, they're... *(Lost for words)*

What woman?

DEREK West side.

MICHAEL But...

DEREK You wouldn't know a woman if she came up
and... gave birth to you!

I could murder a tea.

(Derek torn between badness and telling, telling wins.)

I had a morning you would not believe.

MICHAEL I'm sorry.

DEREK You being sarcastic, you twat?

MICHAEL I'm in sympathy.

DEREK Hm. *(Desperate to tell)*

(Bursts out) Fucking inspectors.

Fucking coastal effects, wetland bollocks. What
is a wetland?

MICHAEL I think...

DEREK Wetland! I know it's wet round here, it's a fucking estuary, innit?!

Heard of a risk assessment?

MICHAEL Health and safety?

DEREK Whaddyouknow about 'ealth and safety?

Risk, what fucking risk? I told him there was a high risk of having something very long an' sharp shoved up his arse.

MICHAEL You didn't?

DEREK Yeah, I fucking did.

MICHAEL We got to keep licences.

DEREK He knows me, they all know me. They know I'm a laugh.

MICHAEL There's a new guy.

DEREK (*Muttering*) Risks of flooding.

What flood?! I've pissed bigger floods than this.

Weather's always been shit and always will be. It's life. It's fucking England. Get used to it. I had to. You don't see Freddie Mercury pissing about moaning about the weather, do you? No, he had better things to do, writin' songs, arrangin' tours, talkin' to Brian...

As–have–fucking–I.

MICHAEL He's dead.

DEREK (*Sad*) Only the good die young.

(*Pause*)

(*Michael has stopped working, looking at eel.*)

DEREK You're not asking him out on a date. Get on with it!

(*Michael continues, Derek watches him.*)

DEREK Oi, have you washed him?

MICHAEL Course

DEREK Yeah. Don't forget.

If he's dirty and someone has him for their elevenses...

(*Derek draws finger across this throat with ccccck noise, then taps his nose.*)

Fatal.

They'll eat anything these. Bottom feeders.

I can't afford it. Not after last time. Careful right?

MICHAEL They won't eat **anything**.

DEREK I said careful!

MICHAEL No probs.

DEREK (*Considers Michael*) Bit perky, aren't you?

MICHAEL Not a crime.

DEREK "Not a crime" ...

Hm.

Is them gills nice n red?

MICHAEL Yep.

DEREK That means it's aerated.

MICHAEL I know.

DEREK So the skin can breathe.

MICHAEL Mm. (*He knows all this*)

DEREK What makes it tasty.

MICHAEL Yeah.

DEREK Oxygen, that is.

MICHAEL Oh?

DEREK Water, H two fuckin' O. The O is oxygen, see?

MICHAEL OK.

DEREK Yeah, right, well.

(*Silence. Michael cheerfully packing, Derek ruminating.*)

DEREK Oi, what the hell's got into you today?

- MICHAEL Just a bit bouncy.
- DEREK What's wrong with your mug?
- MICHAEL Just smiling.
- DEREK Enough to scare the fish as a rule, your miserable mug.
- Bouncing around like a space hopper.
- MICHAEL Yeah, I'm quite... uplifted.
- DEREK Uplifted?!
- MICHAEL Feel quite, you know... bouncy.
- DEREK You're like a jiggling sprat, you twat.
- Jiggling twat.
- What's the matter with you then? What's the 'reason'?
- MICHAEL Just happy.
- DEREK Got your end away? Bet you are. Which end?
(Laughs raucously)
- MICHAEL Just feeling happy today.
- Enjoying the work. Enjoying my work. Yeah, enjoying my work today.
- DEREK Enjoying your work, are you?
- What, enjoying the...

Whaddyou fucking mean you're 'enjoying your work'?!

Who do you think you fucking are?! You ain't arranging global tours for a famous rock star like... Freddie Mercury, are you?

MICHAEL No.

Just... happy to be me, here, enjoying my work.

