

FROM
GLASG
OW TO
SATURN



The
Journal of
Creative Writing
Glasgow University



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Edited by
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Welcome to **Issue 35**.

Are we a magazine or a journal? Are we primarily a print publication or an online one? Are we aiming to reach prospective creative writing **students**, or a much wider audience? Even **as** we prepare to publish this new **issue** we are **still** debating these **questions**. But these **debates** have brought **fresh**, invigorating energy to **issue** thirty-five.

This year is set to be one of significant change for From Glasgow to Saturn. Building on the **success** of fGtS thirty-three, our first ever print **issue**, we aim to further improve the way in which our **readers** interact with the exciting new work we publish.

For **Issue 35** we have turned artistic direction over to our new co-editor, Graeme Rae. Keeping this **aspect** in-house will, we hope, **strengthen** the coherence between the written and **visual aspects** of the magazine. You'll see concrete poetry referenced here **as well as** text-as-image. We have also introduced a new interview feature (this time with Carolyn **Jess-Cooke**), allowing us to place **established** writers next to the new voices we have always championed.

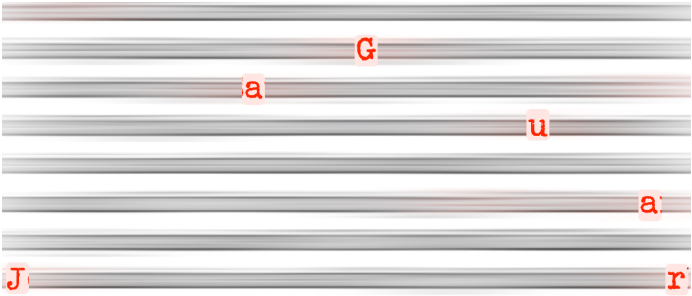
Passion for writing is central to our identity - whether a genre, experimental or poetry piece ... or all three! - and **as** we go from **strength** to **strength** what consistently emerges from the University of Glasgow is that **passionate** new talent is constantly **springing** up around us. We hope you enjoy this latest **selection**.



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J.L.Davies



J.L. Davies mainly flogs old movies. Not many people know that she secretly writes stories.

A jaguar walked into a service station. This is not a joke. It's just something which happened once-upon-a-time.

It was an open-sided service station, a roof with no walls where every long-haul bus stopped between two remote towns. Open to the jungle on every side. It was hot, always hot. Even when it was nearly night, which is when this happened. Having no walls didn't help much; it was in a place where there was almost no breeze. Bleary-eyed passengers followed the same routes through. Toilet, then food. Sometimes a cigarette. A fug of smoke hung in the air. It smelled like those thick cigarettes with the Red Indian on the packet, the ones with no filter. That, and oil. All the food was fried.

How can they afford it? the girl asked the boy. To travel for so long.

It's what some people do. They're Looking For Themselves, he said.

Do you think they'll Find Themselves here?

Ha. Probably not. Only the unlucky find themselves here.

But we're not unlucky, she said.

No, babe. We're not unlucky.

The jungle was hoaching with life. Birds screamed and chattered. Insects buzzed. Mosquitoes and moths circled beneath the service station roof. Low-hung striplights hummed. Dried moth carcasses lay trapped in the plastic casings.

What is that anyway? she asked, pointing at his plate.

Something fried.

Can I eat it?

You can. Of course. But you probably won't like it.

What is it?

I don't know.

She reached over and pressed it with the back of her fork. Grease swelled onto the plate. She stabbed it with the fork, lifted it to her mouth and took a small bite. She chewed slowly, swallowed and shrugged. The boy looked at her.

Did you know François Mitterrand decided to eat a rare French songbird when he knew he was dying? she said.

Whatever that is you're eating, it's definitely not a songbird.

I know, she laughed. Anyway, it was a delicacy, unlike this, and for his last meal, he wanted to eat this bird even though it was rare, had been eaten almost to extinction and was illegal. There was some special way of preparing it, drowning it in brandy, and then plucking and roasting it.

She took another nibble.

For Mitterrand, the other thing about it was that you had to shield your mouth before you swallowed it whole.

She then bit the rest off her fork, lifted a greasy paper napkin in front of her lips, chewed, and swallowed.

You had to shield your mouth so God couldn't see you eating such a rare bird.

God won't forgive you for eating that either, he said, laughing at her.

She lay down the fork. You ate it too.

They had been in a bird hide in a botanic garden the week before, watching coloured hummingbirds hovering by plastic dishes of sugar water, trumpet flowers nearby, waiting for the longest beaked birds. How small hummingbird eggs must be, she had thought as they watched. Like Tic Tacs, but with tiny yolks. There was a strange brown creature there, too. Four-legged, like a large guinea pig, but with a rattier face. Like a big rodent, she had said. But he'd said no, it was too cute.

