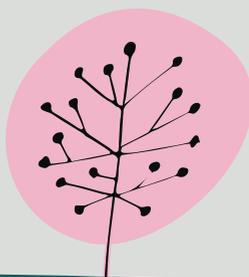
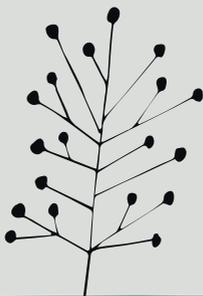


# Whisper the Wrong Name



JERWOOD/ARVON MENTORING SCHEME  
ANTHOLOGY VOLUME SIX

POETRY

RACHEL LONG  
EMMA SIMON  
HILARY WATSON

PLAYWRITING

ANNETTE BROOK  
CHARLOTTE COATES  
SARAH MULHOLLAND

FICTION

RUE BALDRY  
GILL DARLING  
CAROL FARRELLY

Whisper the  
Wrong Name



Jerwood/Arvon  
Mentoring Scheme | ANTHOLOGY  
VOLUME SIX

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Still © Rue Baldry

Phantom Limbs © Emma Simon

ARSEPIECE © Charlotte Coates

My Quondam Dreams are Shot to Hell © Gill Darling

Menagerie Street and other poems © Hilary Watson

Whisper the Wrong Name © Sarah Mulholland

Beheld © Carol Farrelly

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For Martha Rae



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Welcome to *Whisper the Wrong Name*, the sixth anthology of work by nine talented writers selected for this very special mentorship scheme, led by Arvon and supported with extraordinary commitment and generosity by Jerwood Charitable Foundation.

Anyone who attended Arvon in 2014 was eligible to apply. Mentors Ross Raisin, Tanika Gupta and Caroline Bird read all the submissions, each interviewed a shortlist, and each chose three budding writers of their genre to support. No two years are alike, but it is guaranteed that all the writers make huge progress in this environment which supports and challenges and which, above all, gives permission to write.

Our writers came from all over Britain – Edinburgh, Portsmouth, Manchester, York and London – to Totleigh Barton, Devon, twice in the year. The space that Arvon holds to inspire writers worked beautifully, creating a place for reflection and bonding that established vital networks of support. Last summer the group worked with Chris Meade of if:Book to produce ‘A Picnic Hamper’, a series of collaborative pieces responding to daily prompts around the theme of the picnic. In the winter they met industry professionals: literary agent Simon Trewin, theatre-maker Louise Blackwell, and poetry publisher Neil Astley.

This scheme’s success is dependent on thoughtful attention from Arvon’s excellent team, collaborating across time and space, to make this a truly national project. The skills Arvon has learnt over its lifetime are key, and we are constantly observing our practice, to renew our ability to create the conditions writers need to be productive.

Jerwood Charitable Foundation is exceptional in its support for Arvon’s vision, and I want to thank them on behalf of all 54 writers who have benefited from the scheme so far, who tell us it is a precious lifeline. Now, it’s over to this year’s cohort.

**Ruth Borthwick**  
**Chief Executive | Arvon**

Space and time to write are all too rare. Too often moments are snatched on a train, in a café or late at night. As those hard-won words are eked out, receiving good counsel is just as hard to come by.

Over the past six years the Jerwood/Arvon Mentoring Scheme has provided 54 writers with some help for these basic writerly needs. With Arvon's characteristic care and attention, the programme responds and flexes to provide writers with a fertile year for development. Crucially, the two week-long residencies offer the opportunity to write, uninterrupted by the demands of everyday life, and fresh ambition to finish work that may have begun in hastier moments.

At the core of this programme are the relationships between the writers: between the nine selected mentees, and between each mentee and their mentor. Jerwood Charitable Foundation helps to create such relationships across art forms and in a variety of guises. We know the importance of a critical friend to offer intelligent, honest support from the wealth of their experience or to simply be there, saying not much at all. We thank mentors Caroline, Tanika and Ross, who have given more than just their time to this scheme.

Above all, we congratulate the writers on this handsome volume full of insightfully and skilfully drawn characters. For all its multitude of voices, the works find space and time to tell their stories within these pages and promise much more to come.

**Jon Opie**  
**General Manager | Jerwood Charitable**  
**Foundation**

‘To say I’m proud of my mentees would be a massive understatement. The scheme has allowed them to finally and unequivocally identify themselves as full-time poets, and embrace the total focus that comes with that. They have each written a collection’s worth of material in one year, which is incredible, and I’ve had the joyful privilege of witnessing their work strengthen both in quality and flair. Soon, I’m sure, they’ll be mentors themselves.’

**Caroline Bird**  
**Mentor | Poetry**



Rachel Long | from *Poundland Barbie*

## **His bottom lip**

Clitoral, like finding  
a small, hidden part  
of myself in someone else.

Nerve-wet, fleshy  
for a white guy, and stained  
between life-lines with red wine  
gone black.

Only this I point  
with sharpest teeth.

He weighs this up. Eyes roll  
over what this means,  
how and where it can lead, all the things  
it limits. I think this is his first time  
knowing what it is to be betrayed  
by a part of his own body.

Lucky.

No other part? He starts, Not even –  
Be strict. Only this.

## Short Film

Sunday, 4am. Woman, 27, drunk, stumbles through her front door, hits light switch with the bulb of her shoulder, waves to the cab driver like he's her oldest, dearest friend. Kicks shoes off. Sighs, grins, performs the food dance (shoulders to ears, fists balled, knees bent, sways to broken tune of 'Oh, yeah, ooh-oh, yeah'). Walks to bottom of staircase, reaches up, removes battery from fire alarm. She's gonna cook. Oh yeah she's gonna cook toast. (Drunk woman, 27, hasn't eaten anything all week, except sweets. Not sure how to pick this up on camera as she's alone, with no one to disclose this to. Maybe the camera can dolly her into bathroom after? To do: Look into vomit sound effects, contrastingly, jazz could play whilst camera waits outside.) Eats/gobbles half a loaf standing up, licks blood and butter off knuckles, wrist. Looks out of back door, notices that it is getting lighter. Fiddles with a bunch of back door keys (shows signs of distress at difficulty). It flings open, finally. She's almost in tears (close up here?). Steps, barefoot, into garden. Floodlit scene. Scares the cat with a human face, walks up steps, touches air-raid shelter, lightly, once for good luck (consider how to communicate superstition). Camera follows her past dank pond (would fish floating belly up be effective here, or too much?), stands in the ritual-middle of abandoned family garden. Removes all her clothes – expressionless – places a tartan scarf over her head; she is going to play 'tents' (childhood game, again, unsure how to get this across. Maybe a flashback scene is needed earlier on – guy's bedroom scene perhaps?). Floodlight times out. Fin.

## The Girl Who Could Do The Most Sit Ups

She shows me the scars  
careening the stomach that won her the PE prize, Year: 9.  
I was jealous. As I am now  
on walk-of-shame Sundays of her husband and babies,  
sitting round their table, passing glazed carrots and smiling.  
Tiff yanks her first maternity blouse up,  
'Still jealous of these?'  
Her once-lovely 32Cs, now huge, sad moons – translucent and  
'only whacked out for him in the dark.' We laugh,  
a little green-tinged chorus.  
We want swapsies to be currency again.

My phone rings: the fuck buddy. I tell him  
I'm leaving 'now, yes, I'll be with you soon.'  
Her: 'Tell me where you're going tonight.'  
Me: 'Nowhere we haven't been.'  
She cackles, then pleads.

I map our night across her stomach,  
draw a cinema, a noisy bar – dark  
so I colour it in. She closes her eyes,  
I walk across the bone of her bra  
to the door of his flat, my finger-foot hovers  
for a stretch of unmarked skin  
while he fiddles for his keys.  
Inside,  
I tiptoe down uncarpeted stairs  
– her ribs,  
right down  
to the last step,  
her hip

where they both, always,  
twist,  
just out of my reach.

**Abort: An Installation. Or Monet's Haystacks (but the haystacks are estate bins and there isn't much light transition because it's winter) From Smoking Ledge, 2nd Floor Balcony**

Against the estate bins, a dirty Moses basket stuffed into the mouth of a washing machine.

Against the estate bins, a dirty Moses basket spat onto the pavement, a black cat laying inside it.

The dirty Moses basket has been removed and replaced with two empty-bellied shopping trolleys. Washing machine remains.

Will the black cat, now basketless, climb into the womb of the washing machine?

Two empty-bellied shopping trolleys and a black pleather sofa with a headless shower lead reclining on its seat. Washing machine remains – empty.

Black pleather sofa has been stabbed.

Two empty-bellied shopping trolleys, black (stabbed) pleather sofa and a pizza box now surround the headless shower lead. Washing machine has been carted off.

It was still there at gone 11 o'clock.

What council collects washing machines at midnight?

Six dining chairs set for dinner around a ghost-table, black (stabbed) pleather sofa, and a cream, cushionless baby-seat now surround the estate bins. Shower lead has slivered off.

A lady from the night council is sweeping leaves.

Four dining chairs (one is now on its back, legs up). Someone has set them apart. *Someone* because the wind is strong but not strategic enough to pull a wooden family apart.

Two removal men leave next door backwards. They share each end of a rolled up carpet.

The black cat is back, meowing to be let inside a flat that isn't his/hers.

Does it matter what sex the black cat is?

The two removal men holding the rolled up carpet ask me to press the lift button for them – down arrow. The steel box creaks and descends.

Will they dump the carpet at the estate bins? Or will they lay it like a patient inside their white van?

They could have no van at all.

Meowing, meowing, scratching at the door's red paint.

They could not be removal men. They could just be two men leaving a house with a rolled up carpet.

They could be just one man holding a rolled up carpet with a mirror at its centre.

The tallest turns to me before he steps inside the steel box and says, smoking is bad.

## Delayed Gratification

I feel middle class when I'm in love.  
I think it's all the poached eggs on bird-seed bread,  
staying up all night on Zoopla – imagine  
waking under cottage beams, the laughter  
in a garden. Kids.  
A little boy with mixed gold hair  
keeps standing in my dreams.

I read somewhere that it takes three hundred years,  
about thirteen generations, to change your social class.  
I think about this whilst having a fag-I'm-quitting,  
head against the bell of my front door – it's broken  
but, sometimes, after he's left for work, after sleeping over  
on the floor beside my single bed  
its missing slats forbid sex, after  
he's taken a hand-held shower and peed  
in the gaffer-taped loo, I hear this bell  
ringing and ringing.

## Almost No Memory

Go to the door in his towel. There has been a delay in you answering. There is always a delay in you answering. Say, 'Hello?' 'Hey!' He'll say, stepping forward to kiss your face. Pull away. Tighten the towel about your breasts, say, 'Erm, this is a surprise.' His mouth will shuffle, two left feet for lips, 'Very funny!' He'll think you are joking. 'What are you up to?' He goes to hug you. Pull away again, say, 'Look, I don't mean to be rude, but you can't keep knocking here like this.' 'What the fuck?' He is smile-frowning now. 'Stop it, let me in. It's cold out here.' Shout over your shoulder, 'Yeah, it's him.' Quick-glance into the kitchen. He didn't hear anyone calling. Did someone call out? Why could he not hear them? Who is inside his house – the house you share? His eyes stumble all over your body, panic. Keep your voice level. Call again, 'It's fine, babe. Dealing with it.' Then he says your name – the way you've only ever heard a child who couldn't speak yet say it, 'Rachel, what the actual fuck? Please stop pissing about.' He tries to laugh, but can't. 'It's me,' he says thrice, like voodoo. Shake your head as you close the door, whisper through the slit, 'I don't know who you are.'

Annette Brook | from *Gala Mae*

Set in the Gala Mae Rooms, a fictional club in 1950s Soho, and an old people's home in the present day, the play explores the lives of two mixed-race sisters who, both raised in children's homes, do not want their old age to be spent in an old people's home. Gladys decides to rescue Norma from such a home and as she persuades her sister to leave, recounts their colourful, spirited past.

## Scene Seven

GLADYS has just buried her husband XIN, who has been murdered by the teenage boy who 'runs' the Gala Mae Rooms, where she works. A mere two hours after the funeral, her sister, NORMA, whom she has never met, arrives at the club.

\*

*1957. A weekday in summer. The Gala Mae Rooms. GLADYS (25) sits at the bar drinking gin; she is wearing black. LARRY (34) is sweeping the floor; he wears his suit from Scene One with a black tie and stilettos. Brogues lie by the door near his chair. XIN's boxing gloves are around his neck. NORMA (19) enters and stands in the doorway; she wears an expensive looking coat with fur trim. She is carrying a newspaper. 'In The Still of the Night' (by The Platters) can be heard playing faintly on a record player.*

NORMA:           *(Reading from newspaper)* The Gala Mae Rooms?

*LARRY nods at the 'Gala Mae Rooms' sign.*

I'm looking for... (*Sees GLADYS. Stops.*) Hello Gladys.

*GLADYS walks around the bar, picks up a bottle of gin, returns to her seat and pours a large measure. She stares at NORMA.*

I'm so very sorry for...

LARRY: (*Stops sweeping*) What you want, precious?

NORMA: (*Walking towards GLADYS*) When I saw this yesterday I didn't know whether I should... I'm so sorry. I know it's not the best timing but gosh I've imagined you all these years. I've wondered as I suppose you have too – you do know about me?

*GLADYS looks at her glass.*

It was the picture, I suppose, I saw that and it was there around your eyes.

LARRY: (*Goes over to his usual chair by the door and sits down, closes his eyes, sighs*) She buried her fella two hours ago baby girl. This might not be the moment.

NORMA: I know I haven't really any right to turn up today. (*Pause*) I'm Norma. Hello. (*Pause. To LARRY*) I should be here. I mean if... (*To GLADYS*) I would've been by your side. I hope you had people with you.

*GLADYS finishes her gin and pours another. NORMA turns to LARRY.*

Pleased to meet you. I'm Gladys's/  
LARRY: /Lady, lady, hush all this I am. Jesus in a  
hedge.  
NORMA: Sorry. It says here he was an accomplished  
boxer.

*GLADYS walks over to NORMA and snatches  
the newspaper from her and touches the photo.  
LARRY sighs, shuffles in his seat and falls  
asleep.*

Please do have it. I've another copy at home. I  
don't normally read it cover to cover but I saw  
the photo of you and Xin.

*Beat.*

I should have waited. I considered writing you a  
letter. Perhaps that would've been best I just  
wasn't sure... (*Rummages in handbag.*) I have  
my birth certificate here for you to see. It would  
be nice, another time, to take tea at Lyons and  
talk. Another time. I'm so sorry. I'm truly so  
very sorry.

*NORMA lightly shakes LARRY awake.*

You'll be with Gladys, all day, won't you? You'll  
be here?

*LARRY nods. NORMA holds his hand. He  
squeezes it, closes his eyes.*

Here's my current address and the number of the phone box in the hall. You can leave a message. Anytime. If you should want to... it would wonderful. (*Walks towards the door.*)

GLADYS: (*Slowly*) I'm leavin' tomorrow.

*NORMA stops, turns. GLADYS looks down at the newspaper.*

NORMA: International couple. Makes a different photo.

GLADYS: Two coons in a cuddle. Ha.

NORMA: He was a good man I'm sure.

*GLADYS fetches another glass from behind the bar and pours two gins. Nods at NORMA to take one. NORMA does and walks over to LARRY as if to wake him.*

GLADYS: Yourn.

NORMA: To Xin?

GLADYS: To us.

*They drink. NORMA coughs.*

NORMA: The children's home couldn't help. They said you'd left at 14. (*Quietly*) Two coloured girls whose parents didn't want them. You do your hair ever so nice. My little girl, Lisa, she calls me mummy and it's curious. It's a jolly curious word. Having never used it myself. (*Pause*) This gin's rather strong. I try not to 'what if'. I try to make plans and to look forward. When I lost my

husband... he died last year. He was older than me, it wasn't a shock. Although, it was really. Sugar daddy.