(Derek puts down his tea in disbelief.)

DEREK I've heard it all now.

(Derek thinks)

"Enjoying his work".

(Pause)

So what would you do about this woman?

(Michael surreptitiously checks his watch)

MICHAEL What woman?

DEREK What woman? Woman was watchin' me.

MICHAEL Oh. *(Thinks)*

DEREK Like... how would you start off?

For example.

MICHAEL Well... *(Subtly starts to pack up while Derek thinking.)*

You find out about her.

DEREK What – “Who are ya?” I can’t say that.

MICHAEL Find out what she likes and say you like it.

DEREK What, like...

MICHAEL Like... “who’s your favourite singer?”

DEREK “Who’s your favourite singer?” (*Thinks*)

Oh!

Oh, yeah!

(*Derek is thinking as Michael quietly leaves.*)

As a further opportunity to develop their writing, this scheme offers its writers the chance to work with Chris Meade of if:book UK to conceive and realise an experimental, collaborative writing project, using new the internet and new forms of technology to inspire and aid their work. This year, four writers across genres produced a play script, an extract of which is included in this anthology.

The full version can be viewed online at <http://theshedifso.pressbooks.com>.

Sarah Hegarty, Jessica Mitchell,
Yvonne Smith, Paul Stephenson | from
The Shed

When I gave my talk at Totleigh Barton on the future of the book and showed the Jerwood Arvon mentees the latest iPad apps glowing, dancing and buzzing with digital enhancements, described if:book projects and new media writing sites none of which I could access in this wi-fi free haven, as I chatted around the big wooden table with the new team of selected writers about blogs, copyright and why laptops only crash when the final draft is finished but still unsaved, I wasn't assuming a positive reaction to my suggestion that some mentees might like to work on a piece of collaborative writing.

I was delighted when four of the writers decided they'd meet online over one week and see what happened. It was a lot of fun looking in on the bizarre, witty and touching dialogues arising between shedbound shades of dead writers, including the appearance of a gigantic caterpillar in their midst who injected a surreal twist to proceedings then edited himself away.

I believe there is a big future for new forms of collaborative writing made possible by the affordances of digital, that soon we'll be enjoying great literature made in these ways, and that the breakthrough works are very likely to arise from groups such as the Jerwood/Arvon mentees: talented, ambitious, emerging writers brought together to think and write alongside each other with expert support and the uniquely inspiring atmosphere of Arvon where the creation of literature is made to feel as natural and tasty as the gobsmacking landscapes and the communally cooked lasagne - if not even tastier.

Chris Meade
Director | if:book UK

Four writers on the scheme got together online over three weeks in June 2013 with just a blank Google doc, a few photographs and a lot of nervous anticipation. The following piece of work is the result and we hope you have as much fun reading it as we did in writing it together.

Our starting points were various: memories of our recent Masterclass at Totleigh Barton in Devon, photographs of a shed, some famous writers associated with the West Country – notably Nancy Mitford and Jean Rhys. We were also aware that June 2013 was the 100th anniversary of the suffragette Emily Wilding Davison's death, after being trampled by King George V's horse during the Epsom Derby. So, with the encouragement of Chris Meade on the starting gun, off we went. Our characters all somehow arrived with the flashing of the cursor and, to our surprise, started speaking to each other. It was a fascinating process to begin a conversation as a character with another unknown character or three and watch them unfold and develop in front of our eyes. It was liberating to react instantly to the other characters whilst at the same time working out together what direction and shape the piece should have. Writing in this way was a real buzz and an antidote to over-thinking or suffering writer's block! Everyone should try this at least once in their lives.

**Sarah Hegarty, Jessica Mitchell,
Yvonne Smith, Paul Stephenson**

From Scene One

A large derelict shed/outbuilding, covered with crumbling pebbledash. Total darkness. Sound of door creaking open, disturbing spiders' webs and then footsteps.

ROSE Hello?

Sylvia? Emmeline? Are you here?