What's that poem? By Charles something? Goes like I was stolen by the gypsies, my parents stole me right back.

Dunno. But I bet yours would, too, the boy said.

Would what?

Steal you right back.

I bet yours would, too.

I wouldn't be so sure, he said.

Don't be daft.

She pushed her spoon through the sludge at the bottom of the coffee cup. It was dark, greyish. She waited for what she knew he would ask.

So what happens next?

She smiled. It ends with the father. I think he's sitting in a bathtub painting a sparrow 'the colours of a tropical bird'.

Nice. And then what? Mitterrand comes along and steals the sparrow? Looking for a rare death snack.

That's what they should have called that stall over there. Death Snacks. Get your death snacks here.

Shh. They'll hear you.

Then they sat for a while. Waiting. The thick air buzzed. The jungle around screamed and creaked and disappeared into the darkness. Night falls quickly here.

Politicians might as well eat rare animals, he said, after a bit. The WWF said the other day that half of the world's animals had been lost in the last forty years.

That can't be true, can it?

I think it is. We can check online later when we get to the hotel.

It's heartbreaking if it is.

And that's when it happened.

Silence fell. Absolute silence. And they looked around, from the smoking drivers to the passengers in pushed back plastic chairs and no-one spoke. The buzz and hum of the jungle was gone. The scream and the chatter of birdsong was gone.

And then the jaguar. Sleek, long and low to the ground. Big paws, but dainty, almost. In absolute silence it passed through. Spotted and golden. Crossing the pale linoleum. Bright in the fluorescent lighting. Lean. Perfect. A diagonal line, from one corner to the other, then gone.

Aaron Westmoreland

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Aaron Westmoreland writes.

Stumbling over your foreign syntax
Of eyes askance and crooked elbows

Nuanced pronunciations of
Held breaths and calibrated distance

Fumbling with declensions of clenched jaws
Not spoken but legible

Curvatures stiffen, sans serif wrists twisting
Gooseflesh ellipsis and parenthetical thighs, wound
together

A physical poetics in
Shifted weight and lines knotting-unknotting

Lindsey Shields

the Pa
s
s i n g

Lindsey Shields graduated from the University of Glasgow in 1991 with an MA Hons in Politics and Scottish Literature. Her Junior Honours year was spent on an exchange at Georgetown University, Washington D.C. Thereafter, she spent a year in Munich learning German and returned to Glasgow to do an accelerated Law degree at the University of Strathclyde. She qualified as a solicitor in 1997. After seventeen years of practising law she has returned to her creative roots and is doing a Masters in Creative Writing part-time at the University of Glasgow. She currently works at the University of Strathclyde.

We bury you at 6 p.m.,
as the sun slips down the back of the mountains
and the church bell rings.

They've dug a corner plot for you
on the outskirts, by the olive tree
away from the believers.

The black lacquered coffin,
coated in condensation,
melts slowly in the evening heat.

We form a semi-circle round your grave,
your four children
in front of ten or so folk we do not know,

And throw the flowers that Mr Kaklamanis gave us
on top of you.

The arid stony soil spills slowly.
None of us can speak any parting words.

Billie Lamont

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Billie Lamont is a second-year part-time student of the Mlitt Creative Writing course at Glasgow University. She writes mainly short stories but has tried her hand at screen-writing and poetry. Her novel has been a work in progress for almost eight years and only now has she realised that the measly amount she has written needs to be rewritten. She is a delusional optimist.

Timmy, a little boy fast asleep in bed, shivered inside his pyjamas. Consciousness gently stroked his cheek, his ear, but he remained unroused. The snow outside his bedroom window had turned to sleet. A frosted fingernail nicked the nape of his neck; Timmy twitched but did not wake. The nearest streetlamp blinked, squinted then closed its amber eye.

Knock! Knock!

Timmy jerked awake. He scrambled against the pillows until his back hit the headboard. Holding bed breath in his tiny lungs, Timmy listened. Nothing. He let the breath ease past his lips and then wriggled down to cocoon himself in his duvet. Perhaps, Timmy thought, it was the bump of a gift-laden sleigh landing on the roof. He smiled, then realised they lived on the twelfth floor of a twenty-storey building. Timmy was still pondering Santa Claus's delivery methods when he heard it again. There was a knock on his closet door.

Something was in there. It was rapping impatient knuckles on the plywood, demanding entry into Timmy's bedroom.