GLADYS: Sugar daddy.

NORMA: He looked after me. We can't all have love stories.

*Pause.*

I'm glad you did. I can tell you did. (*Sips her gin, walks about the room*) I never really came up to town much. He didn't like me to. Whenever we did I loved it. Felt like paradise. All the people from all four corners of the earth. Sometimes I made you up in my head. They told me all about you when I was eight. When they sent me to the home that you'd just left. They said 'one in, one out'; there'll be an infestation of you lot somewhere.

GLADYS: World's full of bastards.

NORMA: They might not have told me. If they were cruel they would have never uttered a word. I let them ignore me really. It was preferable.

GLADYS: You made me up in your head?

*NORMA nods. GLADYS pushes the bottle of gin towards her. NORMA pours out two more drinks.*

I used to do that.

*LARRY stirs.*

We open in a bit.

NORMA: Not today surely.

*GLADYS stands, she is shaky. She starts to put coasters on tables slowly.*

GLADYS: I can't give you anything.

NORMA: I don't want/

GLADYS: /no money, no lodgings. Nothin'.

NORMA: I don't want/

GLADYS: /show me that certificate.

*NORMA goes over to GLADYS and hands her the birth certificate.*

Kosher is it? You're not after De Alfonso or  
(*closes her eyes*) his son?

NORMA: I don't know either/

GLADYS: /you get coffin botherers round here. Claiming to be long lost all sorts. Hoping for some crumbs.

NORMA: No!

GLADYS: You get vultures 'n' all.

NORMA: I...

GLADYS: No one normal'd have come today.

NORMA: I'm dreadfully sorry. (*Walks towards the door quickly.*)

GLADYS: Wait!

*LARRY jolts awake and grabs the back of NORMA's coat.*

LARRY: She being light fingered?

GLADYS: La I'd like you to meet Norma, me sister.

LARRY: Ding dong the witch is alive! So it's true then.

*(Lets go of NORMA and smooths down the back of her coat.)*

GLADYS: Met mum. Once.

NORMA: She didn't come to see me. I'm... glad... she found you... I'm glad I found you.

*BOBBY (17) enters, carrying a bunch of limp flowers, walks towards the bar and puts them down. GLADYS walks towards the door.*

BOBBY: Didn't think you'd be back yet.

*LARRY rises out of his chair; picks up one of his brogues and throws it at him. BOBBY spins round.*

Don't be a cunt.

LARRY: Get out.

BOBBY: *(To NORMA)* Bobby De Alfonso. *(Holds out hand, she hugs herself.)*

NORMA: Norma.

BOBBY: You. You 'ere for? He had no dough. Whatcha want?

LARRY: *(Voice drops)* I won't tell you again.

NORMA: I'm not here for money.

BOBBY: Why you drinking me gin? *(To GLADYS)* You sure she's who she says.

GLADYS: *(Screams)* You're not!

BOBBY: Here, here, hang about. *(Walks directly over to her, LARRY blocks him)* I been choked up about it all Glad. Can't hardly sleep.

*Pause.*

NORMA: Wouldn't want to keep you from your school work Bobby.

BOBBY: *(Straightens tie)* I run this place.

NORMA: Smashing. You must have a bit to do then.

*GLADYS stands facing the door.*

BOBBY: I'm fucking sorry Glad. Glad look at me. That's the truth.

NORMA: You appear to be upsetting her Mr De Alfonso.

BOBBY: *(To GLADYS)* You wanna watch the company you keep. *(Exits.)*

NORMA: Gracious he's not running this place! He can only be 15.

GLADYS: 17.

NORMA: Looks about 12. I didn't like his tone.

*LARRY gestures for NORMA to bring GLADYS a gin, she does. He goes over to the record player and changes the record. 'Summertime' (by Billie Holiday) starts to play. NORMA sways and hums along.*

GLADYS: Your fella decent?

NORMA: Percy? He took care of me. He used to like to take me to nice restaurants. To the theatre. All sorts. I suppose I became a little like one of his

tie pins. Something decorative, something reliable, occasionally required but on the whole not essential.

*Pause.*

GLADYS: Where does our mother live?

GLADYS: She died. Year ago.

NORMA: Oh. No. (*Starts to cry.*) Oh no.

*LARRY comes towards them both, pulls them together into an embrace.*

LARRY: Ay Babushka, Babushka, Babushka.

*Pause.*

I'm gonna get me frock on. This garb is a fucking disgrace. (*Exits.*)

GLADYS: Reckon you're better on your own as you are.

NORMA: We've been on our own as we are forever.

GLADYS: Mind how you go.

NORMA: You like singing?

*NORMA starts to sing 'Summertime'. GLADYS watches her for a time then sings with her.*

-BLACK-

Rue Baldry | Extracts from *Still*

## Spring, 1954

'I know what you are,' Dennis Cinderwood said. 'I know what you do with him in the dark. With your assistant. With Mr Mere.'

Edgar said nothing; he was frozen. This was the moment. He'd spent years staring out at it in the middle of sleepless nights.

Dennis Cinderwood was a scrawny eighteen-year-old with rat-sharp eyes. Edgar had been his doctor since he was a child.

'You might fool the rest of the village,' Cinderwood said. 'But I know you don't need all those bedrooms in that big house of yours because you're only using one of them.'

Cinderwood, with his sweep of acne down his cheek, sitting in the patients' chair in Edgar's lovely, clean consultation room, was exposure, ruin, end of career, a hounding from the village, arrest, prison, euphemising headlines in the local paper. This should not be happening here in the familiar smells of wood polish and disinfectant.

'It's like he's your wife in that kitchen of yours with your smart new 'fridge. And he's your wife in bed, too, isn't he?' What did the refrigerator have to do with anything? Or the size of their house for that matter? Money? Edgar relaxed very slightly. Perhaps Dennis Cinderwood only wanted money.

'Tell me what you do to each other in the dark.' Cinderwood ran his tongue over his lips.

If Edgar paid Cinderwood off he might keep coming back. He'd take all their money until Edgar had to shoot him like in an Agatha Christie novel. Edgar didn't know where to get a gun from. Of course Albert would be better at killing someone because he'd been in a war, but Albert must never know about this.

Cinderwood swallowed audibly. 'I don't have a problem with pansies myself. Do me a favour and I'll keep my mouth shut. Right?'

So: money. Yes. How much?

But Cinderwood said, 'Just show me how to do it. All right? Do it to me. I need someone careful, someone who knows what they're doing. I heard it hurts. The first few times.'

'What on earth are you talking about?'

'What you do with Mr Mere. You know. In bed. Do it to me.'

Edgar was trying to make this make sense. Not money. Sex. He felt nauseous. Images of his hands on pimples skin. No. Edgar had only ever had Albert.

'We could do it now. Here. There's the couch. Who'd know?' Dennis Cinderwood looked scared and young now.

Edgar stopped feeling scared. 'I have absolutely no idea what you are talking about, young man.'

'I do know where to find men who'd want to. I could even get paid. But for the first time I want someone I trust who knows what he's doing.'

'I sincerely hope that you are not talking about those illegal practices which are an abomination in the sight of God.' Relief was making Edgar pompous.

'But I thought... you and him...?' Young Dennis looked confused. 'You do. I'm sure you do.'

If Edgar was firm enough they could stay safe. 'You are psychiatrically unwell. That is why you have imagined perversions occurring between a respectable gentleman and his manservant.'

'If you won't do it I'll get Mr Mere to!'

'Do not talk to Mr Mere. I will not have you scandalising my staff. Go home and read your Bible.'

Surely he wouldn't ask Albert. Not really. Not after this.

Dennis' eyes were wet. He left. Edgar relaxed into his chair. His heart rate took a few minutes to return to normal. So close. So close to ruin. But he had managed to keep his head and avert disaster.

He rested his elbows on his lovely desk. Horrible boy. Gone now. Edgar had patients to see. Good people in this village were unwell. He made them better. That boy would have put him in a prison cell where he would have been no use to anyone. He picked up his folders of patients' notes.

The one on the top was Dennis Cinderwood's. Of course it was. He wanted to put it to the back of the pile where he couldn't see it. He wanted to throw it in the waste paper basket. Albert needed to get the notes back so he could file them neatly away again. Edgar had to write something or Albert would wonder what had happened in the appointment. Albert must never know.

File open and pen poised, for a vicious second Edgar considered writing *suffering from homosexuality, psychiatric referral needed*. Dennis would want to join another medical practice now he'd been thwarted; he'd probably go to Dr Stamen at the other end of the village and those words would go with him. Edgar paused so long a drop of ink fell from his nib. He blinked. He wrote, *Acne. Advice given*, closed the brown card folder and put it in the filing tray.

One lunch time six months later it was raining so hard that Edgar was soaked through just crossing the road. It wasn't that big a house: just the three bedrooms. One was for visitors and one for appearances' sake. That bed was always made up although nobody had ever looked at it. Irma was the only visitor they had ever had. Albert took Edgar's wet coat and boots and gave him a pot of tea and the newspaper while he finished getting their lunch.

Page Four: *Local Man in Court*. A blurred photograph of Dennis Cinderwood with his coat collar turned up. His name in the first paragraph. “Dennis Cinderwood, 19, of Ilvesden Green”. Chill in Edgar’s belly. Cinderwood had been caught propositioning a policeman in a “notorious” public convenience in the city. He was up in court. All those people looking at him. He would have been interrogated by the police. He might have told them what he knew. Dennis might know an awful lot about a lot of men. He wouldn’t know the names of the ones he met in squalid lavatories, though. Eventually he’d name the GP who hadn’t helped him.

Albert brought in lunch on a tray. Edgar hurriedly closed the paper and folded it away.

## Dennis Cinderwood, 1954

Edgar nattered on about a labyrinthitis case, but Albert could tell he'd seen that story in the paper. That Cinderwood lad. His poor mother. She'd be in to the surgery to get pills for her nerves any day, no doubt. Even if he was acquitted her shame was on show now. He wouldn't be innocent, though, because he was just the type for obscene practices with strange men in foul places.

When these cases were in the papers, Albert and Edgar both pretended not to have seen them. He'd known that Cinderwood boy was a wrong 'un who'd end up like that. Deserved what was coming to him. Just so long as he didn't drag anyone else down with him.

They drank their tea and ate their bacon sandwiches. Bacon off the ration at last. Last thing to go. The rain stopped outside but the sky stayed grey. If Cinderwood got Edgar in trouble Albert would break into the airless, barred cell where he cowered to slowly and painfully murder the little bastard.

Last spring, on a sunny morning about to cloud over, Albert had been putting rubbish out at the back of the surgery when Cinderwood came out from seeing Edgar about his acne. He'd sidled up to Albert in that little back alley, pale as milk with red eyes. Older than Albert had been for the Great War. And what had that lad seen? He'd never dug a tank out of mud up to his knees while a body jerked itself free of intestines a few foot away. What did Cinderwood have to be scared of? Only the thing that had got him now: Justice.

He'd cornered Albert, touching his shoulder, eyelids fluttering and lips parted. 'I bet you could show me a thing or two.'

'I've to get back inside now, son. I'm needed on reception. You run along and play.'

‘Meet me later then. I’ll play with you.’

‘Watch yourself.’ Albert might have been getting on a bit but he was still broader than Cinderwood. He’d be stronger in a fight. ‘Out of me way now.’

‘I’ve watched *you*,’ the boy hissed, all sweetness dropped. ‘You and your doctor friend. I know what you get up to. I know what you are.’

‘You know nowt, son.’ Albert stared at him, saw Cinderwood clear in all his details. His fists clenched themselves. His neck was heating up.

‘I won’t tell anyone. Not if you help me out. Teach me how to do it.’

‘I’ll teach you how my fist breaks your teeth.’

‘My, aren’t you masterful when you want to be?’ He pressed his body against Albert’s. ‘Don’t you want to do sinful things to me?’

Albert pushed the skinny chest away, pushed it hard with both hands, watched the youth go tumbling backwards, watched him slide along the alleyway, knock his head on bricks, slide his hand through dog mess as he tried to right himself.

‘You leave us be,’ Albert snarled, stepping over the crumpled lad to get to the back door.

He pulled the door open and heard it slam behind him as though it were a long way away. Crashing like an explosion. Shells. Mud. Corpses. Floral soap. The people in the waiting room turned to look at him. Albert backed out again, back into the alleyway, trying to remember how to breathe, how to stand up straight, closing the back door as gently as he was able.

The Cinderwood boy flattened himself against the wall behind the bin. Albert was standing in front of him. The boy was crying, bleeding. Blood on the back of Albert’s hand. Quick look: nobody else around. Albert launched himself off towards

the road. Boots on alleyway cobbles. Sobs behind him. His own sobs caught in his chest, tightening it and twisting his ribs. When he'd got home he'd washed his hands and face in the downstairs loo. The cold of the water had restored him. Ready to go back to the reception desk.

When he'd looked out the back door at the end of morning surgery, the Cinderwood lad was gone. Dog mess smeared down the alleyway the only trace. Hadn't seen Cinderwood since until his photograph was in the newspaper.

For weeks Albert had sat up in the kitchen of a night, waiting. For the doorbell, for violent policemen and handcuffs. They'd not arrived yet.

Sure enough it wasn't long before Mrs Cinderwood shuffled shamefaced into the surgery. Edgar prescribed her pills for her nerves. Six weeks later, glassy-eyed, she came back for her next prescription and the police still hadn't come. Albert asked her how she was.

'My boy, Dennis,' she started, slurring her words.

'Never mind that,' Albert said swiftly.

'He's in St Jude's. They're curing him.'

Albert had helped escort a screaming woman to St Jude's once. The entrance hall stank of piss. Beyond her screams Albert had heard others.

'They'll sort him out,' Albert told Mrs Cinderwood as though he believed it.

'Yes. Everything's going to be fine. They'll make him normal again. He was sick. That's why he was in that place where they arrested him.' Her face was slack and her voice slow, but not quiet enough for a full waiting room.

'He'll be looked after there,' Albert reassured her. 'It's the best place.'

When she sat down he excused himself to the next patient in the queue. He kept himself steady all the way out

into the back alleyway. He slid down the wall to a squat, rested his head in his hands. Sucked in icy air. *It's all right. We're safe. He's said nothing about us,* he repeated to himself as a litany to fend off his terror of St Jude's.

## **The Walk Home, October 1965**

Albert didn't know what to think. Youngsters these days. The way they carried on. The way they dressed! The hair. Depraved. He hadn't believed his eyes when he'd seen them on the television. Americans, Londoners and musicians. Lads with long hair and tight trousers. Looked like girls, they did. Obscene.

Then he'd seen them up in their nearest city: shouting and clowning about. All over each other they'd been. Lads and lasses leaning against each other in public, holding hands. The girls in skimpy frocks with their knees showing. If that's what they did in public... Albert didn't want to think about it.

They didn't know they were born. Half of them had indoor toilets. Just walked into jobs, they did. Walked out of them, too, if they fancied. Then they'd sign on and get taxpayers' money to do nowt all day but grow their hair. Free doctors. Schooling, too, for as long as they liked. Albert was paying for that. Didn't stop them complaining. Protesting. Wanting change for its own sake. Life was one long party but that wasn't good enough for them. They should have tried his life. He'd never been on a protest march in all his days and there was plenty he'd have liked done different.

And now he'd seen it in the flesh in his own village. Nowhere was safe. There was a lad now working in the garage who had hair down to his collar. And his overalls buttoned so low his chest hair was on show. What was Albert supposed to think about? Seeing that when he was booking Edgar's car in for its service? Bold as brass, he was, wiping his hands on a rag, telling Albert that his boss wasn't in, but he'd give him the message. Albert hadn't known where to look.