I thought we were going to make more leaflets.
Have some tea, some cake maybe, and then the leaflets.

Listens

All this hide-and-seek lark, it's not very... it's not very fitting. And we haven't a lot of time - not really. I promised my mother I'd be home by six, and that means getting the last train.

Emmeline?!

Sound of sensible shoe stamping firmly on the floor

This is really very silly indeed! No wonder my father is against the whole thing if this is what you all get up to.

He says if we were all married, if we were occupied – cleaning the floors and cooking the meals – we wouldn't have a moment to worry about having our say. He says we get our say at home anyway, and that's a say enough.

*(Disappointed)*I thought I'd get my say today.

*Sound of sitting down on the floor. Rustling,
then loud chewing and eating*

Only none of you want to listen.

DARREN What you putting on that voice for? Who you pretending to be?

You mad bitch.

You're all mad, bitches. Women!

ROSE *(Gulps)* Who's that?!

DARREN And what you eating? I'm starved.

ROSE It's a pork pie. (More gulping and munching)
It's all gone now though.
Did any girls come this way? Tall-ish. Wearing trousers. Holding a banner.

I did all the stencilling on that thing. I had to do it in the bathroom so my father didn't see.
Barely room in there to get it in there, never mind paint on all those letters.

Can you stencil?

DARREN You escaped from the nuthouse? Stencilling – what the hell's that?

I didn't see nobody. It's dark!

Oh, I get it. They're after you, are they? You've got out of some nuthouse and they're after you, these girls with the trousers?

Well, sorry, darlin' but you've come to the wrong twatting place.

Pause

Hey, what do you look like?

I could do with seein' a chick. I been inside somewhere myself, you understand?

I could do with looking at a woman.

ROSE I don't know that I want to be looked at, thank you very much. There's not much to see anyway. That's what my father says.

DARREN There's always somethin' to see. We're all the same underneath. Well, obviously I'm not the same as you – underneath.

Fuckin' hope not. (Laughs)

I wouldn't have survived prison if I had.

Pause

Hey, let me touch your hair.

Go on.

ROSE Have you seen a lot of people... underneath? I mean have you seen underneath a lot of people?

DARREN (*Laughs*) Oh, I see. Getting dirty now. Nah, I mean, yeah, course I have!

I seen everything ‘underneath’, all there is to see.

Seen more underneaths than you’ve had hot dinners.

I was a magnet – back in the day.

They been queuing up to show me their underneaths. Men too – in the nick.

All I wanna do is touch your hair.

ROSE I’ve never seen anyone. Only fragments. Feet. Ankles. Wrists. Nothing whole.
Why do you want to touch my hair?

DARREN Dunno... (*thinks*)

Been hard last couple years, slapping some hairy wanker, slamming huge doors, the bed... oh my God, the bed was hard.

Just wanna touch something soft I s’pose, woman’s hair. Like that Timotei advert, it was on a lot.

Plus I can smell something – what is it... some herb, herb you put in your hair?

ROSE We were rolling about in the grass earlier. I made a daisy chain, and then Sylvia crushed it and rubbed all the little bits of petal and stalk into my hair.

You can touch it but you can't move. I'll come to you. And if I say stop then you have to stop.

DARREN (*Bravado*) Tryin' to get me going? "Rolling around in the hay?!" You shouldn't say things like that. People'll think you're one of 'them'.

Pause

Okay. I won't move.

You come to me.

JEAN Here I come! Did you say "prison"? Are you one of these musclebound thugs? I could do with a bad boy. Whoops! (Stumbles)

Anyway, who are you both, for God's sake? And what are you doing in my shed?

Sound of liquid pouring, ice cubes

I was told to wait, and he'd come back. But I can't remember who he was. Christ, it's as bad as that time in Paris with Ford. Madox Ford, you know.

ROSE Oh yes, well... I know of him. He's been a good friend to us, very helpful, though I didn't much like that character, Valentine. Bit of a sap. We're not like that. We're not piners.