Timmy's scrawny frame quivered deeper beneath the quilt. He tugged the duvet up to his chin, stared wide-eyed at the closet.

Thump!

Something slammed against the other side of the door.

A cry for help fluttered up Timmy's throat and turned to moth-dust on his tongue. His mother was sleeping just down the hall. Timmy's bedroom door was usually open but he could make out his winter coat hanging from the peg on the back of it. The switch to his overhead lamp was just out of reach from his safe warm bed. He was too scared to move. The darkness knew this. It stretched up and stretched out, cracking its back. It relished the feeling of form and substance. It elongated its spine over the ceiling, spread out its arms and waited.

There was no knock on the closet door.

Timmy dared to breathe and loosen his grip on his duvet. The shadows didn't flicker.

There was still no knock on the closet door. There was a groan. The closet door opened.

Timmy strained his ears, his stomach felt like it was being

wrung out. The sound of rough feet scraping on the floor, suddenly catching on carpet, made Timmy tense. He couldn't see anything. The footsteps were followed by a sickly glow which caused the shadows to dance. Timmy heard a slow creak, a rattling of chains, and then two distinct voices muttering to each other.

'You should not have taken that left turn.'

'Shut yer face. You're not always right, y'know.'

'Well, excuse *me*, but I do believe it was *you* that had us wading through the filth and mire of those ghastly marshes.'

'Whuh? Aw, that was decades ago!'

'Yes, well, I couldn't get the stench out of my mane for years. And what about that *incident* in North Berwick? That was only last week.'

'Aw c'mon!' Timmy heard chains hitting the carpet. The squeaking stopped. 'It wasn't like I meant it.'

'That's not the point! You nearly crushed her! Then we would have been in serious trouble.'

'She shouldn't have been out on that bloody rock in the first place! What kinda kelpie sulks around a fucking seagull reserve?'

'It's a nature reserve. It's not specifically for seagulls. It's more of a ... '

'I don't give a flying fuck, she still shouldn't have perched her watery arse on that ledge. Preening to the windsurfers like a bloody mermaid. Fuckin' uptight kelpies with their equine attitudes. All high and mighty ... ' The voice trailed off into dark mutters before Timmy heard it say to itself. 'She was asking to be pushed.'

'Thought you said it wasn't on purpose?'

Silence.

'What time is it?'

'Time for us to move it along, Grehm.'

'Awright', awright'.'

The rattling of the chains and the slow creak started up again as the footsteps came past the bottom of the bed. Again Timmy tried to scream but found his voice petrified in his throat.

The glow revealed a creature. Timmy watched it limp around the end of the bed. It hadn't noticed Timmy yet, its head bowed. The skin of its belly was tight and shiny; a map of veins ran around the creature's yellow globe of a stomach. Its legs were thin and ended in unnaturally long toes that moved independently from each other, like the twitching antennae of an insect. Timmy felt queasy just watching it move from foot to foot. Its mottled skin stretched then gathered in small pools at its knees like dirty pond water. The fingers looked exactly like the toes: skeletal and sinewy but they moved normally like human hands, opposable thumbs and all. Curiosity tugged at Timmy's wide eyes.

By the pale light coming from behind the creature, Timmy saw that it was pulling something in a low-fenced cart.

The rust from the front two metal wheels flecked into the carpet as they squeaked forward, bearing the weight of whatever was sitting on the rotting wood of the cart. The embellished steel attaching the wheels to the wooden platform was riddled with tiny spikes and iron thorns. The rest of the cart came into view. Timmy gagged.

The head of a horse sat within the fenced cart, blinking and twitching. The lantern wedged between the slats of the cart glowed green and shook precariously in front of the horse's head as the cart rolled onwards. The horse appeared to be unimpressed with its surroundings. It snorted, blew air out its rotting nostrils. Stark white orbs swivelled in their sockets, taking in the ceiling, the walls plastered with pages of comic books and posters of cartoons. The horse whinnied quietly at the games console gathering dust in a corner, its eyes revolving until they rested on the bed, and then on Timmy.

'Grehm,' the horse spoke out the side of its mouth, its lips dotted with sweat. It never took its eyes off Timmy. '*Grehm.*'

'*What?*' The creature, Grehm, stopped mid-hobble, and turned to glare at the horse.

The horse continued to stare at the boy in the bed, only Timmy's eyes and tiny snub of a nose could be seen within his duvet-cocoon. Grehm followed the horse's gaze, glanced at Timmy and then did a double-take.

‘Bugger.’

‘I agree. What do we do now, Grehm?’