There had been a time when a lad like that with his long hair and his chest looking you bold in the eye, you'd have

known what he was. It would have signified. Not now, though. Now Albert didn't know what anything meant.

Did they not consider what folk would think? Breaking their parents' hearts, they were. The television played their noisy music some nights. Filthy beats, like thrusts, rising to climaxes. Under-dressed girls dancing to it. He didn't know where to look.

It was going to be a sunny day. The morning's fog had burnt off. Mind, yesterday had looked like it was going to be fine right up until the thunder had started. It just wanted to keep dry long enough for him to walk back home from the garage.

Great Britain. Used to mean something. Those youngsters didn't consider that, did they? Great. That's what the country had been. Worth something when he was young. Worth fighting for. What did the government expect, though, getting rid of all those Empire countries? Not surprising the young folk had no respect after that.

National Service was gone, too. There'd be nowt left. Only these girls in trousers wanting men's jobs, and lads all tarted up. It exhausted him. He'd never understand this new world. Why had they bothered fighting two World Wars for this?

Albert stopped in at the newsagents. He bought the *Times* for Edgar and the *Mirror* for himself. Also a packet of fags in case he ran out. He took a quick look in the *Mirror* while he walked. Scandals and girls in swimsuits. Crime and film stars and vicars and sex. They printed enough details that you could guess full well what had been going on, too. Like anyone wanted to know about that sort of thing.

In his day you waited until you were married. Girls that didn't were disgraced. These days, according to what he read in the papers, there were unmarried mothers all over the shop.

They would have been made to marry in his day. Whoever was willing. Didn't have to be the father. Probably wasn't. The girl might have been miserable, might have hated her husband, and her bastard, and all the little kiddies her husband filled her with. Her husband might not have had owt to do with the little bastard, might even have knocked him about. Didn't matter. Respectability: that's what it was. They might all have been unhappy, but behind closed doors. When Albert thought about things that way then he got confused. He didn't know what to think.

He could see it clear as day that being soft on the wayward girls was convincing the others to let the boys do what they were always pushing for. But being firm with them hadn't stamped out promiscuity; it had just made life awful for the little bastards like him.

The road slipped upwards a bit here, not exactly a hill but he'd call it a slope. He'd never noticed that when he was younger, but now he felt it in his knees. Made him breathless. Just a little. He didn't want to bother Edgar about the breathlessness. Bit of a cough and a wheeze, too. He stopped to catch his breath. He rolled up both the newspapers, leaned against a tree.

Last night on the BBC television news, of all places, they'd been talking about this Sexual Offences Bill. There had been a time you'd never have heard a word like *sexual* on the BBC. Depravity, that was what it was. It had all gone wrong when the newsreaders had stopped wearing evening dress. No respect anywhere anymore. Not even among BBC newsreaders.

No wonder Albert was breathless, trying to catch up to this modern world. He didn't even want to understand it. He didn't know what to think. He resumed his walk, slowly, still with the burn of damp air in his lungs.

The Bill couldn't be passed, of course. It shouldn't. It wouldn't be. That was how Rome had fallen, everyone knew that. It was just plain wrong. The police had to prevent that sort of thing. Something which had always been wrong couldn't suddenly become right because politicians said so. Sexual relations between men. Women, too, they said. Which was unimaginable. It wasn't right, getting Members of Parliament to vote on something obscene like that. And what would the queen think of signing an Act about that sort of thing? Who'd have to explain it to her? If the Bill passed. Which it wouldn't.

He stopped again on the railway bridge to get his cigarettes out. He put the newspapers down on the wall while he fumbled out the matches, and cupped his hands against the breeze to light it. The first inhale started a coughing fit as it always did, but no matter. He needed a smoke if he was going to work out what to think about a world like this.

It would encourage them. They would all be at it. Men like Sah out in plain view making deals. He felt for the toffee hammer which always used to be in his pocket. Not there, of course. Not for years. Probably in a drawer somewhere. Better get that out again. He spat red onto the train tracks below. He sucked in air until the blackness cleared, and then he sucked in cigarette smoke as he picked up the papers and resumed his walk.

All those boys damned to an afterlife of hell fire and they wouldn't even know that they were, because they'd obeyed the law of the land. He'd known well enough all his life that he was going to go to hell. He was resigned to it. He had nightmares sometimes, about the flames and the devils with their pitchforks, but he was just going to have to take them because he knew he was steeped in sin. He did hope it hadn't been him who'd damned Edgar, but it was too late to worry about that now.

If that Bill became law would there be boys with boys leaning too close to each other out in the streets, like the young people he'd seen all over each other in the city? Disgusting. How would those bare-kneed girls feel if their long-haired boys started canoodling with each other? It didn't bear thinking about. Would those girls start looking to other girls instead?

He had to stop walking again, bent over trying to pull in air. He couldn't be this old already. Hadn't he walked half the length of the country from Whitethorne to Edgar? Hadn't he marched through miles of trenches with a pack on his back? The stroll from the high street couldn't be defeating him. He had a drag of his cig while he was stopped and that started another coughing fit.

He'd been nineteen when he'd walked all that way from Whitethorne. Edgar had been eighteen. There was to be an age limit in this new Act. Men could only love one another when they were over twenty-one. There was something wrong with that, but Albert couldn't think clearly enough to work out what.

He staggered to the kerb for a sit-down to right himself. He couldn't go home like this; it would worry Edgar to see him in this state. He'd probably have him packed off to that hospital for tests, like as not, and then where would they be? Best not to know.

Albert had retired when the two village practices had merged because of the new thinking. The other GP had a fully qualified nurse and a receptionist with secretarial college qualifications. There'd been no place for a jobbody like him, no matter that he'd nearly forty years' experience. Probably just as well. It was as much as he could do to keep on top of housework and shopping. How had that happened? Hadn't he kept house, run the practice and done Fire Watch in London? Where had that energy gone?

He was breathing easy now so he got himself to his feet and set off walking home again. Easy does it.

If Albert didn't have the energy to carry the papers home then he certainly didn't have the energy to understand the way the world was going.

He didn't know what to think. He didn't know what to think.

He made it to their front door. Nice cup of tea and a read of the paper: that was what he needed. He hoped there was something scandalous in the *Mirror* to make him feel decent in comparison.

## After Albert, 1969

The door of the village hall is closed and the windows are too high to see through. He'd feel safer knowing what he's walking into. Once he's in he's bound to be recognised and there'll be no escape. His bladder forces him inside in the end. He's not going to make it home in time so he'll have to use the village hall facilities.

The smell reminds him of school – damp and bodies and boiling water. Old women sit round trestle tables covered with oilcloths. On one table there's a tea urn and four rows of identical squat brown glass mugs. His urethra tightens. He thinks perhaps he can hold it in after all. He starts to back out.

'Doctor Lancaster!'

In a moment of red panic he forgets the name of the old woman bustling towards him. Partial mastectomy and recurrent bladder infections. She has a name. Mrs... erm... Mrs— he can't remember.

'Cup of tea, Dr Lancaster?' asks a different woman, a middle-aged one in a housecoat standing by the urn. Dark hair. Husband burst his eardrum. Spencer? Something like that.

Edgar's hammering heart is sending his blood around his brain too fast, washing away his thoughts before he catches them. These women are his patients. Were his patients. Of course. There's only one surgery in the village. This is their village hall.

'Now, how do you like your tea? Milk, is it? Sugar?'

'Just a little milk, please,' Edgar says, because it's a question he does know the answer to, though, once the urn's started to fill the mug, he's condemned himself to staying for at least the time it takes to drink the thing.

He sits and places his mug on a shiny, geometrically patterned tablecloth, to the sound of knitting needles clacking

arhythmically. Two old women chatter. A mouthful of tea burns. He concentrates on not reacting. The brown, sticky eyes of fig rolls glare at him from a pale blue saucer in the middle of the table. He puts his mug back down.

He remembers his bladder and excuses himself. Across the yard in the gents, steam rises from his piss and his breath. When he's done, silence echoes from stall to urinal. He breathes it in mixed with ammonial stench. His tea has cooled when he gets back. He finishes it. He stays until an anecdote looks to have ended and then makes his excuses.

He shuts the door behind him a little too forcefully. He misdiagnosed himself. He is certainly not one of *those* lonely old people. He finds himself on the railway bridge, staring down onto the tracks. Parallel lines shine below on the soot-black stones.

A flash of brightness in the corner of his eye. A white coat. A man in a white coat. Long hair. Young people these days. Albert's voice. Wide red trousers flap at the young man's ankles. He's walking up the road towards the station. And then where will he go? Where do the young people go to when they escape from this village? Albert claimed he couldn't tell the boys from the girls anymore. This one's definitely a boy, even though Edgar can only see him from the back. He swings his hips in a certain way which makes Edgar wonder where he might be going and who he might be meeting.

The roar and flash of an approaching train startles Edgar. He watches it shoot towards him, disappear under him, rumbling the bricks under his feet. It settles him like Nanny's back rubs did. When the train's gone, he doesn't check whether the young man with the white coat is still in sight. He walks home.

Albert's boots are still by the back door. They're perfectly polished and perfectly parallel. When Edgar comes inside he

places his own shoes tidily beside them; his always look dull and uncared for in comparison. When he was healthy, Albert was the one who polished and cleaned footwear. Every puddle-splash Edgar leaves across his brown leather feels like a betrayal.

Sun shines in through the panes of glass in the back door showing up a layer of dust on Albert's boots. Nobody will ever wear them again. Edgar feels his energy drain away. He has to back into the kitchen and onto a chair. He feels dreadfully, dreadfully sorry for those abandoned boots. There's nothing wrong with them, but they're empty and alone, standing guard beside a door they will never leave through again.

There are men who could do with good work boots like those. Perhaps an old soldier, like Albert except down on his luck and without a doctor friend to look after him. Perhaps a young man looking for work, or a family man with bills to pay who shoes his children before himself. Edgar's never worn boots like that and Albert's feet were two sizes smaller than his. Edgar couldn't have worn the boots anyway, could not raise himself to placing his feet where Albert's had been.

It's hugely wasteful but they're not Edgar's boots to give away. Albert chose them and bought them, polished, cleaned and looked after them. The insides moulded themselves snug to Albert's feet. Edgar can not touch those boots. Not even to dust them. He has not touched them. He does not touch them now; he leaves them in their sentinel positions at the back door.

Domino night at the Bear and Badger is a pretty dismal prospect but so is another evening in his armchair. Edgar looks in through the windows of the saloon bar, onto the tops of the bent, bald heads of wizened old men shuffling domino tiles across the scratched table tops. The pint mugs they drink from look alien. What will he order? Albert liked an occasional pale ale, but Edgar stuck to wines and whiskies when they drank

together. He's afraid of the smoke tonight, of memories of Albert. Edgar watches the old men heave en masse into laughter. He might be an old man now – just might be – but he's not an old man like them. He doesn't go in.

On the way home he sees that same white coat, walking up that same hill to the station. Where is it going at this time of night? Edgar doesn't mean to follow. At least, he thinks he doesn't. When the young man turns a corner Edgar realises that it's not the same white coat after all. A different man is wearing it. His shoes are white, too. He's got a thick moustache, drooping at the edges, of a kind which Edgar's seen on the television but never in the flesh before. Not like Albert's neat, polite moustache. This man's trousers are tight around his thighs. If the coat was shorter Edgar could see more. Edgar and the young man are the only people standing on the platform for trains to the city.

When the young man turns his face to the approaching train, Edgar's stabbed with recognition. The Connin boy. Edgar hasn't seen him since he grew out of his asthma. Edgar sits in a compartment on his own, well away from Connin. When the ticket inspector comes through he buys a return to the city.

He wonders what he's doing. He's only sure that he hasn't felt this exhilarated in a long time. He checks the village stations they stop at, but he doesn't expect the Connin boy to get out at any of them. They are both heading into the city, to the places where the young people go when they leave the village.



‘The joy of this scheme, for me, is twofold, because what develops over the months is not only a close and creative relationship with another writer, but also the privilege of a front row seat on a work-in-progress, observing a novel grow, in serial, sometimes getting a bit stuck, as they do, and unstuck, until all of that building material and momentum becomes something whole - at which point you step back, with the writer, and say, “Well done. You made it. What next?”

**Ross Raisin**  
**Mentor | Fiction**



Emma Simon | from *Phantom Limbs*

## The Derry Street Trials

If she crooks a knowing smile your way  
to draw out thoughts that itch within  
then she's a witch.

Scrutinise her dress. If it's raggedy,  
hem unstitched or wanton split too high,  
then she's a witch.

If you can see the bones of her  
a jut of question marks, a lack of marrow,  
then she's a skinny witch.

They're the worst. Though many shape shift  
disguise their witchy forms  
in outsize black and formless grey

roll malicious intent, year after year  
in thick fat, like the truffling pigs  
they want to turn you into.

If you see such figures in the tented dark  
laughing at the night while gathering its riches,  
beware. They're all likely witches.

Mark her hair, if there are silver streaks  
– known as devil's moonshine – it's a sure sign  
she's an accomplished witch.

If she has no children. Or too many.  
Leaves them a-bed while she slips out  
to conjure coins from the beamy air,

or stays at home, bricked behind her walls  
without a man to breathe life in her fire,  
then she's a witch

or as good as, by any rational reckoning.  
Watch her by the water:  
how she skirts the millpond.

## Penknife

It was a double-page colour spread:  
the man, the rock, the penknife  
used in the desert to sever his own arm.

I worried at phrases:  
'torn edge', 'widening wound' –  
like a returning tongue to an unexpected gap.

He had to break the bone before he could  
slice through. I rolled this fact  
around my mouth for hours.

At that point I didn't know which way  
I'd be split: hip to hip or vaginal tearing  
both unimaginable

unlike the man and his bluntish penknife  
the Utah sun, a body heat of rock  
a sick smell of seeping cactus,

the yellow marrow cradling the bone,  
the sand rust red, the scree and sweat and dust  
and nine and a half hours, sawing.

## **Morning Has Broken**

The milk cried on the doorstep. We toasted blackbirds  
crunched their burnt wings. Watched jam drip  
through the egg timer.

Was it eight already? Outside overcoats  
and umbrellas quick-stepped the wind.  
No-one could tell the time from the telephone

having done its worst, it stayed dumb. We washed faces  
in cold light that rained from the ceiling:  
knew you could drown in an empty bath.

The great tractor wheels of the day lay on their side,  
the engine rusted in parts, like a jigsaw we'd had  
of The Hay Wain. It was all corners. No-one knew where to start.

We cut up newspapers for small talk. Snapped lumps  
off the Morning and Evening Stars,  
dissolved them in the multiplying flower vases

overflowing with black tea. Our hands  
clumsy as hooks as we pinned headaches  
to our faces for smiles.

## **We Never Realised We Could Fly**

— not truly — not like the barnacle geese  
all downbeat and updraft, hauling winter in  
with sweeping lines across salt-laced horizons.

We'd cuddled hands that cradled us  
threw us skywards and we'd rise,  
airborne a while, hopeful as prayers

but still we didn't think of this as flight.  
Not us, dreaming of cresting from spiky haylofts  
drab as Widnes rain, shadowed by tower blocks,

a feathering of exhaust fumes and dust  
clinging to a frame of slender bones,  
our weary pylons. These aren't the soaring things.

I saw a crow once, a jewel's brooch of a glittered eye,  
his crow like a haunting. I could no more sing like him  
than pipe canary warnings of death coming,

gasp full-throated arias in valley-glades.  
We used to cry for larks rising, the green streak in us  
throbbing. Roost at night in cages all our own making.

## I Confess My Sins To The Electronic Scales

It speaks a language of loss I understand:  
the scantness of half teaspoons of salt,  
a promise of absolution in a row of zeros.