Have you been here all this time? Listening?

DARREN Two women. Two weird women. (*Thinks*) But they're still... women.

D'you know that film with Jesus in the barn and the kids find him? This is like that. Played that video a lot.

I'd have to be Jesus. Remember Hayley Mills? I loved her.

JEAN Always the past tense, eh? I tell you, I know about the past tense darling. Been there. Like that time in Paris, does anyone remember that?

Oh well. It was a long time ago.

DARREN How old are you?

JEAN (*Laughing sarcastically*) You're very young, aren't you?

DARREN I've aged prematurely.

You don't sound like an old bag.

JEAN For that you can have a little drink. Anyone else? Plenty of gin. Just need to find it...

Sound of shuffling through bags

DARREN Yeah, ta, gin, straight. You got any Guinness?

JEAN Gin will have to do, young man. And what about your... friend? The one who was rolling about in the hay, earlier?

DARREN She's not my friend, she's...

(*Loud whisper*) I think she's a nutter. You sound much better.

- JEAN She sounded quite sane to me... but then everything's relative of course. Are you frightened of madness?
- DARREN Not frightened of anything now. Who likes nutters? I met enough of them, fucking noisy. No, but that other bird, it's she thinks she's living in a different world. I'm practical.
- JEAN A practical man! Now that is what we need to get us out of here. I presume we are leaving? We're just waiting, aren't we?
- DARREN Leaving... yeah. Listen, can I come home with you? I need a bed. I'm not sleeping here. I won't do anything, promise. I can fix something, got a dodgy toilet or light fitting?
- JEAN Oh. I thought... well. My home. That's a funny idea. It's not far, in some ways. It's sort of... moored. Beached. Run aground, if you like. Or I am. In this dead-end village. The neighbours hate me. When I'm not looking – when they think I don't know what they're doing – they break in and steal things.
- DARREN Sounds like me. We might make a good team. This town is shit.
- JEAN (*Quietly*) A team. That's what you said. I haven't been part of a team for... I don't know how long. Christ! Mustn't get maudlin, darling!
- DARREN Yeah, a team. I've been in a gang – it's... scary. I wouldn't admit that but I'm saying it to you. Look, come on, grab hold, you'll fall over. I'll get that door open.

JEAN It's quite – comfy, in the dark. Isn't it? Can't see you, you can't see me. We're just in each other's heads, darling! Maybe that's best, eh?

DARREN Don't be stupid. Can't just sit here. You must have things you wanna do. Tell me, I'll help you. I told you, I'm practical.

JEAN Things I wanna do. Wannadoo, wannadoo, baby. That's what we said in the Sixties!

DARREN You're that old?! Sixties, like the Beatles? You can't be. So what do you want then?

JEAN Everything. I always wanted everything. That was my problem. (*Drinks, vicious tone*) So what's your problem? Just looking for some distraction, hey honey?

While Jean is talking, Darren stealthily moves to where her voice is coming from, attempting to surprise her. He lunges, falls forward.

DARREN There's nothing there. Hey, where are you?!

JEAN (*In a quiet calm voice, with Dominican accent, as if reading*) 'They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did.' Remember that, honey? Recognise it?

DARREN Shit, what's going on?! Who is that?

He makes a rush for the door.

JEAN I'm trouble, honey. But this honey ain't for bears.