‘Stop talking like he can’t hear us for a start.’ Grehm’s face split from ear to ear in a grin, like the big cat that got the sweetmeat. In a much louder voice he said to Timmy, ‘Awright’, boy?’

Timmy was still reeling but somehow managed to emit a squeak.

Grehm’s smile faltered and a nasty glint ignited in his eyes. ‘C’mon, boy, you’re not a piglet writhing in shit, *use your words!*’

‘H-hello.’

‘That’s better.’

Timmy sat up, hugging his knees and asked, ‘Are you an elf?’

The horse giggled and snorted; dark red fluid sprayed from its left nostril and splattered onto the carpet.

‘Excuse me,’ the horse apologised and then proceeded to chortle to itself as Grehm answered. ‘I guess you could say that . . . yeah.’ He gave a flick of his wrist and yanked on the chain still in his hand causing the cart to jolt. One of the wheels wobbled and the cart tilted towards the ground. A loud sucking noise and a *pop!* and the horse head was tipped forward against the wooden fencing. It came to rest leaning against it at an angle. ‘And he’s Rudolph.’

‘Oh! Well, I mean, really!’ The horse shook his matted mane and twitched but remained stuck. Timmy tried not to stare at the ragged serration of the neck; the pale pink of the torn muscles like ripped paper chains. The inside was hidden mostly in shadow but the shine of vertebrae winked at Timmy from its depths. Timmy couldn’t help himself. He got up onto his knees to peer into the cart and immediately wished he hadn’t.

The bed of the cart was writhing. Tiny white maggots picked up the glow from the lantern on their wet backs. They rolled and twisted in the pool of congealed blood surrounding the horse’s head. A squelch and then a rough push from Grehm and the horse returned to its original position, although quite affronted.

‘Honestly, imagine comparing me to a *reindeer*. Those things are simply tacky. My name is *not* Rudolph, by the way. I am not to be confused with my inferior arctic cousins. My name is Woltz.’ The horse bowed its head in Timmy’s direction. Timmy felt inclined to do the same in return.

‘My name’s Timmy.’

‘Yeah, we know.’ Grehm shuffled closer to Timmy’s bed, letting go of the leash. There was a change in the air as Grehm edged nearer.

Now that Timmy could see him more clearly, he thought Grehm looked very old. There were mossy wrinkles furrowed deep into his brow. Tiny white hairs sprouted from his small pointed ears, much like an onion when it had dried up. The bags under his eyes sagged like melted wax fruit but the eyes themselves glittered.

‘Timmy, tell us something will yeh?’

‘Yeah?’

‘What time is it?’

‘Oh. It’s uh,’ Timmy glanced at the hands of his alarm clock on his bedside table, ‘It is ... two fifty-eight a.m.’

‘Ah, good.’ Grehm hobbled back to the cart and tinkered with the loose wheel. Only the sound of Grehm tightening the screws with his fingernails echoed in the gloom. Grehm spat in his palm and began to oil down each wheel in turn.

Timmy’s curiosity got the better of him.

‘Can you spit oil?’

Grehm didn’t look up but said, ‘Yeah, it’s a sort of oil . . . more of a lubricant.’ Grehm sneered at Woltz, and to Timmy’s unease Woltz grinned back.

‘What, er, what else can you do?’

Woltz replied this time as Grehm continued to work on the cart, ‘Well, Grehm’s “official” business deals mainly in the entrapment of the mind. It involves quite a bit of, er, role play at times but the outcome is tremendously horrible. The physical aspect of Grehm’s delightful little projects is rather lost on me, but then I was never one for that level of degradation.’ Woltz’s white eyes flicked to Grehm. Grehm said nothing.

'Grehm likes to leave a lasting impression on his *subjects*. You see, Grehm's favourite pastime is quilting – with a little needlepoint thrown in. Well, as you might imagine, in Grehm's line of work there isn't an awful lot of lambs' wool to hand.'

'Allergic to lanolin,' Grehm grumbled as he worked.

'Yes, quite. So, Grehm found a terribly clever way to combine his work and his hobby saving time and resources.' Woltz leered at Timmy. 'And it's the younger the better really.'

'I figure nobody's gonna miss the bodies,' Grehm interrupted, still bent over the cart, 'So why not use them? Before is better. Rigor mortis sets in a lot quicker afterwards, y'know.'

'Once they're past the struggling and the screaming, you see, they all succumb to a sort of, well, paralysis. Still alive, so there's that nice elasticity in the epidermis. First Grehm will shave the head. He entwines it sometimes with the rope of a hanged man's noose to weave a nice long thread. Personally I think human hair works fine on its own.'

'Then there's the teeth – I heard you should grind them and use them in tea, good for the gut, but then I can't digest anything, can I? So no use to me! Anyway, the teeth ...'