It knows that stones and pounds exist  
outside the realm of number. Tell me, it says,  
how they feel weighed down in your pocket.

I try to remember, conjure a time of glut  
and in this act I am unburdened,  
the pebbles inside my mouth loosen,

drum like cherry stones in a spittoon.  
I whisper stories about squandered butter vats,  
sugared water fountains, caramelised pears

the fatness insulating lives. It's like building cairns  
– *some marker that we got this far* – on the stainless surface.  
A speak-your-weight monotone

reaches across the darkness, offers forgiveness.  
We surrender ourselves each morning  
to its red-eyed judgement. Soon we'll weigh no more

than paper souls. Everything is connected now.  
The knives in the kitchen drawer  
itch to cut and to slice. An unlit fridge

humming its psalms of less and less rocks me to sleep  
to dream hollow bones of birds, the pelvis of an angel  
so light the air shines through.

## Subduction

there are daschunds at the garden gate  
a stag's antlers rise from the recycling  
all bloodied stumps and smoke-soft greenness  
my neighbour understands we never mention it  
nothing frays in straight lines or nobody  
I forget which stars fish in puddles  
hooking Friday nights from greasy rainbows  
the boy with a lollipop sucks colours clean  
from skeleton trees outlines  
shift mauve shadows between towers blocks  
as the afternoon sprawls outwards  
overtakes a woman with a pram  
so tired of hills cars chevron a sky  
held up by aching flyovers  
commuters flinch at fireworks  
Catherine-wheeling in eyes of owls  
like a children's book you once put down  
and now can't find hornbeams searchlights  
over war-time roofs find uncertain animals  
trapped by rumble strips it's where we see ourselves  
an afterimage staring back from headlamps  
coming home or leaving in liminal light  
pockets full of stolen snowberries

Charlotte Coates | from *ARSEPIECE*

Arsepiece is a sixteen-year-old girl from Hackney. Her real name's Claire Jordan but she goes by the name Arsepiece because that was her mum's nickname for her. Her mum hasn't been around for a while.

When Arsepiece's nan, Tulip, suddenly dies, Arsepiece finds herself without her main source of love and support. Homeless and penniless, she is befriended by Kitten, a hipster art student, who persuades her to be in her film.

Kitten is on quest to document the East End. She finds the poverty exhilarating in comparison to her privileged upbringing and is keen give 'the dispossessed' a voice. Kitten refuses to pay Arsepiece for appearing in her film, so Arsepiece robs her.

\*

Kitten and Arsepiece meet again at a 'Restorative Justice' session where Arsepiece attempts to apologise for her crime.

## **Scene 11: Restorative Justice Meeting**

*KITTEN and ARSEPIECE sit opposite each other. There is a table between them on which has been placed a box of tissues. A facilitator sits a little way off near a water cooler. She wears a panic alarm around her neck.*

KITTEN: Violated.  
FACILITATOR: (To ARSEPIECE) What would you like to say?  
ARSEPIECE: Do I have to Miss?  
FACILITATOR: One word please.  
ARSEPIECE: Misunderstood.  
KITTEN: (To the facilitator) I don't understand.

FACILITATOR: *(To ARSEPIECE)* Um, do you think your actions have been misunderstood?

ARSEPIECE: Yeah.

*KITTEN laughs.*

KITTEN: Honestly? *(To ARSEPIECE)* Whatever's happened to you is your fault.

ARSEPIECE: I'm not dumb y'know.

FACILITATOR: *(To KITTEN)* Can you tell Arsepiece more about feeling violated?

KITTEN: I mean, uh, that's not her name.

ARSEPIECE: It is.

KITTEN: I mean...

ARSEPIECE: *(To the facilitator)* Tell her to leave my name alone Miss.

FACILITATOR: *(To KITTEN)* Arsepiece has asked to be known as Arsepiece.

KITTEN: Why?

ARSEPIECE: Why not?

FACILITATOR: *(To KITTEN)* Arsepiece has elected to be called Arsepiece and we ask that you respect her choice.

KITTEN: That's bloody hilarious.

FACILITATOR: *(To KITTEN)* I feel what's important today is that Arsepiece has chosen to attend the session.

ARSEPIECE: I didn't have to come y'know.

KITTEN: So grateful to you.

ARSEPIECE: *(To the facilitator)* Miss!

FACILITATOR: *(To KITTEN)* Arsepiece's name is not relevant to the session.

KITTEN: Fine.

FACILITATOR: Kitten, I'd like you to tell Arsepiece about feeling violated please.

KITTEN: I came to this meeting because actually, you know, um. Oh! This is so hard.

FACILITATOR: What is Kitten?

KITTEN: I mean... Just sitting here.

FACILITATOR: Restorative justice sessions are not easy.

KITTEN: Yup.

FACILITATOR: But it can be hugely enriching for both parties.

KITTEN: I know. I just want to, um, I need a moment.

FACILITATOR: That's fine.

*Pause.*

Kitten?

*KITTEN indicates she requires more time.*

ARSEPIECE: *(To the facilitator)* Do you want to hear about me being misunderstood?

KITTEN: OK, so, you know when you're walking late at night and every time you see someone you think, fuck, are you going to rob me? Rape me? Murder me? Is this the night I'm going to end up tied up in the back of a Transit van speeding away from my life? Um, in those moments you're prey. Like you're in the Serengeti or something. Then you get home. That space you were in on the street, it's

vanished. It's like, um, it was never there and you forget it until the next time. Since you attacked me... I feel like I am prey always.

FACILITATOR: Thank you. That was very powerful.

ARSEPIECE: Sorry 'bout that.

FACILITATOR: *(To ARSEPIECE)* Thank you.

KITTEN: I'm so OCD now. I um, I have to check the door a million times before I go to bed. I have to go round and round checking all the doors and windows. It's actually very disabling.

FACILITATOR: I Kitten. Did you hear what Arsepiece just said?

KITTEN: I mean, you've fucked my social life. I don't go out after dark. I was a really sociable person before you attacked me.

ARSEPIECE: I'm sorry for what I did to you. Sounds very hard for you and things.

KITTEN: It is.

ARSEPIECE: Yeah.

KITTEN: I'm scared of my own shadow. I'm scared of creaking floorboards. I'm scared of the wind.

FACILITATOR: *(To KITTEN)* Arsepiece has apologised to you Kitten.

KITTEN: *(To ARSEPIECE)* Yup, well. I can't get over what you did.

ARSEPIECE: I might as well go then.

FACILITATOR: *(To KITTEN)* It's OK for you to say that but I think it's also important for you to acknowledge what Arsepiece says to you.

KITTEN: *(To the facilitator)* You're denying my voice.

FACILITATOR: No. I'm not.

KITTEN: All through this process, my voice hasn't been heard. I asked, in court, I asked to make a statement about the effect she has had on my life. The judge wouldn't let me. Do you think that's fair? I don't think that's fair. And now, finally we get here, and you're telling me to shut up.

FACILITATOR: I'm not telling you to shut up.

ARSEPIECE: I want to go.

FACILITATOR: I'm happy to terminate the session. There's a lot of energy in the room and that's not safe. You've both been on a long journey to come to this place. Restorative justice is very challenging.

KITTEN: Shut up!

FACILITATOR: It's not OK to tell me to shut up.

KITTEN: Stop patronising me. You're so... your language is so fucking clichéd and it's fucking me off and actually just because something, a crime, happened to me it doesn't mean that I have to listen to this... this... language.

FACILITATOR: I'm terminating the session.

KITTEN: Oh! No, no. Sorry, um. Look um, can I just say, I am very angry and very upset and I've been having a very stressful time recently, um, actually sorry for what I said about... your language. This is very hard for me.

FACILITATOR: It is hard for you. It's hard for Arsepiece and it is also hard for me. We are all struggling to be the best that we can.

ARSEPIECE: That's true y'know.

FACILITATOR: *(To KITTEN)* I need you to be open hearted.

KITTEN: Sure.

FACILITATOR: I need you to be respectful.

KITTEN: Yup.

FACILITATOR: If you don't feel like you can be respectful today then it's OK for us to terminate and for us to come together again when you're in a better place.

KITTEN: I'm fine.

FACILITATOR: OK, then I'd like you to both listen to each other and respectfully consider what the other is saying.

*(To ARSEPIECE)* Would you like to tell us about your word?

ARSEPIECE: Misunderstood. Erm, coz...

FACILITATOR: Yes?

ARSEPIECE: Misunderstood, because like, she was going to give me money for being in her film and she never.

KITTEN: We weren't finished. You hadn't earned your money.

ARSEPIECE: There was no fixed time.

FACILITATOR: So, what I'm hearing here is that there was a misunderstanding about the nature of your business arrangement.

KITTEN: *(To ARSEPIECE)* I invited you to participate in my, um, film because I thought it would be a good experience

for you. I wanted people to hear your voice. I wanted to help you. Making work is, like, um a massive brilliant thing for me and I wanted you to have that experience.

*Arsepiece laughs.*

ARSEPIECE: Mate, I didn't realise you was teaching me. Should have bought my notebook and things. Didn't realise I was getting a special lesson.

KITTEN: *(To the facilitator)* I found that aggressive.

FACILITATOR: *(To ARSEPIECE)* I found it sarcastic. Was that your intention?

ARSEPIECE: Dunno.  
The thing is yeah, Miss...

FACILITATOR: Speak to Kitten.

ARSEPIECE: The thing is yeah, you said you was going to pay me for doing something and I really needed the cash and it did my head in when you wouldn't do what you said.

KITTEN: You're blaming me again. Never your fault.

ARSEPIECE: My nan was dead and you were messing with my head about it. On purpose.

KITTEN: That's no excuse for attacking me.

ARSEPIECE: I was hungry.

KITTEN: Don't be dramatic.

ARSEPIECE: S'true. I was hungry.

KITTEN: Um.

ARSEPIECE: Do you know what, you was properly doing my head treating me like some sideshow. Upsetting me and making me read that thingy, over and over again.

KITTEN: It would have been an, um, amazing film. You weren't able to see that. So, fine, it's not my fault you weren't able to go there. I tried so hard for you.

ARSEPIECE: Don't know what you're on about, mate.

KITTEN: Um, it's very important to me that the disposed have a voice.

ARSEPIECE: That's gash.

FACILITATOR: *(To ARSEPIECE)* That's your reading of the situation Arsepiece and its fine to express your feelings but please be mindful that you need to do that in a measured and respectful way.

ARSEPIECE: OK then.

FACILITATOR: Thanks.

ARSEPIECE: *(To KITTEN)* It was literally never my intention to rob you but you did my head in and then I snapped kind of thing. I'm sorry for what I did but like I was weirded by what you did. That's it really.

FACILITATOR: Thank you Kitten *(To KITTEN)* Thank you for listening.

KITTEN: You people think that nothing is ever your fault.

ARSEPIECE: What do you mean 'you people'?

KITTEN: Nothing.

ARSEPIECE: People who say 'you people' they usually say that about black people. I'm not black though.

KITTEN: So I brought it on myself?

ARSEPIECE: Dunno.

*Pause.*

You mean 'you people' you scum. That's what I think.

KITTEN: That's not true.

ARSEPIECE: You think I'm scum.

KITTEN: You might be poor but you don't need to attack people who are trying to help you. There's an award-winning sixth form college down the road, I mean, you could have gone there. You don't need to be mentally impoverished. Public libraries are free. There's a whole world of wonderful things out there. I promise. You could have them too.

FACILITATOR: OK, so I think it might be useful to sum up now, Arsepiece...

ARSEPIECE: What?

FACILITATOR: Today you've heard from Kitten that your crime has had far-reaching consequences. Kitten feels your actions have impacted severely on her quality of life.

ARSEPIECE: I know.

FACILITATOR: Kitten does not forgive you.

ARSEPIECE: OK then.

FACILITATOR: Kitten, I think the overwhelming take-home message from Arsepiece is that she's sorry.

KITTEN: I don't accept her apology because she...

FACILITATOR: Arsepiece has stated today that she didn't intend to rob and assault. She was feeling emotionally vulnerable at the time of the incident. She has expressed that working on your film brought up uncomfortable thoughts and feelings for her. She acknowledges she behaved in an utterly unacceptable fashion but has stated she feels she was in a heightened emotional state at the time.

ARSEPIECE: *(To the facilitator)* Can I just say something please, Miss?

FACILITATOR: Sure.

ARSEPIECE: She makes out like I'm not bothered by it and whatever but I am. It was a mistake.

KITTEN: I don't make mistakes like attacking people so, um, I'm afraid I am struggling to empathise with this. You people don't even have the self-respect to look yourselves in the eye and admit what you really are. You're not a victim of your circumstances. Everyone has choices.

ARSEPIECE: You don't have a clue mate. You're shouting your stuff out but you don't know me.

FACILITATOR: OK...

KITTEN: I know everything about you.  
FACILITATOR: Thank you Kitten. I'm wrapping up the session now. We have evaluation sheets for you to fill out in reception.  
KITTEN: I know you're self-indulgent, greedy, lazy and jealous (*beat*) of people like me.  
FACILITATOR: Kitten?  
KITTEN: (*To ARSEPIECE*) It's all about envy with you isn't it?  
ARSEPIECE: (*To KITTEN*) I don't envy you mate.  
KITTEN: I really wanted to engage with you Arsepiece. I wanted to help you. Nobody gets what I'm trying to do. Like my family, they're fucking bastards, they want me to go and do this art history course in Florence. That just shows you how little they fucking understand me. I've been thrown off my Masters, OK? I'm not going to graduate despite having a doctor's note that specifically mentioned PTSD and some other pretty heavy, um, duty shit actually. I'm, um, totally don't know what I'm going to do and it's all your fault.  
If you had any idea how much you'd fucking got under my skin you would be ashamed of yourself. You're the background on my phone for fuck's sake!

*KITTEN produces her phone and shows ARSEPIECE. The homepage has a*

*picture of ARSEPIECE from the film  
KITTEN made.*

ARSEPIECE: Get that off there now!  
KITTEN: It's my emotional property actually.  
ARSEPIECE: You fucking freak!  
KITTEN: It's mine.  
ARSEPIECE: But it's me!  
KITTEN: So? Um, that doesn't matter. I own my  
idea of you. That's my art.  
ARSEPIECE: You're frying my brain now. What?  
What?  
KITTEN: I'm so unhappy honestly, um, I don't  
know what to do.  
I think fundamentally, the problem is...  
ARSEPIECE: Shut up, yeah? You're just some rich girl  
who chats shit.  
And you're boring.

*KITTEN slaps ARSEPIECE hard.*

*(To the facilitator) Miss!*

*The facilitator presses her panic alarm.*



Gill Darling | from *My Quondam Dreams are  
Shot to Hell*

## One

At seven a.m. he nudges me awake and tells me to leave.

There's a few seconds of disorientation at waking up in a bed not my own. These sheets are beige. The duvet is hideous, masculine, migraine-inducing chevrons of maroon and grey. The man's hand is on my shoulder.

'Give me a cup of black coffee,' I say, 'and I'll be out of your life for ever.'

He busies himself in the bathroom and I try and focus. There is a glass one-third full of Chardonnay on the cabinet besides the bed, and a pain from too much wine and not enough sleep jabs me behind the eyes. The walls are magnolia, there is a bland, blond wooden picture frame on the wall, a beach scene. Some kind of gym equipment – a cross trainer or whatever they call it – dominates a corner of the room, and its brutalism conjures up sweat and sinew and the reason why I find myself on the wrong side of the Pennines on this Sunday morning, as does the pleasurable ache I feel, the sheets humid with sex and sweat.

I close my eyes again. I don't want to get up. I very much want to be home.

The man is hovering at the bedroom door.