- DARREN Bear? I'm not a fucking bear.
I'm not just some animal, you know.
- ROSE What kind of animal would you be...?
- DARREN Shit! You again.
- ROSE If you were an animal? I think I'd be a caterpillar, a fat one, with hairs all over its body. Wriggling around on the floor of this shed, just waiting to be a butterfly.
- Darren laughs in spite of himself*
- DARREN You are weird!
- ROSE Go on! What kind?
- DARREN Well. I'd be... like... a gorilla probably. Or one of those wildebeest. I'd be hairy... very powerful. I'd be like... other animals would fuck right off when they'd see me coming, they'd shit themselves with fear and fly across plains like on a documentary.
- ROSE Why would you want other animals to run away from you?
- DARREN (*Amazed anyone could think this not natural*) Who wouldn't? Respect. They'd fear me, I could eat them soon as look at them. I could tear them to pieces. Natural power.
- ROSE You'd be all by yourself. Always.
- DARREN Ah, but... I'd have the bird gorillas and the bird wildebeest and they'd be crowding around me

like fuck and especially cos I was King Bollocks.
I wouldn't have to lift a finger. They'd just come.
Nature.

ROSE I think you'd be by yourself.

DARREN Oi, that's a bit insulting, love. You need to
watch your David Attenboroughs.

What about you then? How would you get your
hairy caterpillar mate?

ROSE What do you mean, 'David Attenboroughs'? I
haven't really thought about that, but I think
I'd be OK. I think caterpillars look after each
other.

DARREN Let's hope for your sake they do.

ROSE Now you're being insulting.

DARREN No, love, I'm just concerned for your welfare.
What, you mean you never seen Attenborough?
What century you living in?!

ROSE The twentieth. It's 1908.

Pause

DARREN You mean 2008. You're still five years out, love.

ROSE You're not a very good listener. It's 1908. Next
year, it'll be 1909 and I'll be 14. Two years from
16 and four years from 18, and on and on and
on. I find it easier to separate big things into
smaller things, otherwise it's too difficult to
think about them. I'm half-way to 28. And a
long way from 56. (Pause.) How old are you?

- DARREN Are you joking me? You're 13? You don't sound bloody 13. What you doing luring me into talking about touching and hair and all sorts? I'm not a paedo! Plus you're a nutter. So I can't trust nothing you say.
- I'm 28, if it's any of your business. Fucking 13?! Bollocks to 13.
Do they say bollocks in 1908?
- ROSE What are bollocks? Do you think I sound immature? My father says I'm immature for my age. He thinks that's why I got in with Emmeline and everyone.
- DARREN Immature? Just call it nuts. And bollocks, love, they're these, I'm grabbing them now. They're the powerhouse of the male caterpillar – and the wildebeest, yeah.
- ROSE I can't see what you're touching. We need a candle. (Scrabbling about) Did you see any candles?
- DARREN I got matches. Have them in 1908? You strike one of them.
- Throws a box into the air, it falls, matches scatter. Rose scrabbles for them.*
- DARREN Hey, when you move do you do that thing caterpillars do when they hump their bodies and sort of loop and scoop over the floor?
- ROSE Don't be stupid. Shall I light it? Do you want to see?

Pause

DARREN Dunno... now. You might have two heads, or...
 a hairy body, like a caterpillar. What do you
 think? Remember I'm vulnerable.

ROSE Are you? I've never heard a man say that about
 himself before. (Pause)

DARREN Yeah, I am. That's why I committed offences. A
 counsellor said that to me in prison, that I'm a
 vulnerable man.

You can't have heard men saying anything at
your age. Got that to come.

You got me here for a bit. You gotta start
sometime.

ROSE Could I touch your hair? In the dark though.

DARREN Er... dunno. No-one's ever asked!

Thinks

I've got shit hair. You won't like it. I haven't
washed it for months.

ROSE I don't mind.

DARREN It's like a dog's. A shit dog's.

Pause

DARREN All right.

But you remember I'm vulnerable?

ROSE Put your hand out? So I can find you.

DARREN It's out.

Silence

ROSE Is that... no, that's something else.

DARREN Is that your real hand?

ROSE Course. (*Feels*) Your nose is soft.

DARREN It's broken. Do I smell?

ROSE A bit. Not really.

DARREN I must stink but ta.

Pause

DARREN Can I touch you now?

Suddenly door is flung open, shed flooded in bright electric light, a bulb dangling from central beam. Darren and Rose recoil. There is a figure in the doorway.