Whatever colour lingered in Timmy's cheeks drained from his face as glinting scalpels and black thread danced in front of his eyes. When he regained his senses, Woltz was still chattering happily to himself: 'tongue has to be frozen of course and ...'

'Woltz, shut yer face, nobody's listening.'

'Oh,' Woltz huffed. 'Well, I say ...'

'That's yer fuckin' problem right there! You say too much! You blether on and on!'

'Well, what do you expect? You're the one who started talking to the boy! Not me! If you're going to start a conversation, don't get all grumpy if I want to join in ...'

'I am not getting all *grumpy*.'

'Oh yes you are, and another thing ...'

'STOP!'

Both Grehm and Woltz turned slowly toward the pink-nosed boy standing on the bed. Timmy couldn't believe his

own ears when the word came from his dry lips but it was like a fuse had ignited within his chest and thawed the numbness from his limbs. The cloying fear returned, pouring into his heart like black tar. The fuse burned through Timmy's mind, lighting up his brain to the danger he was in while he had been sitting there listening to them go on about how Grehm was going to sew him into a quilt.

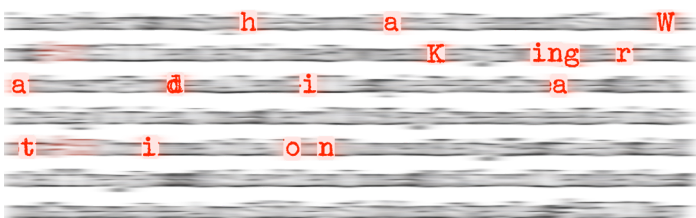
'What do you want?!'

Grehm smiled and hissed, 'Ssssskin.' He spoke slowly and in a voice that echoed off the walls; it seemed to come up from somewhere lower than his belly, lower than his roaming toes and lower still. 'We want the fear in sweat, the tremor in those human lungs as they gulp the air down and choke on it.' Grehm scuttled towards Timmy with the speed of a darting rodent. Grehm's frame was no longer deteriorating but filling the room, suffocating Timmy. The shadows flickered gleefully as the night outside seeped through the cracks in the windowpane. Sleet and wind screamed against the glass.

Timmy tried to breathe. His chest was being crushed. He couldn't see. He could only hear Grehm's voice inside his head. 'We shall savour the sheer agony of the realisation that we are real. And that we should be feared.' The boy panted and gasped, trying to swallow the oxygen that surrounded him, unseen. He couldn't breathe. He couldn't breathe and the only thought that swirled in his head, like a dust mote thrown into a tornado, was that he was going to die. He was going to die on Christmas Eve, and his mother would find him, he was all alone, he would die alone, his mother, his mother ...

Air rushed into his chest. Timmy gasped and his hand slapped over his throat. His vision dimmed, but before unconsciousness swallowed him whole he saw Grehm wheeling Woltz towards the bedroom door. Woltz wound his serrated neck round to face Timmy and said, 'Oh, we're not here for you.'

Carolyn Jess-Cooke



Carolyn Jess-Cooke was born in 1978 in Belfast. Following a first-class honours degree in English Literature and Classical Studies, Carolyn received a scholarship to study for a Masters degree in Creative Writing and later completed a PhD in Shakespeare On Film. She took up an academic post in film studies at the University of Sunderland in 2005 then advanced to senior lecturer at the University of Northumbria in 2009. She is currently Lecturer in Creative Writing at Glasgow University. Her research interests lie in the areas of mental health, pedagogy and cross-disciplinary creativity. She has written two successful novels and her work has appeared in New Statesman, Poetry Review, Poetry London, Ambit, Magma, Poetry Wales, The SHOp, Poetry Ireland, and The Stinging Fly, as well as a variety of non-print media and public art. Carolyn has received numerous awards, including an Eric Gregory Award from The Society of Authors, a place in the Cardiff International Poetry Competition, a major Arts Council of England Award, the Tyrone Guthrie Prize for Poetry, and she has twice received a Northern Promise Award.

Haul out.
The universe is being gutted
four billion years after

we let the ice caps powder –
so pile up the neuron stars
like old office chairs.

You there. Up-end the supergiants ready
for the grinder. Tear down Andromeda,
wipe out the equations and graphs

chalked up by a keen hand.
Don't weep for the collapsing prisons
of matter –

all things, even sadness,
so soon
run out their rent.

Interview: Carolyn Jess-Cooke

FGTS: Having been both student and lecturer in Film Studies and Creative Writing, how do you feel about writing's place in a Critical Studies department? Do you think its teaching is at all constrained by the academic framework that has to be applied within a university?