'Yeah yeah,' I say and get out of bed, and the man leaves, my nakedness now an affront, and I scabble around for my clothes; my shoes, presumably, are downstairs.

Dressed, I use the bathroom. Things I didn't notice the night before: standard white bathroom suite – are bathrooms available in any other colour now? I almost miss the avocado, the mushroom, the aubergine – mismatched towels in fawn and navy. On the side of the bath, which has a faint ring of scurf, sit a supermarket brand of shower gel and some kind of sports

shampoo. A back scrubber hangs from a hook on the back of the door. It has a slightly rotted look.

There is just enough of the peach-coloured toilet paper. I flush the loo and as I stand up there is another stab of pain as my socked foot crunches against something. I have trodden on a toy soldier. I pick it up to scrutinise the damage. The helmeted GI or marine or SAS officer or whatever, entirely moulded in seamed green plastic, still crouches forward in readiness, but his gun is bent, and it is possible I have snapped one of his legs at the ankle. I drop the soldier and kick it towards the bath.

I open his medicine cabinet and take a look inside. Bars of Imperial Leather soap, condoms – so that’s where they were – and some tablets labelled Zantac. I take them out for a closer look; it’s a current prescription. Zantac: is that like Xanax, those pills that neurotic characters in American films take all the time? I’m thinking of Cate Blanchett in *Blue Jasmine*, necking them constantly. I’ll google it when I get home.

I go down the stairs that lead into the through lounge where the man sits at the breakfast bar. He has on a bathrobe, thick towelling, a kind of grey green, expensive. He won’t have chosen it himself. The mug of black coffee awaits me. I sit next to him and take a sip. Instant.

His son will arrive at eight.

The man offers me nothing to eat, although he must have something in, if only Frosties for the boy. I sit back and drink my coffee slowly. His own mug is drained, he fiddles with the cord of his dressing gown. I amuse myself by pretending to want to stick around.

‘How long have you lived here again?’

‘Eight months.’

‘Oh, since your divorce.’

‘Yes.’

The consternation when his ex arrives, the child in tow, to find a strange woman sitting at the breakfast bar.

‘Well, you know where I am now,’ he says, unnecessarily.

‘Indeed I do,’ I say. I need to stop short of his actually telling me to leave again. ‘Well,’ I say, and get up and start gathering things together – shoes, coat, bag – to his evident relief.

He walks me to the door. ‘Great album,’ I say, nodding towards the CD of *Station to Station* on the hall table. His kiss just misses my cheek.

‘Be in touch,’ he says; it’s not clear if this is an instruction or a statement of intent, but it doesn’t matter, because although the sex was spectacular and will be replayed in my mind several times over, we both know we will never contact each other again. We’ll spend a lifetime not contacting each other.

I kiss his cheek. ‘Marvellous,’ I say.

I do not mention the toy soldier.

I forgot my satnav in the hurry to leave my house last night, but soon I find the A649 and am heading for the motorway towards Manchester. Bye bye Liversedge. The very name suggests teetering on the brink of alcoholism, which you would be if you had to live there.

My car is so old it has a cassette player. As I join the motorway my left hand scrabbles around in the shoebox of tapes on the passenger seat. I insert one at random and press play. *Too Drunk to Fuck*, the cover by Nouvelle Vague, comes on.

I met this man, who I was not too drunk to fuck, online. It very quickly became apparent which way things would pan out and we arranged for me to drive over to visit him at his neat seventies box of a house forty or so miles away. I arrived at

seven-thirty, and had naïvely assumed he might provide sustenance of some kind. When I asked he produced some stale crisps, but by then I was already too pissed to drive home. We chatted for maybe an hour before going up to his bedroom.

‘I bet you’ve had some compliments about those,’ he said as I undressed.

‘I could say the same about you,’ I said, a very short time later.

Driving along the motorway now I replay our animalistic coupling, the actual shock of him, to set it in my memory for later. Sheer novelty alone made it more exciting than sex with John Summers. There is no question, though, of my ever going to Liversedge again. That nerve-bound excitement could not be recaptured, the merest hint of more acquaintanceship would sterilise any further encounters. I have no interest in his promotional prospects, his ingrown toenail, his passion for Leeds United.

He will have closed the door behind me and not waited for my car to back out of his drive before going to shower. He’ll use the sports shampoo on his hair and he’ll soap his whole body carefully with the shower gel, so as not to greet his son smelling of sex. The child will be dropped off by the ex-wife at eight, as advertised. She will be polite and yet distant with the man; she’ll kiss the top of the boy’s head and tell him she’ll be along to pick him up later. She will also leave the house without looking back. The man and the boy, a stolid, unimaginative child, will do father and son things together: video games, football in the park, an ice cream. After the ex-wife has collected the son the man will go back online to look at dating sites. Maybe he’ll find a woman who wants to see him tonight. Or maybe he’ll take a break from it, go to the pub with his friends. The friends will be affable, blokeish, the talk of

sport and work. He won't mention me to them. One day he'll meet a woman he likes enough to have an actual relationship with, and he'll stop cruising the websites. His son will be sullen and wary around the new woman at first; the ex-wife will become frostier, perhaps even subtly undermining the relationship by scheduling access visits with the son at inopportune times, but eventually it will settle down and some kind of managed entente reached by everyone. The man will not be unhappy exactly, but he'll feel an underlying sense of dissatisfaction, as if something's still missing, and though he promised himself he wouldn't, he'll find himself back on the websites from time to time, striking up a conversation or two. Perhaps it'll go further and he'll meet up with a woman, fuck her at her house, or maybe a hotel – this time with the added frisson of infidelity – although he's been unfaithful before, of course he has, that's why his wife left him. And so it continues.

I am really fucking hungry. It occurs to me I have nothing in at home.

Later on that day I catch a bus into the centre of town to go and meet my second date of the weekend. Unlike Liversedge, this is a “proper” date; I have arranged a real-life encounter with a man I met on one of the more decorous dating sites. When we set up a meeting a couple of days ago it seemed a good idea, now, with a hangover still thudding in my brain and curdling my stomach, I wish I had cancelled.

We have arranged to meet in a café in town. The bus delivers me slightly early, I can be on time, but instead I spend a while walking up and down Deansgate looking at shop windows – House of Fraser, Waterstones – so as to be five minutes late.

My date, as I had planned, is already there. I see him before he sees me; he is sitting at a table playing with his phone. He looks up as I walk in and in that instant I see his face fall as he clocks me, and is disappointed by what he sees; I have fallen short of whatever ideal of me he has built up in the course of our brief correspondence, and I feel like turning round and going home and seeing if John Summers is available for a fuck instead, and not at all like spending a couple of hours feigning interest in this man whose interest in me, it is apparent, vanished precisely two seconds ago. My head is aching.

‘Hello!’ I say, smiling brightly as I walk towards him. ‘So sorry I’m late! Buses.’ He stands up and our cheeks brush each other momentarily as we kiss the air. There is no way on earth this man is five foot ten. He is shorter than I am, in my low-heeled boots. So if I have misrepresented myself somehow then he most certainly has. Perhaps, then, we are on a par.

‘Hi,’ he says; he has recovered some of his composure and has decided, as have I, to soldier on and make the best of a bad situation. It’s a shame, because I’ve always liked this café, it’s a nice little place, and now it will have connotations of a dreary and dismal hangover afternoon until I can turn it round again.

My date, whose name is Gary, asks me what I would like to drink. My beverage of choice would normally be a large glass of red wine, but if I have one now I may be sick. I ask for a Diet Coke instead.

‘I’m not much of a drinker myself,’ says Gary. He is slightly overweight, wears a checked shirt tucked into supermarket jeans. His online profile has him down as being fifty-five years old. This may well be another lie.

‘I am much of a drinker,’ I say. ‘I’ve got a hangover today, as a matter of fact,’ and I see disapproval flash across his face,

although I have made no secret either on my own profile or in any follow up conversations of my predilection for alcohol.

‘Oh I hate drunk women,’ he says primly. The waiter brings us our drinks. Gary is drinking normal Coke.

‘Then I guess the wedding’s off,’ I say, and he looks at me in some bewilderment. ‘That was a joke,’ I say.

‘Oh! Yes!’ he says, and laughs doubtfully. ‘So, Anna,’ he recovers himself and goes on. ‘Tell me about yourself. How’s your weekend going?’

‘I went to Yorkshire yesterday,’ I say.

‘To see a friend?’

‘That’s right.’ He asks me whereabouts. ‘Liversedge,’ I tell him. ‘Near... I don’t know where it’s near, actually.’ I should have told a more comprehensive lie. My lack of knowledge of my alleged friend’s locale may very quickly trip me up, but it doesn’t matter, for Gary seizes the conversational ball and sprints away with it, leaving me standing at the other end of the pitch.

‘Oh, I know where it is,’ he says. ‘I used to work round there as a matter of fact,’ and he launches into a lengthy narrative about his spell there as a salesman of some kind. He pauses for breath only when the waiter comes back for our food order. I ask for meze and dips, Gary orders steak and chips. Gary talks and talks: about the golfing holiday in Spain he has just returned from (incorporating a couple of dull anecdotes about the rubes who accompanied him), about his ex-wife, about his son, about the baby his son has had with his girlfriend. After an hour I have found out a very great deal about Gary, while he has learnt next to nothing about me. I am invited to coo over pictures of the granddaughter on his iPhone. I make the requisite noises of approbation.

‘She’s very clever,’ he says of the tot. ‘She does things that are way ahead of her age group.’

‘What, like differential calculus?’ I ask. He looks at me.

‘No, I mean for instance she was speaking in whole sentences before she was a year old.’

‘Ah,’ I say. The waiter returns to ask if we would like dessert or coffee. It is time to cut my losses.

‘I should get going,’ I say.

‘Oh!’ he says, though he cannot possibly be disappointed. ‘I’ll message you then, shall I?’

‘Let’s not bother,’ I say, and take out my purse.

‘Oh let me pay for lunch,’ he says.

‘Nonsense,’ I say, and pull out a twenty-pound note.

‘Are you part of the PC brigade or something?’ he asks me.

‘What on earth do you mean by that?’

‘Well, I just like men to be men and ladies to be ladies, that’s all,’ he says.

‘Oh do fuck off,’ I say, and throw the twenty-pound note down on the table, and gather up my coat and bag, and leave.

Back at home, I snooze on the couch with BBC 6 Music on in the background. When I wake up it is dark outside. The sleep on the sofa has revived me somewhat and I make myself some toast for supper. The crusts are starting to go mouldy but the slices in the middle are still all right. I’m nearly out of butter but I can’t be arsed going out to the shops again. An unedifying evening of television beckons and I decide I would rather go out. I text Audrey and we arrange to meet at Kiki’s, our local bar.

‘Hello dearie,’ says Suze as I come in. Suze fancies she is running some twenty-first century version of the Colony Room, with herself as a modern Muriel Belcher, right down to the ‘Cheerio!’ with which she knocks back her single malts, which might be vaguely plausible if Kiki’s were in Soho or even the

Northern Quarter instead of a mixed part of south Manchester, might be plausible if Kiki's were haunted by flaneurs and sapeurs and artists gone to seed and one-time brilliant writers too far in their cups to do more than slur at you the premise of their latest idea for the Great British Novel. You suspect Suze longs for the revoking of the licencing laws so that she could put dibs on the special licence to run the only all day drinkery in the area. I think she would secretly like homosexuality to be recriminalised as well, to give her bar more of a furtive and illicit edge. The smoking ban was probably another disappointment. But Suze is savvy enough to realise that a members-only bar could not drum up enough business round these parts. The clientele, myself included, are an on the whole unremarkable bunch of teachers and social workers and psychiatric nurses with perhaps the occasional graphic designer or online content manager – whatever that is – who come in singly or in pairs or in family groups with small children and dogs. Suze has to content herself with showcasing the (generally very bad) work of local artists and playing Jacques Brel on the audio system.

She took over the lease here four or five years ago. I think her to be about sixty, although no one knows for sure. In any case, she had her daughter, Eden, who definitely is fifteen, later in life. Eden's paternity is a subject on which Suze, a card-carrying lesbian for at least three decades by all accounts, will not be drawn. She, Suze that is, has dyed blonde hair down past her shoulders and is much given to cherry red lipstick that makes a gash of her mouth against her very white skin, and to hats, the bigger the better. This evening, although the weather is mild, she is wearing what she proudly tells me is a genuine Russian fur pill box, à la Julie Christie in *Dr Zhivago*.

I buy a glass of red wine from her and take up occupancy in one of the battered leather sofas in the window and she gives

me a look, the red mouth becoming a thin line, because she knows I am waiting for Audrey and only Audrey, and that sofa, with its twin facing it across the coffee table, is meant for a larger group, and really I should take one of the far less comfortable wooden dining chairs at one of the tables for two.

The door opens and it is not Audrey. It is Kevin Boone, who I do not wish to see, and who is pushing a baby in a pushchair and who makes a beeline for me.

‘Dearie!’ cries Suze from the bar, sour face vanished. Kevin Boone is the closest Suze is likely to get to a celebrity punter; he and his brother were in a band that had a minor club hit in the nineties that now gets little airplay other than the occasional one-hit-wonder compilation show, and Kevin’s Wikipedia entry, rumoured to have been penned by himself, has recently been taken down (I checked). The brother, Clive, nebbish Ira Gershwin to Kevin’s more flamboyant George, has seemingly gone to ground, or moved to Sale, but Kevin still haunts the local bars. I *had* heard that he had had a baby, and as he make his entrance he hails Suze with a wave, pausing as he arrives at my sofa so that everyone can get a good look at him, and he does have that calculatedly louche appearance, jet black hair swept back from his temples and standing up in a widow’s peak at the front, dark-rimmed eyes and black duster coat over jeans – also black – and biker boots; people do look twice at him because he looks as if he is, or ought to be, famous. That the pushchair is somewhat at odds with the overall effect is presumably the point.

‘Anna!’ he says now, and I offer a reluctant cheek to be kissed. ‘Allow me to introduce you to Sailor.’

‘You’ve called your baby *Sailor*?’

‘S-A-Y-L-A-H,’ he spells out for me. ‘Saylah.’

‘What’s that derived from?’

‘Oh nothing. Me and Ursula just liked it.’

‘How old is he?’ I ask.

‘*She*,’ he sounds affronted, ‘is seven weeks old.’

‘Oh.’ The infant regards me momentarily, then switches her gaze to her father. She looks as if she has been plugged into an electric socket. A shock of very fine, dark hair stands vertically from her head, as if someone has just rubbed it with a balloon, and she has a goggle-eyed look of ongoing amazement. Her ears stick out. ‘Lovely,’ I say.

‘Anna, it’s just the most amazing thing ever!’ Kevin, uninvited, plonks himself down on the sofa. ‘My friends had told me about it, but I didn’t believe it. I thought it would be all about Ursula, these early days, and yet I’m just so in love with this little one, you know? Like my heart’s going to burst, or something. And already I would do anything or give up anything to keep her from harm. I know it’s a cliché, Anna, but it changes everything. Even at seven weeks, she’s got her own personality. Last night...’

‘Lovely,’ I say again, and Kevin, his monologue temporarily halted, glances at the bar. ‘Can I get you a drink?’ I say quickly.

‘Oh cheers, Anna! I’ll have a whisky with a touch of water, Dalwhinnie if Suze has any in, which I know for a fact she has.’ I go to the bar and make the purchase, Suze all smiles again and ‘There you go, dearie!’ Kevin settles down with his expensive beverage.

‘I expect you’ll be wanting to hear about Bruce?’

‘No,’ I say.

‘Can you believe he’s bought a *house*?’

I am surprised.

‘I know: after all the lectures he gave us about “the cult of home ownership”! But that’s the least of it: get this. Cassie’s pregnant!’

‘Oh,’ I say.