NANCY I do beg your pardon. Young people, would you be so kind as to fetch my belongings from the carriage and take them up to my rooms.

DARREN What the...? Ever heard of knocking, love?

NANCY That's right, chop-chop now, the gentleman is waiting. And do take care with the trunk.

- DARREN Look love, I don't know who the fuck you are, walking in on people like that but you wanna get some manners.
- NANCY Splendid. And if you would be a darling and see to the driver.
- DARREN Oh Jesus, not another one. Just hold your horses.
- NANCY Young man, I am not about to start holding horses. I'll have you know I left Knightsbridge on the lightest of breakfasts and am now somewhat rather frazzled and in the most urgent need of a Singapore Sling. Once you've carried in my luggage you may very kindly procure me the gin.
- DARREN You might be in for a disappointment there. Some other mad bird got in first.
- NANCY I shall powder my nose and then bring down the cherry brandy tout de suite. I do not suppose for one instance that civilisation has extended quite this far. One lives in hope. And no need to open the trunks. Do lay them down gently or you will damage my typewriting machine. It is of primordial importance that my typewriter remains intact, do you hear?
- DARREN Look we're having a moment here. Turn off that light!
- Lights out*
- DARREN Fuck.
- Darren stares at plate*

He lets out a groan, pushes the table hard, it falls over. He grabs Nancy's hand, looks as if he's going to hit her but changes mind, wrenches watch off her wrist, necklace from her neck, grabs some knives from the side and runs out of the back door, leaving it flying open and banging in the wind.

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A special thank you to the team at Totleigh Barton who hosted the 2013 Masterclass Residency and 2014 Writers' Retreat.

Arvon

Arvon is England's leading creative writing charity, celebrated for its unique ability to discover and develop the writer in everyone. It has been described by Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy as 'the single most important organisation for sharing and exploring creative writing in the UK'.

Arvon runs an annual programme of residential courses at three writing houses, in Devon, Shropshire and Yorkshire. The week-long courses, led by highly respected authors, include a powerful mix of workshops, individual tutorials and time and space to write. Covering a diverse range of genres, from poetry and fiction to screenwriting and comedy, Arvon courses have provided inspiration to thousands of people at all stages of their writing lives. Grants are available to help with course fees. We also offer non-residential city-based creative writing courses.

At the heart of Arvon is the desire to encourage anyone, regardless of their background, to find their voice through writing. About a third of our activities are with groups from schools, youth and community groups and arts organisations, many from the most disadvantaged communities in the UK.

For more information see www.arvon.org. The Arvon Foundation Ltd is a registered charity number No. 306694.



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Since 2009, the Jerwood Charitable Foundation has worked in partnership with Arvon to run an annual mentoring programme. [The Jerwood/Arvon Mentoring Scheme](#) is designed to nurture emerging writers of fiction, poetry and playwriting. The experience includes two residential weeks away at Arvon centres, a year of mentoring from a leading writer, as well as additional support in the areas of the publishing industry and artistic collaboration.

This year's fiction writers were mentored by [Nikita Lalwani](#), poets by [Patience Agbabi](#) and playwrights by [Amy Rosenthal](#). These three inspiring mentors have supported and guided the writers in their work, from a week of intensive workshops, to preparing their work for this anthology.

The book's title *Swimming Lessons* evokes many of the themes explored by the writers in this anthology. Taken from Samantha Jackson's poem, which follows the first splashes of a nervous young swimmer, the title conveys feelings narrated throughout these works: from the anxiety of a Congolese woman awaiting her husband's return from a diamond mine, and illicit meetings at the fern-lined beaches on Japan's Izu Peninsula, to the sense of mystery surrounding a teenager who hitches from Scotland to London with an unwilling truck driver.

We hope these diverse pieces will excite readers for more to come from these talented writers as they launch their writing careers.

'The scheme allowed me to believe in my book – and to write it.'

Sarah Hegarty

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