CJ-C: I think the teaching of Creative Writing in higher education environments has changed dramatically since I did my MA (2001) – back then, things were fairly chaotic and thrown together... I did ask to do a PhD in Creative Writing but was told it didn't exist, so I went off and did one in Shakespeare instead. I think writing always exists within constraints. As a published author I still have remarkably less freedom than I'd like – the commercial imperatives driving publishing are increasingly working against authors. But in terms of the academic framework, I think it can actually work in students' favour (honest!). It is necessary to learn critical skills in order to write well, and the research element of academia also stands writers in very good stead in a variety of ways. For instance, I think it was a good thing I went off and did a PhD in Shakespeare, as I fast became steeped in research methodologies that serve me well thirteen years later.

FGTS: Do you consider teaching to be separate from your creative practice or has it become a part of it?

CJ-C: Teaching is absolutely a part of my creative practice – it would be difficult for me to teach if I had to compromise my writing. Each informs the other in countless ways.

FGTS: How does your prior study of film affect the way you write? Do you think your writing has cinematic qualities? Does it affect the way you construct an image?

CJ-C: Yes, I'd like to think my writing is cinematic – at least, that's what I aim for. I am essentially a frustrated filmmaker.

The lifestyle of a filmmaker doesn't complement my family (I have four young children and a very nice husband, as well as a goldfish – until recently we had three chickens and a cat) so I pour all my 'films' (acting styles, directorial styles, and even the soundtrack) into my books.

FGTS: How big a role does research play in your creative work? In your most recent novel, say, the world of psychiatry?

CJ-C: I mentioned that the research skills acquired during my PhD served me well – I honestly don't know how I'd go about writing my novels without that knowledge of *how* to conduct research. At the very least, I think I'd take a lot longer researching my novels if I didn't have these skills. For *The Boy Who Could See Demons*, I interviewed several world-leading child psychiatrists who were gracious enough to give of their time. One of them read the manuscript twice to check I'd got my facts straight, and he also invited me to visit his in-patient unit in London. I read up on psychiatry and schizophrenia and a whole gamut of mental health issues – many of the facts I came across informed the plot. Ursula (a minor character) emerged solely as a result of the differences I discovered between psychology and psychiatry – it made complete sense that Anya (the protagonist) would have tensions with colleagues in the field of psychology because of their disparate views.

My current novel requires a ton of research and, if I'm honest, I'm dawdling at the foothills of the research mountain because I know it's going to take a lot of effort to climb it. But a factually incorrect book goes against all my principles.

FGTS: You have a well-established online presence. Do you find the social media aspects of being a modern writer rewarding or a necessary evil?

CJ-C: I think some writers feel they need to spend all day tweeting, but you don't. I am probably too distracted by Facebook, but on the other hand it can be useful – I have

established a number of important contacts and actual friendships this way. A few of us will inbox each other regularly to moan about agents, publishers, one-star Amazon reviews, accountants etc and yet we've not yet met. It's not just about marketing, it's about battling away the loneliness that accompanies writing.

FGTS: Could you tell us about your writing routine? Pen and paper? Tablet? Desktop? Location? Is it something you have to be disciplined about? Has anything changed over the years, as you've built a viable career around it?

CJ-C: Once I get going with an idea and feel confident enough with it, I sit in an armchair (terrible for posture, according to my physio) and type away. I can do 6,000 words in two hours when I've got the confidence, presence of mind and adequate childcare. When I don't have the confidence, and when I'm feeling like I really should quit this writing malarkey, I have an array of very pretty notebooks and multicoloured mechanical pencils from Paperchase, which I use to scribble. Scribbling is very important. It leads to greatness.

And no, nothing has changed, really. I'm writing the same way now as I did when I was ten. Only, I have a nice MacBook Air instead of my grandparents' ancient typewriter that used to make my fingers bleed.

FGTS: You write both poetry and novels. Your prose is very straightforward, very accessible. Could you talk a little about the various challenges of the two forms? Do you have to battle to get into an appropriate mind-set or mood? A different writing routine? Or are the differing styles quite compartmentalised in your mind?

CJ-C: I'm detecting tones of 'pedestrian' in the word 'accessible' here... I think that when I write in prose, I write in the character's voice. I find first-person comes naturally and struggle with third-person. So I slip into that role and almost become the character, so that everything comes out in their

voice. I love prose fiction because it requires a lot of problem-solving, and I am naturally a goal-oriented problem-solver. So the words 'the end' and the riddle posed by a plot are satisfying. With poetry, however, there is a different kind of pleasure in the creation of meaning – at least, my own meaning. Poetry is another form of problem-solving, but much more autobiographical. You get to draw upon material from your own subjectivity and life and forge it into something that you hope is useful to someone else.