‘So him and me’ll be old gimmer dads together – can you imagine us at Wacky Warehouse!’

This image, of Kevin Boone and Bruce Donnelly, in their fifties the pair of them, crawling after their respective progeny along a tunnel of plastic padding in pillar box red or Bird’s custard yellow, has Kevin creasing up with laughter.

‘Oh,’ he snorts, ‘Oh... hello Audrey,’ for she is here.

‘Hello, Kevin,’ says Audrey. Kevin and Audrey had a bit of a thing about fifteen years ago and it went very wrong. I never did get to the bottom of it.

‘I’ll go to the bar,’ says Kevin, amazingly, and stands up. We order a large red wine (me) and a Campari and soda (Audrey – she assures me it’s making a comeback). Saylah turns her astonished gaze to the two of us.

‘Is that his?’ Audrey asks me. I indicate that it is so.

I’ve known Audrey about ten years. I met her through Kevin and Bruce. She must have been phenomenally good-looking when she was younger – well, she was, I’ve seen photos – and she still has those high cheekbones, big eyes and hair that tumbles artlessly over her face. Not that Audrey cares. ‘I’ve retired,’ she has said to me, often. ‘I can’t be doing with it, all that mess and disruption, and the man hanging around afterwards like a mooning puppy. Always wanting more.’ Needless to say, men hit on her all the time.

Saylah continues to stare at us as Kevin returns with the drinks.

‘What an ugly baby,’ says Audrey, and Kevin looks startled but then laughs, as if it must be a backhanded compliment.

‘Is it true that *Never Mind the Buzzcocks* keep asking you to be in the identity parade?’ Audrey goes on. ‘You know – the section for washed-up has-beens? And you’ve done something to

your hair, haven't you? What look do you call that – the boot polish Vince Vega?

'I was telling Anna just now,' says Kevin, ignoring Audrey and settling down again. 'Bruce and Cassie have bought a house together and she's with sprog!' Audrey shoots me a glance, but I am studying the beer mat, which is advertising some kind of online quiz to promote World Whisky Day. Kevin repeats his Wacky Warehouse prevision for Audrey's benefit.

'Well I think you're both mad,' she says. 'But there it is.'

Kevin is about to launch again into his paean to fatherhood, but someone else he knows comes into the bar – maybe someone else vaguely connected to the music business, for Suze greets him effusively – and Kevin is off with him to the outdoor terrace to smoke an e-cigarette, the pushchair wheeled triumphantly before him.

'Bye ladies,' he says over his shoulder.

'What a blasted relief,' says Audrey.

'Oh, he's all right,' I say.

'Are you OK?' she says. She means about Bruce.

'I don't want to talk about it,' I say. Instead, I tell Audrey about my disastrous date with Gary, and then about Liversedge. Audrey, in spite of her retirement from the amatory world, likes hearing about my own adventures, which she receives with a blend of disapproval and prurience.

'You stupid bint,' she says. 'You mean you went to the house of a complete stranger, without telling anyone where you were going?'

'I did tell someone,' I say. 'I texted you with all the details.'

'Did you?' says Audrey. 'I must have missed it.' She glances at my battered Nokia on the table. 'Why d'you have such a shit phone, anyway?'

'I like it,' I say.

'It's an affectation,' says Audrey. 'Anyway, this'll interest you. I've decided on drowning.'

'Oh really,' I say.

'Yes,' says Audrey. 'Apparently there's a pain in your lungs to begin with, but then you experience a kind of delirium, then a ringing in your ears, and then oblivion. I read about it in the *Guardian*.'

'Right,' I say. 'How's the job going?'

'Oh, it's a hoot, rather!' says Audrey, brightening. 'Did I tell you what it is?'

'Not really.'

'I'm a professional mourner. I'm working for this chap in Stalybridge. I attend funerals. To make the numbers up. Sometimes there's a few of us go.'

Audrey has had what you would call a chequered career. Until recently she worked as an escort – of the strictly non-sexual variety – until she announced that she was tired of constantly having to scrub up for dull dinners and black tie functions, that the clothes allowance wasn't enough and that she wanted something more relaxed. The escort agency owner tried to get her to stay – Audrey was one of her top earners – but she was adamant.

'You mean people pay you to attend funerals?' I ask her now.

'That's right. This chap got the idea when he was visiting the Middle East – they quite often hire women to come and wail at funerals there. There's no wailing here – this is England, after all – but some families are embarrassed by the lack of numbers so I get hired to pitch up and – I don't have to well up or anything – just pretend I knew the deceased.'

'Who do you pretend to be? You're not worried about getting found out?'

‘Hasn’t happened so far. Generally I’m a former work colleague; that usually works out OK if you’re vague enough on details. I did one the other day; an old chap, and his geezer mate was quizzing me and quizzing me about how exactly I knew Jack, and it was on the tip of my tongue to say I was his secret mistress, but I didn’t. He was eighty-six in any case, the late Jack.’

‘Does it pay well?’

‘Thirty quid an hour. I don’t get paid for travel time, but I do get petrol money. They had one in Birmingham the other day, but I turned it down. Four hours’ driving for a couple of hours’ work. Not worth it.’

I strongly suspect Audrey of not really needing to work. She lives in some comfort in an Edwardian cottage a couple of streets away from Kiki’s, gets all her shopping delivered by Ocado and takes several foreign holidays a year. She hinted once at a sizeable inheritance from a distant aunt.

Eden, Suze’s daughter, comes up to the sofa. Though she’s only fifteen, Suze has her waiting tables. Punters – myself included – occasionally muse out loud about the legality of this. Suze insists it’s perfectly kosher.

Eden is still cultivating the urchin look, all gamine crop and baggy dungarees, her hair a kind of fuchsia pink. This sets her apart: her Facebook friends all have the festival chick thing going on, daisy-chain headbands and long blonde hair, denim hot pants and wellies. Gorgeous, all of them, but it’s a cookie-cutter look. In a further example of perverse behaviour, Eden has decided that Audrey and I are cool, and often seeks out our company.

‘I’ll just take these glasses for you,’ says Eden, ‘and then can I come back and talk to you?’

‘Sure,’ says Audrey.

‘House prices,’ says Eden, returning to our table, ‘have gone up twenty-one per cent in the last year around here.’

‘This is a strange conversational opener,’ I say, ‘for one so young.’

‘It’s all right for you,’ says Eden. ‘You’ve like climbed the property ladder and pulled it up behind you. I’m Generation Rent.’

‘You live with your mother, above a bar,’ Audrey points out, ‘and you’re fifteen. You’re too young to be Generation Anything.’

‘Well I’m going to be Generation Homeless then,’ says Eden. ‘I’m going to finish a degree course in something somewhere up to my balls in debt. Mum’s never going to be able to lend me the deposit for a flat. They’re not building nearly enough social housing.’

‘I’ll leave you my house,’ says Audrey suddenly. ‘In my will.’

‘Oh, for God’s sake,’ I say.

‘This’ll interest you,’ says Audrey to Eden. ‘I’ve decided on drowning.’



‘Working with three talented playwrights, bursting with ideas and energy has been a big honour. We worked on dialogue, action, structure, character and finding your voice in workshops and individual tutorials. The mentees developed their ideas over the year, culminating in a strong draft of a full length play at the end. It has been a real pleasure being a mentor and wonderful to be able to nurture new playwrights.’

**Tanika Gupta**  
**Mentor | Playwriting**



Hilary Watson | *Menagerie Street* and other  
poems

## Road

Windscreen wipers. Indicator. Satellite  
lost. Recalculating. Recalculating. North.  
Hand on thigh. Eyes on road. Break bank  
waters. Roofless abbey. Tintern.  
Ex threw shoes in toilet bowl –  
research into swingers' parties –  
women. Third exit. Toll road. Petrol receipts.  
Postcodes. New moon. Let me hold  
the umbrella. Hotel lobby,  
lift doors. Where do you want to go?

Across the river. Take us where lights shine  
ankle height, where beers come in 1/3s.

And we can be  
a little while.

Before bleach-white towels.  
Showers. Pillows. Headboard.

## **The Hunter**

We found shelter in the woods,  
a huntsman's hut torn  
by pricks of frost  
shattering glass,  
air-ripped bricks,  
and tiny rooms  
with crowds  
of crippled chairs.

Nightfall. Corner heaped,  
the walls tongued down on us.  
She rose, packaged me in strips,  
and left me there.

Moonlight creaked through  
French doors held by rust.

She stalked towards the glade,  
a tawny owl warding her away.  
Crouched in underwood.  
The harpoon against her shoulder blade,  
she traced the planet's shadow  
bleeding through the moon.  
Loosed an arrow.

I did not see her climb the fraying rope,  
unfettered mass, her leap of faith.  
Nor the dip of fingertips,  
quicksilver in her palm.

She knelt again beside me –  
grey, liver pocked,  
beggar-ribbed,  
her hair twisted frost.

We sexed and scrapped  
on threadbare floors.  
The moon drops trickled  
past my tongue.  
'I need at least your scent,'  
I said.

But her words were gone,  
she pulled closed the door.

And then the child came.  
It screeching like  
Lucifer would answer,  
tore my breasts  
till blood  
and milk ran.

I knew I could not love it.

Too soon the teeth,  
fur tattering her head.  
She pawed the rugs  
with fists,  
blundered through  
on all fours.

I kept us fed  
on roots and fish,  
lit candles. Searched  
the woods, terrified  
my mind would snap  
like femurs under bears.

We scraped by  
till the age of talking –  
till she broke, the wild way.

I led her through,  
unleashed her in a damp  
and dusky glade,  
the cuff of moon  
leaner than a tooth –

darted home, shuttered out  
the shrieking whelp,  
held fast the locks.

Daybreak –  
rag-wrapped, barefoot,  
stammering inside the city gates,  
I tried to tell,

of what...?  
But only howls,

only howls came.

## **After the Murmuration**

Carp lie dormant, gills flitting in the shadows.  
The air is calm as moonlight over the water.

A blackbird pauses to quench her thirst, while dragonflies,  
blue as veins, zip between the grasses for mosquitoes.

Beneath the duck weed, a knot of toads shelter from the heat.  
A lone dandelion seed settles on your eyelashes.

I catch it like a star of splintered glass;  
cast it away on a breath.

As tadpoles tickle at your neck, nibble along your jaw,  
my fingertips skate like water-boatmen across your skin.

I nuzzle out your scent along the contours of your sides  
where blue irises butterfly from buds in the early light.

Tracing rows of pebbles along your ribs, I memorise  
the coordinates of your hips. Yellow lilies crown towards

the sky that fills with starlings, rising from the reeds.  
A terrapin slinks into the pool, rippling the surface.

## Menagerie Street

Flamingos outside the corner house  
gaze past open ivory curtains  
into the magnolia living room.  
Geoff and Susan, house-socked  
on snow-white leather, ruck  
over ice cream-coloured carpet squares.

A warthog and tapir knit and purl  
through buckle shoes and backpacks  
wet from ruptured Frubes.  
Penguins on the pavement  
teeter against the hordes.

Cooper's wild boars gruff at food bins,  
while water buffalo lounge quite happily  
on the drive, opposite Nina's dozing zebra.

Has-been lions used to laze beneath  
the trampoline at number 3.  
Now a chimp hurls acorns from street trees.

The nuts whack the postman's door,  
chip the crimson paint, as alpacas  
spitball cud over James' kettle,  
toaster, his new scarlet De'Longhi.

Next door, rainbow lorikeets burst  
from Daphne's hemp sombrero.  
Crazy ants steer Cheerios  
from her compost heap.

Her jutting bones protrude  
through sleuths of sagging cheeks.

Whirls of capuchins fling themselves  
from scaffolding,  
grab onto the giraffe  
whose roving hooves stop  
before the teacher's door.

It cranes through  
the bedroom window –

where Miss Davies lies entwined  
with Miss Fife  
in afternoon bed sheets –

protrudes its purple tongue  
to lick the wallpaper vines.

## Holiness of Bricks

He won't have imagined  
burning leaves of books  
fluttering in the open  
between the floors

or bare brickwork  
beneath peel-scorched walls.  
Nor the extractor fan's collapse,  
the washing machine white  
amongst charred counter tops.

He'll have forgotten the proximity  
of the neighbour's dog,  
that windows also frame  
outside

while the house crumples –  
black, gleaming,  
soaking up its stink.

He won't have seen the firefighters  
line the street near the red STOP sign,  
a cordon round the oil truck  
he parked in the living room.

Dressers upturned,  
chairs ached to splinters,  
tables akimbo,  
the empty hearth glowing,

flames licking photos  
out of mounts,  
lapping free the tiles  
that once blocked rays  
now dancing in  
ringlets of smoke.

## The Promise

In the dark-wooded pub near Carnaby Street  
you don't know why you feel strange, but I see  
the black bear waking between your irises.

There are dirt tracks and pine trees, and silence  
you cannot find like snow buried leaves.  
You say 'No one's ever finished me.'

like you are the dregs of tea. But we  
are drinking lemonade in cut glass.  
I hear what you're saying, but the citrus

on my tongue's a little dull, not quite lemons.  
You twirl your ice cubes around the tumbler.  
'It's not your parents, I know people like me

when I meet them.' But the hunter's loose now,  
reaches the precipice of the falls.  
No sign of the beast, just bracken

lowering raindrops to the ground.  
'It's cold. Don't touch me in public.'  
The bear doesn't sit patiently in bars.

He comes out on crowded streets,  
dances drunk at zebra crossings, punches  
the air from your chest with clumsy fists.



Sarah Mulholland | from *Whisper the Wrong  
Name*

Cindy Connolly, 29, is finally about to make a break from her dysfunctional family as she has accepted a place at Glasgow University to study Sociology as a mature student. She is trying to break the news to her younger sister Layla, 22, when they find out that their father, Steve, is on trial for rape. Layla refuses to believe that the father she idolises would do anything like this and agrees to be a character witness for him at the upcoming trial. Cindy, however, who has always had a fractious relationship with Steve, does not support her in doing this, leading to conflict between them.

What Layla does not know is that Steve abused Cindy when they were children.

The play explores how Cindy finally discloses this to her sister and what they decide to do with this information after Steve is found not guilty for the rape he was on trial for. It explores the bonds of sisterly love and just how far one can go to protect a sibling.

The action takes place in contemporary Portsmouth.

\*

### **Act One, Scene One:**

Cindy is at her sister's house fixing her bike in an effort to soften Layla up for the news that she is due to move to Glasgow after the summer ends.

*CINDY and LAYLA are in a garden. It is late afternoon on a warm summer's day. There is a bike and lots of tools surrounding it. We can see the back door to the house up four or five steps leading down to the garden. There are also a couple of sad-looking garden chairs, a climbing*

*frame and a shed. CINDY is kneeling down fiddling with the bike chain; LAYLA is sat beside her picking daisies and occasionally glancing at her watch.*

CINDY: Can you pass me that thingy?  
LAYLA: Which thingy? They're all thingies.  
CINDY: The chain tool thingy. It's the one that looks like Optimus Prime when he's half way between being a robot and being a car.  
LAYLA: Who is Optimus Prime?  
CINDY: You're not that much younger than me Layla. He's... the manager of the Transformers.  
LAYLA: *(Pause)* I dunno anything you just said.  
CINDY: *(Sighs)* I'll get it then.  
LAYLA: Just tell me what you want and I'll get it. Or wait till Dad is here and he'll sort it.  
CINDY: Cool. Yeah. OK. Steve will sort it. Or I could learn how to do it myself maybe?  
LAYLA: That sounds... boring and hard.  
CINDY: Yeah. It is. Doesn't mean it's not worth it.  
LAYLA: I've got better things to do than watch you fail at fixing my bike chain.  
CINDY: Go then. *(CINDY gets up and makes shooing motion at LAYLA then walks over to the tools and rifles through them)* I will fix YOUR bike all on my own.  
LAYLA: Cinds, stop doing that big sister guilt-tripping so good.  
CINDY: Shant. Aha! Optimus!  
LAYLA: What does Optimus do?  
CINDY: *(Holds the chain tool up and inspects it)* Optimus is the glue that holds the rest of the

Transformers together. He is their moral compass, their wise and firm yet fair leader, their—

LAYLA: *(Interrupting – grabs chain tool from CINDY's hand)* Fucking hell. Why don't you just marry him?