In the past I have found it difficult to write poetry and prose at the same time. But I wonder if this hasn't been down to the fact that my fiction editors are a lot more ruthless when it comes to deadlines than my poetry editor... Nowadays I seem to be able to write roughly a poem a day, as well as juggling this new novel and research papers. And teaching. My life pivots around writing.

FGTS: Do you write for anyone in particular? A notional, composite reader, say, or someone from your life?

CJ-C: I think I write for me. I find it most satisfying when I am able to plunge into a novel (as I did with the first two) without any planning whatsoever and get to find out what happens, as if I was reading it instead of writing.

FGTS: Your latest collection, 'Boom!', focuses on motherhood. Do you feel that motherhood and domestic life is a natural catalyst for creativity in women, or was it (as per the traditional view) a challenge to keep making art once you had children?

CJ-C: I think motherhood and domestic life is presented as dull, tedious and undermining by contemporary culture, whereas I find it rewarding in just how tough it is and essential in refining my creativity. I didn't anticipate this, just as I didn't anticipate exactly how hard it is to raise children and on so many levels... But it really does – or can – refine you as a human being, to have so much anxiety for another individual because you love them so deeply, to the point that you don't blink at someone

climbing into your bath and pooing in it. Or having to catch vomit with your bare hands. You have so much desire for them to be happy and healthy that you will do whatever it takes for that to be achieved, even in the small things.

I think this dimension of motherhood is not talked about, and certainly not celebrated. As a full-time working mother people commented on how I was 'abandoning' my children. As a stay-at-home mother people took it that I was uneducated and therefore didn't work for that reason – not that I'd resigned from a Senior Lectureship to be there while they were learning to walk and talk. But these additional struggles did prove, in my experience, as catalysts for creativity. Motherhood in general has made the stakes higher and given me more to say, and that has naturally informed my creative practice.

I also don't think I ever would have written a novel if it hadn't have been for my son. I was so ill during my pregnancy with him that I spent every evening in a bath for months on end. It was boring, so I took to reading the fattest novels I could. When he was born all my ideas were novel-shaped, and that's when I wrote *The Guardian Angel's Journal*.

FGTS: 'Writing Motherhood' incorporated live events at literary festivals and with a blog on Mslexia you curated work by other writers on their own experience of motherhood. How did you find this curation experience, particularly in an online environment where feedback is instant?

CJ-C: I have really loved receiving submissions of work from other writers and creating a dialogue between mothers about their experiences. The festival events have really proved my instincts right – that many of the portraits of and dialogues about motherhood are *not* by mothers, and that many women are feeling excluded from (even angered by) the conversation. And it was indeed the creative aspect of this experience that I wanted to focus upon. Motherhood as a subject is vast – hence the success of 'netmums' – but the element of creativity is a fascinating one, and rarely discussed. The conversations we

have had have been warm and insightful, and I hope to continue the discussion as long as possible.

FGTS: There are several examples of you recording your work for audio or video. How did the collaboration for 'Hare' with Melissa Deim come about?

CJ-C: 'Hare' was a poem of mine that was placed in the top ten entries in the National Poetry Competition (out of 12,000 entries, I might add!). The Poetry Society commissioned a group of filmmakers to make 'filmpoems' from the ten winning poems which were then screened at festivals around the world.

FGTS: How do you know when your novel (or poem) is 'ready' to be written?

CJ-C: Hmm ... I don't. I suppose I thrust it into the world and order it to fly, because I don't have the time to wait around for it! I have always been ridiculously impatient and, now that I have four children aged between two and eight and a job and book contracts to fulfill, I am worse than ever. I do admire people who take years to write a book, though. My last book took me six months to complete and I thought I was being virtuously patient with it.

FGTS: Following on from this in your most recent novel, The Boy Who Could See Demons, you revisit the Troubles. What was the trigger that made you decide to revisit this aspect of your childhood?

CJ-C: *The Boy Who Could See Demons* was never meant to be about the Troubles. When I read it now I see it is deeply autobiographical, but I wrote it in 2010, nine months pregnant and too concerned about getting the book written before the baby arrived to see how much it draws upon personal material.

I wrote it without much of a plan. I remember the look on my editor's face when I announced it was about a little boy whose best friend is a demon – not much of a pitch. One night I

wrote the first chapter, which pretty much remains in that nascent state in the book. And then I was really intrigued, and Alex – the main character – told me the rest of the story.