CINDY: *(Grabs chain tool back)* I would but he is a fictional robot.

*LAYLA makes a grab for it again and when CINDY pulls it away from her in time LAYLA starts tickling CINDY; they both laugh and continuing play fighting.*

*STEVE opens back door and we see him watch them run around the garden. LAYLA has picked up the hose and is threatening CINDY with it.*

STEVE: Alright girls! What you crazies up to then?

*CINDY stops dead and looks up, LAYLA continues trying to play until she realises CINDY is not joining in anymore.*

LAYLA: Alright Dad?

STEVE: There she is, my most beautiful youngest daughter! Come here you! *(STEVE reaches for LAYLA and pulls her into a giant hug and twirls her around while she giggles)* Let me take a look at you then *(holds her at arm's length)* You look more and more grown up every time I see you. It feels like only yesterday I was

chasing you around this garden trying to get you to put your nappy on.

LAYLA: Da-aaad! Shut up!

STEVE: What? It's true! You always were a free spirit just like your father. *(LAYLA laughs and punches his arm playfully)*

LAYLA: God, you're so embarrassing.

STEVE: That's my job Layls. You have to sign a contract promising to be as embarrassing as possible when they make you put your name on the birth certificate. True story. *(LAYLA pulls a silly face and STEVE returns it)* And how is my wonderful Cindy-doll? You're looking fan-dabby-dozy too. Oh dear. You don't seem happy. What's up?

CINDY: Nothing.

STEVE: That old "nothing" chestnut again? *(CINDY doesn't move or look at STEVE. STEVE gives LAYLA a knowing look behind CINDY's back)* Fair enough then, Cindy. So. What can I help you with then my love?

*STEVE pats the top of CINDY's head and moves round to stand next to the bike as well, while doing so he makes a show of taking his jacket off and putting it on the back of the garden chair next to them and rolling up his sleeves.*

You gonna make me a tea then sweetheart?

*(He says this to LAYLA but CINDY gets up and makes a move to go to the kitchen).*

Not you Cindy-doll. You need to talk me through the mess you've made of fixing this chain.

*Neither moves or says anything for a moment. Then LAYLA suddenly seems to spring into life again.*

LAYLA: Course dad! *(Runs up the steps in the garden and then pauses as she gets to the door)* You want it normal or I got some of those fruity teas?

STEVE: 'Fruity teas'? Now I've heard everything. You really need to get a hobby Layls! Most girls like clothes and shoes and make up! Not... 'fruity teas'

CINDY: You always said we weren't 'most girls' Steve.

STEVE: Oi you! We've talked about this!

*STEVE pokes CINDY in the tummy with a spanner he's picked up. CINDY squirms and steps back.*

CINDY: Don't! I'm sorry. Fine. Dad.

STEVE: That's better. Lay, I'll just have a bog-standard builder's tea for my bog standard builder's bones if that's alright sweetheart?

LAYLA: Sure Daddy Papa Father *(laughs and goes inside)*.

STEVE: So Cindy-doll, how's your fella doing? What's his name again? Liam or Mike or Stanley...?

CINDY: It's Simon. He's fine. But we're... we broke up.

STEVE: That fucking scumbag (*stands up and starts pacing*) Did he do something to you? Did he hurt you?

CINDY: No! No. It just didn't work out is all. It wasn't his fault.

STEVE: I'd do anything for my girls – you know that, don't you?

CINDY: Course Ste... Dad. I know I know. Just calm down.

STEVE: (*Sighs and kneels down again*) So what's up with this bike?

CINDY: (*Pokes at bike chain*) It's broken and I'm trying to fix it.

STEVE: You got a chain tool?

CINDY: Optimus is over there.

STEVE: Optimus?

CINDY: Never mind. It's a joke.

STEVE: You weren't running around and playing with that were you? For fuck's sake Cindy, it's important. I left all these here for you girls to respect and use with care! Jesus. It's not part of a silly game for you and your sister is it?

CINDY: No Dad. I just... I was being... I haven't damaged it.

STEVE: Good. Now give it here and let me sort this.

*CINDY sighs and gets up to pick up the chain tool. She wanders back to the bike swinging it a little as she goes. STEVE doesn't see this as he is poking and prodding at the bike chain.*

CINDY: You know, I was actually fine fixing this.

STEVE: (*Not looking up*) Clearly.

CINDY: *(Idly hits the palm of her hand with the chain tool and walks towards STEVE)* I'm teaching myself with a video on YouTube. I know Layla asked you to look at it but I've been sorting it. She told me you were the one who said you wanted to come round. Said you wanted to talk to us about something?

STEVE: *(Still focusing on the bike)* Did she?

CINDY: *(Stands over him)* Yep.

*STEVE notices how close CINDY is, stands up and squares up to her. They stare at each other for a while.*

LAYLA: *(Comes back through the kitchen door swinging her hips and shoulders)* Dada I got you a BORING tea and Cindy *(pouts her lips seductively)* I got you an EXCITING passion fruit tea.

CINDY: *(Breaks away from the stare first)* Oh cheers Layla-loony.

LAYLA: You're welcome *(kisses CINDY on the cheek as she hands her the mug)*. And for you! *(Hands other mug to STEVE and he kisses her on the cheek which makes her smile.)*

STEVE: Thanks sweetheart. So this one *(nods at CINDY)* was saying she's dumped that loser Simon.

LAYLA: What? *(Turns to CINDY)* I thought you liked him!

CINDY: Yeah he's nice it just... didn't work out.

LAYLA: Why didn't you tell me? (*Punches Cindy on her arm as she's drinking her tea and she spills some on the ground*)

CINDY: CAREFUL!

LAYLA: So-wee (*pouts like a little girl*)

CINDY: (*Mutters*) Fuck's sake (*dusts herself off*).

STEVE: Language Cindy!

LAYLA: So. Dad. Didn't you say you needed a favour on the phone?

*STEVE looks at CINDY then turns away to put his tea down on the garden chair holding his jacket and frowns.*

STEVE: Oh yes. Of course. (*Turns back to them and smiles*) God, I forget how stunning you girls are, sometimes. I love us being here all together.

CINDY: Steve. Dad, I mean. What do you want?

*LAYLA shakes her head at CINDY.*

STEVE: Look, it's nothing much. I just... I might not be around for a while so I just wanted to make sure you'd check in on your nan from time to time. You know what she's like, getting a bit forgetful. And I dunno what'll happen with my flat while I'm away but I was thinking it'd be good for you to just check on the post or give it a bit of a dust every now and then.

CINDY: (*Looks at LAYLA while addressing STEVE*) How long is a while?

LAYLA: (*Talking over CINDY*) Where you going? What's going on?

STEVE: *(Shakes his head)* Nothing. Nothing bad. I've just got some business to sort. And I don't know how long it'll take, Cinds. I should have a better idea in a month or so.

LAYLA: A month? You'll be gone at least a month! What if my bike breaks again?

CINDY: Layla, I can fix your bike.

LAYLA: All due respect Cindy. No you fucking can't.

STEVE: Hey, there's no need for that is there? I can teach Cindy now how to fix your bike.

LAYLA: Yeah, fine, but also I'll miss you. I never know when I'm going to see you or anything.

CINDY: Layla, we will cope OK? *(Mutters)* We've coped before without him...

LAYLA: Cindy, shut the fuck up! I don't know why you are always such a bitch to Dad but there's no fucking need for it!

*LAYLA starts making aggressive moves towards CINDY and STEVE gets in between them.*

STEVE: Woah woah woah. OK Layla, the loyalty is very touching but you don't need to prove it, OK? I'm sure Cindy is just in a bad mood because of her break up so let's cut her a little slack, OK?

*LAYLA stands her ground and CINDY looks at her over STEVE's shoulder. LAYLA eventually breaks away from the stare first and paces around the garden. She punches a tree and then slides down to the floor. CINDY and STEVE watch her.*

LAYLA: I'm just going to miss you. I can't believe you're telling us now. We could have thrown you a going away party. I'd have made you a cake!

*LAYLA starts getting tearful. STEVE goes and sits next to her and touches her arm gently.*

STEVE: Darlin', you make the best cakes ever and I would have loved that. I am still going to be around for a bit, I'm not sure how long but for a little while and when I've got things sorted we can have a big party then ok?

LAYLA: *(Sniffing)* OK.

STEVE: So can I see a little smile?

*LAYLA shakes her head and then STEVE puts his finger at the corner of her mouth and draws it upwards which makes LAYLA laugh as she bats him away.*

LAYLA: Urgh! Get off me!

STEVE: That's better. There's my Layls. Give me a hug then *(they hug)* and help your poor old dad up. I'm not as young as I used to be. *(LAYLA jumps up and gives him a hand off the ground).*

LAYLA: Oh my God, you did not just say that. That's what Granddad always said.

CINDY: *(Mutters)* It's what fake TV dads say.

STEVE: Well then. *(Picks up his jacket and puts it on. He gulps his tea down and hands the mug to CINDY who takes it without looking at him, then wipes his mouth with the back of his sleeve. He goes and gives LAYLA another big hug and a*

*kiss and walks to CINDY and stands in front of her. She looks up while he's gesturing for a hug but does nothing) Oh Cindy, you'll get over him. It's not the end of the world is it? (Playfully punches her on the chin and she flinches) Love you both! Give your mum my regards. I'll be off!*

*He cheerfully walks to the back door and exits as CINDY and LAYLA watch him not saying anything.*

LAYLA: What is up with you, mardy arse?

CINDY: Nothing. (*CINDY kicks the bike and it falls over.*)

Carol Farrelly | from *Beheld*

## One

Polnoon Street is all wrong tonight. The bracketed lamps still spin their amber light along the row of whitewashed houses, across the A-shaped green, up into the trees' hunching branches and the low brown sky, but everywhere Jess looks she sees faces, suspended. Teenage faces hang, skewed white masks, on doors and benches and streetlights. Jess rubs her eyes and sits down beneath her favourite tree, the chestnut. She presses her back against the trunk and feels, through her thin T-shirt, the bark's nubs and veins. She half closes her eyes. This tree is still scratchy and real. And the village is still beautiful, half-seen between her eyelids. And the burn blethers as usual behind her, coursing through the Orry, telling her not to panic. Gravel turns to sand then silt. It's a law of nature. Everything reduces. She's learned that lesson in Geography and Science, but she's never believed it – that laws always hold. Even if tonight passes, even if tomorrow everything returns to normal, today's events will stick and scar and refuse erosion.

She opens her eyes and scans the street. Twelve of her schoolmates stand slouched on the pavement opposite, all waiting by doors that are shut to them. They stand alone and still: they each withhold the kick or howl that would acknowledge that everything is all wrong. Tonight they are no longer the children from the good and stable homes.

Jess pulls out a stick of chewing gum and unwraps it. She wants again the warm pepper of tobacco in her mouth, even though she has only smoked once before. She chews. Tom Wilson stands on the pavement directly opposite, with his back to her. He's wearing his usual skin-tight jeans and spider-laced boots and he's staring into his cottage window. She leans forwards. The window's glass flickers with bluish television

lights. Tom lifts his hand and raps on the glass. The reflected lights thin then vanish. A pair of curtains snap shut. Tom's hand falls. He turns, staggers out into the middle of the road and pulls out his mobile. He doesn't see Jess sitting beneath the tree's scratchy darkness, only a few feet away from him.

'Mum?' he clamps the mobile to his ear. 'Let me in. Please. I'm freezing out here.' A chestnut leaf bats against his neck and catches in his collar. His face burns. 'Why are you doing this? I'm me.'

His mobile clatters to the pavement, as though it has caught the fire of his face. Three houses further down, Mrs Morrison leans out from a first-floor window and curls her hand into a fist as her granddaughter, Sarah, presses herself, star-shaped, against the front door.

'Get away!' she shouts. 'We've called the police – do you hear? Don't you step inside this house again.' She looks up and down the street. 'All of you! Go. We know our own.'

Sarah cannot withhold any longer. She opens her mouth and she howls.

Jess unplucks the gum from her mouth and stares down at the triangle of pavement between her crossed legs. She has never liked Sarah Morrison, who taunts and mimics and makes an anorexic catwalk of every street and corridor, but as Jess studies the pavement's grain, she can no longer recall one taunt. All she knows now of Sarah is her howl. She waits. Sarah falls silent.

Jess breathes out and looks up again. At the other end of the street, on the hill's brow, Mrs Keegan stands in a white dressing-gown and unlaced trainers. She pushes at two blonde boys, one smaller than her and one taller. They both step back but raise praying hands towards her. She looks to the Orry. 'David! Ben! Boys, where are you?' she shouts. The smaller boy whimpers, while the taller boy turns and pelts towards the

woods, his body tilting as though a wind, palm-shaped, pushes him towards the earth. Others have already retreated from the street into the Orry's cover. There's already a gang in there, whispering then bellowing, lobbing pine cones then flashing mobile-phone screens as though they have devised a new language from wood and light. And a group of parents also stalk the Orry, cracking the cones and twigs underfoot, mulching fallen birds' skeletons, calling out their children's names.

'Jacob!'

'Ben!'

'Lucy!'

A pine cone lands beside Jess. She doesn't turn, telling herself the lob isn't directed at her. Tonight, she is more unimportant than ever before. Her hand reaches out. She picks up the cone, presses its scales against her palm and feels her schoolmates' slow, disjuncting dismay. She closes her eyes, frowns to listen – but the burn's burbling is lost to her. She pulls up her knees against her chest to reassure herself that her limbs are still intact: her body continues, real as this pine cone scratching her fingers, reactive as the red flecks it imprints.

Finally, Jess looks towards her own house, the familiar blinded windows. Hers is the one house that hasn't changed tonight: it remains all hush and screens and 'keep out'. Tonight, it is her schoolmates who are learning such a home, hitting against doorknobs and skirting boards that push and jag you. Invisibility is still new to them, how it questions every nerve in you until you can no longer tell whether your shivers are from heat or cold, whether you're awake or asleep.

A door slams open. Mr Keegan lurches out of the house, clutching a phone against his chest. He guides his calling wife back inside. Tom Wilson thumps on the door again. A twig or

wing-bone cracks behind Jess. Ben runs across the road after David. A voice rumbles from inside a house. Tom picks up his mobile phone and dials. Two crows settle on a roof, shuffle beside a chimney stack and whinny like horses: even the crows don't know themselves anymore.

'Dad?' Tom says. 'You need to come home. Mum's chucked me out. She's gone crazy. Dad? Everyone in the street's gone crazy.'

The crows huddle closer and Jess envies Tom this awful phone call. She envies his ease with that word, even in this moment – 'Dad'.

A damp leaf falls against her neck. And she's recalling Lisa again. Even in this moment, she's recalling Lisa. It's self-comfort, she tells herself – not indifference. Lisa's fingertips on her spine, in the shower, her touch that arrived just as the water plumed white steam. Jess reaches for the mobile in her jeans pocket, but then pulls back: she would have heard any messages or calls. She must stop expecting.

'Do you hear me?' Tom yells. 'Dad?'

A siren swoons from the moor road. Jess stands. Polnoon Street is all blinking blue lights now. Everything around her quickens. Half the doors in the street slam open while the others slam shut. Teenagers and parents shout and ignore and push and reel and strike at walls and shoulders and chests. Voices rise through windows – the chopped-up rhythms of nobody listening to each other. 'Who in hell are you?' 'It's me. What's wrong? I'm me.' 'Where's my child? Where's my daughter?' 'Here.' 'What have you done with her?' 'Here, Mum.' 'Monsters.' 'Who?' 'Monsters.' 'You?'

Jess puts on her hoodie and wanders into the middle of the road, where she stops. A police car crawls past her. She looks back to the ground, where it's safe. Damp stars collect by her feet, caught in a streetlight's yellow arc. The road is wet

again even though it hasn't rained for days. It's the strangeness she's noticed ever since her night with Lisa. She hasn't quite seen the world as it is, or not as a camera beholds the world, ever since her trip to London. Everywhere water pools on desks and pavements and grass, and reflects white tiles, and carries the scent of sex.

The police car draws up outside the Morrisons' house. Jess watches. Sarah is still a starfish against her house's closed door.

'What in hell's happening?'

Tom Wilson stands in front of Jess, mobile pressed to his chest, shoelaces unravelled.

'Why are they doing this?' he asks.

Jess shrugs at him and tries to smile, as though this is an ordinary night and his a random question. He stares back with dry but red-rimmed eyes. His lower lip trembles. He's waiting for her answer, but she has no words or stories to give him. She thinks to tell him that it's better to let the tears fall immediately – that she wishes she had cried when her world fell nine years ago. She rubs at her eyes. Let it out now, she wants to tell Tom. Holler. Kick. Curse. Otherwise you'll play musical statues for years. Others' blindness will hard-wire inside you; you'll implant their eyes; you'll adopt invisibility. She opens her mouth, but no words arrive. Tom needs better comfort than her own miserable wisdoms.

'Why are they doing this?' he repeats. He thumps his phone three times against his chest. 'All of them? Every single parent?'

'I don't know,' Jess replies.

A two-headed shadow moves behind Tom. Jess looks up and sees Peter and Fleur Keld, brother and sister, slouch against the wall, both in blue cagoules. She wonders at their cagoules and their needlessness on this dry night. For a

moment, she wonders if they too see the water that she thought her own mirage.

‘It’s sick. That’s what it is,’ Fleur mutters and pulls her cagoule zip collar-high so that it touches her chin. ‘They’re playing a sick, sick joke.’

Jess and Tom both stare. They don’t know what to say to this girl with her pale, half-hidden face. Peter blushes and looks to the pavement. ‘It’s sick,’ he echoes.

Fleur wraps her arm around her brother’s shoulder and propels him onwards. They wander back down the street towards their house, where the door is open, and they slip inside. Jess wonders what is happening in that house tonight, the house of kind voices that she always envied as a child. The roof above her scuffles. One of the crows has lost its footing. A police siren, as though taking its cue from the crow’s scrabbling toes, blares louder.

Tom turns to Jess. ‘Has your mum chucked you out too?’

Jess takes a step backwards. She shoves her hands into her pockets and shakes her head. Jess’s mum gave her a hello when she arrived home from school that afternoon. She smiled, without looking up, told her she was working the late shift at the hotel tonight and that she left her a cottage pie heating in the oven. Words and gestures, however, don’t guarantee recognition. There was no eye contact: there is rarely eye contact. As often as her mum says hello or leaves her a comforting latchkey dinner, she will enter a room while Jess is there and switch off the music or the light or the heat that spins around her daughter. Forgetful that she’s not alone, her mum sees and hears only wasting electricity and so she flicks Jess into silence, blankness, cold.

Tom rewords the question. ‘Your mum still sees you?’

‘I think so.’

Tom frowns. ‘My dad knew it was me on the phone.’

‘That’s good.’

‘He’s on his way, he said.’

‘That’s good.’

A green curtain scrunches against the window behind them. Jess and Tom start. A brown Labrador imprints a wet nose against the window, all snuffling black skin. The brows crumple and the eyes turn triangular. A paw scrabbles at the curtain. Mad with recognition, Tom’s dog lets out a howl and sprays beads of spittle, like little black flies, across the glass. For a moment, Tom’s face relaxes. He looks ready to laugh. Jess waits for him to press his palm to the window, but he doesn’t – and he’s right, she thinks. He’s right not to touch and make the separation solid. The next moment, the dog vanishes and a white face replaces him – Mrs Wilson stares out at them, her lips purple creases as though she’s been drinking red wine. ‘Leave,’ she mouths, through the glass, still speckled with fly-winged saliva.

‘Mum,’ Tom whispers. This time, he reaches for the glass.

Mrs Wilson stares and Jess wonders exactly what it is she sees when she looks at their faces. She’s often wondered what her own mum sees when she looks at her. The daubed impression of a child, bumblebee-blur eyes and mouth.

‘You’re not my child,’ she replies.

Tom’s face blanches. ‘Yes I am. I’m Tom. I’m me. Mum? How can you not see me?’

‘No.’ Mrs Wilson’s breath blossoms across the glass. ‘I know my son, for God’s sake.’

Jess steps back and swallows. She’s never seen it as an observer before, a mother switching lights against her child.

‘Is that you, Jess Hughes?’ Mrs Wilson blinks.

Jess nods. Tom’s mouth opens.

‘Where are the others, Jess?’ Tom’s mother asks.

Jess shrugs. Tom winces.

‘Where are they?’ Mrs Wilson repeats. ‘Where are our children? Jess? Where’s my Tom?’

Tom gulps. Jess imagines the Adam’s apple in his throat falling apart, as though cored and sliced. ‘He’s here,’ she finds her voice. ‘This is your Tom.’

Mrs Wilson blinks. Her purple mouth wilts. ‘There’s always been something not right with you, Jess Hughes. Always.’

The curtains snatch shut.

Tom turns again to Jess. ‘How come she can see you?’

Jess stares up into the nearest streetlight, the white squiggle of heat, lurid, burning, like a dentist’s spotlight, large as a ceiling. Tom presses his palm against the window, holds it against the glass’s thrum and heat, the linger of his mum’s voice.

‘Can they all still see you?’ His voice is reedy now.

Jess wants to laugh now, at this thought, which would be the strangest occurrence of all.

‘Fuck’s sake!’ a voice shouts.

They all turn. Sarah Morrison is kicking at her front door. Two policemen stand either side of her, trying to talk her down. The policewoman places her hand on her belt. Sarah kicks again. The blue-painted wood splinters and echoes. The trees in the Orry must crawl at the sound. Even the doors on Montgomery Street, the other side of the green, must feel those splinters jag and tug at their grain. The policewoman asks Sarah to calm herself. A wooden blue fang falls to the pavement.

Tom wipes his cheek and nods. ‘Yes,’ he says and positions himself in front of his own front door, pushing back his right leg, as though poised to curl a rugby ball through the air. He kicks, but the door only returns a feeble rap.

‘Don’t, Tom,’ Jess says.

Tom kicks again. Jess glances at her own blinded home again. She rubs at her neck. The police cars' blue lights prickle her skin. The policewoman stands behind Sarah, legs apart and wraps her arms around the girl, as though hugging from her behind. Jess frowns. Her mobile vibrates. She feels the pulse of laughter again in her throat. She pulls out the phone and wants to see Lisa's name flare across the orange screen.

The message is from her mum. Jess's shoulders sink. *We've all been sent home. Are you okay? Where are you?*

Jess pushes the mobile back into her pocket without replying. She feels a body behind her. Tobacco peppers the air

'What's going on?' a man's voice asks.

She turns expecting to see a police uniform. A light-reflecting jacket flaps arms at her. It is Mr Keld, holding a toolbox in one hand and a cigarette in the other: he always carries a toolbox, always ready to tighten any slack joints or loosen stiff blades on a wind turbine. The wind doctor, she used to call him, when she was younger and took to wishing she were Fleur and Peter's sister and he her father. A doctor of any sorts, she thought – a man who tends to machines that propel music and light and heat – must make a good father. He squints at her and throws his cigarette to the pavement.

Another police car screeches and brakes at the bottom of the street. There is a swarm now of blue lights they do not synchronise. Feet scuffle. A woman moans. They all turn to see Sarah running across to the Orry. The policewoman, clutching her stomach, lopes after her.

'What on earth's going on?' Mr Keld asks.

'The adults can't see us,' Jess looks up at him. 'They've all got that blindness, your wife's blindness.'

Polnoon Street remains all wrong tonight, but Jess watches now from her window, knowing that she is somehow immune.

She stands at her bedroom window that flicks on, off, on, off with the refracted blue lights from below. She watches as two policemen stand at Tom's door; she hears how they keep their voices low as Tom's mother and father point at their shrinking son and shriek their denials and accusations. From this height, she cannot see Tom's face, nor his parents, nor the expressions that the policemen must be trying to withhold – that slow-to-react skin all uniformed adults wear. She wonders what the officers see as they stand there and whom they believe: it is their eyes, after all, the official eyes, that will decide this event. Other parents emerge from other houses and encircle the officers. She pulls her phone from her pocket as she watches. All the parents throw their voices higher and flail backward arms at children who watch, separate, scattered, at various distances outside the circle. Her phone lights beneath her thumb and she scrolls for the right music – if someone has ever composed music for a moment like this. Nothing is new, though, even this, she reminds herself. Laws apply. There are pre-existing arrangements of sound that will meet such a moment. She glances down. The adults jostle. The blue lights blink. Tom has escaped from the circle and is standing on the Orry's edge now. This rearrangement of bodies too is nothing new.

Jess looks down at her phone and hesitates as the titles scroll. There is no fitting song. And there are no messages. Lisa has still not contacted her, but she has not contacted Lisa: they have both chosen the failure to act. The titles continue to scroll. She tries to focus. She considers the woman in California that sings of a white mare, rides a white mare that doesn't even exist, so she says, even as she sings and she rides. The voices below crackle. A policeman strolls across the road and beckons towards the scattered teenagers. The priest from St Brigit's marches beside him in blue wellingtons, even though it is

summer and the ground is dry. Another three police cars pull up on the opposite side of the road. Their lights synchronise and the glass's blue pulse judders now. Six more uniformed figures step out onto the road and follow the first man. They wave and call as he does. Their movements synchronise. They have made their decision.



## Biographies

**Rue Baldry** was raised in Essex and Dar Es Salaam. In 1988 she went to York to study English Literature and never left. She now has five children and an MA in Creative Writing. Her scripts have been performed by amateur groups, and given readings by professional theatres. Her play for children, *Under the Stars*, is currently in its second production. In recent years she has changed direction to concentrate on writing fiction. She spent this mentorship year completing her first novel, *Still*, which she had been working on for seven years, and has just begun working on a second novel.

**Annette Brook** was born, raised and currently lives in south London. She started writing plays in 2005, making it through to the final 30 out of 2000+ entries for Channel 4's *The Play's the Thing*. In 2008 Annette completed the Royal Court's Young Writers' Programme and their 'Invitation' group. Plays include *Make You Mine* (showcased at Soho Theatre, 2010), *Bounty* (Iris Theatre, 2011; shortlisted for the McConnell New Writing Fund, 2016), *Little Baby Nothing* (Theatre503, 2013), *Halves* (White Bear Theatre, 2014; Brockley Jack, 2012), *One in Three* (Ophelia, Dalston, 2014) and *The other half* (The Feminist Library, 2015). She has worked in the arts sector for 10 years and is currently Communications Manager for The Royal Society of Literature. She has loved working on a full-length play during the scheme.

**Charlotte Coates'** credits include *Bilanka Cosmos*, part of the 'Is It Getting Cold In Here?' season at Theatre 503; *Warehousing*, a rehearsed reading at the New Diorama Theatre; *Off You Get*, a Rapid Write Response at Theatre 503

and *The Death of Norman Tortilla* produced by Sheer Drop at the Tristan Bates Theatre. Other credits include *Billy*, a short film, which was a finalist in the Smoke and Mirrors 48 hour short film competition and *Vanilla Slice*, which was a finalist in the BBC Talent sit-com competition. She has an MA in Scriptwriting with distinction from Goldsmiths, University of London.

**Gill Darling** was born in Leicester and grew up in Hinckley. She graduated from the University of York with a degree in Economics and Statistics and has subsequently lived in London and, since 2003, Manchester, where she works in social housing. *My Quondam Dreams are Shot to Hell* is her first novel.

**Carol Farrelly** is a fiction writer based in Edinburgh. In 2013 she received a Robert Louis Stevenson Fellowship from Creative Scotland and in 2011 won the Sceptre Prize and a Scottish Booktrust New Writer Award. Her short stories have been widely published in journals such as *The Irish Times*, *Stand* and *Edinburgh Review*, and broadcast on BBC Radio 4. She won the International Hemingway Short Story Prize and has been shortlisted for the Bridport Prize and the Fish Short Story Prize. During her time on the scheme, she has been working on her novel *Beheld*. She read an extract from *Beheld* at the 2015 Edinburgh International Book Festival. [www.carolfarrelly.com](http://www.carolfarrelly.com)

**Rachel Long** was shortlisted for Young Poet Laureate for London in 2014. Her poems have featured in *Magma*, *The Honest Ulsterman* and *The London Magazine*. She is Assistant Tutor to Jacob Sam-La Rose on the Barbican Young Poets programme, and leads Octavia: Poetry Workshops for Women

of Colour at Southbank Centre. She has curated cross-arts literary events for Clear Lines Festival – raising awareness about sexual abuse and consent, Tate Britain, where she invited millennial female poets to respond to Tracey Emin’s *My Bed*, and most recently, Lit & Lynch, in which poetry is spliced into David Lynch films.

**Sarah Mulholland** was born and bred in Portsmouth and has been pursuing a career in mental health since leaving university. In the last couple of years she decided to practise what she preaches and faced her fears about sharing her writing, which she has done in secret for most of her life. As a result, last year she had her first short play, *Defeat*, staged locally and managed to complete her first full length play, *Whisper the Wrong Name*. Sarah is a very new mother to the gorgeous Martha and lives happily by the sea with her partner Jackson.

**Emma Simon** is based in London. Her poems have appeared in a number of magazines and anthologies, including *Under The Radar*, *The Interpreter’s House* (where she was the featured poet) and *Bare Fiction Magazine*. In 2015 she was commended in the Battered Moons Poetry Competition and she won the Prole Laureate competition in 2013. She has used her Jerwood/Arvon Mentoring Scheme year to focus on her debut pamphlet, *Phantom Limbs*, and to start working towards a first collection.

**Hilary Watson** grew up in South Wales and currently lives in Cardiff. She completed a BA in English and Creative Writing and an MA in Writing at the University of Warwick. During her time on the scheme, Hilary was shortlisted for the Live Canon International Poetry Prize and had a poem

commissioned for their 'Project 154', in 2016. With support from Literature Wales, she is currently working on her first collection of poetry. She works at Welsh Women's Aid and plays roller derby with the Tiger Bay Brawlers.

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## 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 five-day 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. Arvon also offers non-residential city-based creative writing courses.

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*Whisper the Wrong Name* showcases the work of nine talented writers who have taken part in the **Jerwood/Arvon Mentoring Scheme** 2015/16. The scheme has been supported generously by Jerwood Charitable Foundation since 2009, enabling poets, playwrights and fiction writers to develop their work. This year's mentors were **Ross Raisin, Tanika Gupta** and **Caroline Bird**.

Taken from Sarah Mulholland's play of the same name, this volume's title evokes a drama felt throughout these works. To whisper is a considered act. To whisper the wrong name then produces a tension. Two sisters meet for the first time in 1950s Soho; a group of Scottish teenagers appear invisible to their parents; two lovers must conceal their relationship from a disruptive visitor. All of the pieces in this anthology take us to the heart of that drama – whether it be in poetic, script or prose form.

“ Shake your head as you close the door, whisper through the slit, 'I don't know who you are' ”

from *Almost No Memory*, Rachel Long

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