The first draft took three weeks. It took another four weeks – when my baby girl was thirteen months old – to delete 44,000 words of it and make it actually readable, and thence publishable.

FGTS: Congratulations on selling the film rights. In the US, Random House decided on an alternate ending to this novel, a decision described as ‘controversial’. Could you say a little more on how this came about and was resolved?

CJ-C: This is a long story...

So the UK version was the original version, although that one had a couple of different endings but nothing too drastic. Then my US editor – who is the VC of Random House US, no biggie – told me she was utterly in love with the book but had a tiny little suggestion. On the phone one cold and stormy night she said she felt I’d dropped hints the whole way through the book that led her to a conclusion I never pursued. She felt Anya was the main character, not Alex. And so we talked, and she said the US market would need something more ‘wowzers’ for the ending. I was aware of author friends who have books that were altered slightly for different markets so wasn’t too put off, but when she batted some ideas around I realised the book was going to be very different indeed if I changed the ending the way she was suggesting. I really had to think about it. But I love a challenge, and I knew this was going to be a *real* challenge.

I think it works in both states. My husband has read both, and when he read the US one he said he hated it. But then, a week later, he said he couldn’t get *that* ending out of his head. So, in that sense, it works.

FGTS: There are thematic connections between this novel and its predecessor, A Guardian Angel’s Journal, the struggle for authorship of our own lives for example. Did you conceive of

the second as a companion piece?

CJ-C: I think I was on a supernatural bent; also, my agent submitted the synopsis for *Boy* to publishers with the completed manuscript of *Angel*, so it was always a two-book deal. Publishers like you to be consistent with the type of book you write – take note, students!

FGTS: More broadly, could you describe the relationship you have with your finished work? Gone into the world, or very much still yours?

CJ-C: I have since written my third and fourth novels which are with publishers at the minute, and am working on my fifth. My third poetry collection is also in the works. Whether in my head or in the world, they are always mine...

FGTS: Thank you very much, Carolyn.

Jo Young

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Jo Young is originally from York, though has not lived there for a couple of decades having recently retired from a seventeen-year career in the British Army. During that time she served in Canada, USA, Germany, Afghanistan, Aldershot, Swindon, Glasgow and Cyprus; most of those places being conducive to poetry writing in one way or another. Jo is taking the opportunity to spend more time with her two young children before they start school while grappling with the unfinished novel in the bottom drawer...

There's splendid strength
Looming down
And
Drawing up their elegant heft.

A priestly silhouette,
Road rotated
And
Fiercely untunnelled with glistening weft

The elegant crafters
Weaving glass
And
Reflecting schemes; harsher, brutal, yet

The earth docked cousins
Clothed the skyline
Once
Industrial, now injured, left.

Still, craning over,
Opaque planes and cords
We
Spin the city, healing, deft.

Emily Ilett

t h e t e r
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Emily Ilett lives and works in Glasgow. She studied Environmental Art & Sculpture at Glasgow School of Art and is currently on the MLitt Creative Writing course at Glasgow University. Her work has been previously published in Popshot Magazine, 2HB, and The Burning Sand.

Mr Wallace spread his toast with his wife's blackberry jam and said to the kitchen, 'Saturday is the day, Lorna, prepare something delicious for dinner.' And his wife shouted from the kitchen that Saturday is dumplings, and Mr Wallace said he hated dumplings and picked pieces of toast from his moustache and noticed his smallest son at the table. Jack was eating a bowl of Cheerios hoop by hoop. Mr Wallace shouted to his wife that Jack was counting his cereal again.

Saturday was the day Mr Wallace was going to cut down the oak tree at the bottom of the garden. He said it blocked light coming into the kitchen in the morning. Mrs Wallace said he was cutting it down because he'd just been made redundant.

Small Jack Wallace, the youngest in his class at school, with ears that got him bullied from the age of four, told the tree of its fate on Monday afternoon. On Monday evening he returned with the Plan. He stood in front of the tree with his feet apart and read the Plan aloud from a sheet of notepaper, which he held in front of his nose because he hadn't told his parents that he needed glasses yet.

That evening he brought down a pair of binoculars which he hung on a low branch of the tree, and an Ordnance Survey map of the local area which he tied to its trunk with string. He'd marked on the Ordnance Survey map where the tree was now (in red), and potential sites the tree could move to (in green, and then blue when the green pen ran out).

On Tuesday morning one large root had ruptured the ground and had angled the oak a foot to the left. All day Jack stayed near the tree, digging small trenches in the soil and positioning a rucksack so that his parents couldn't see the broken ground. That evening he hung a compass from the tallest branch he could reach, and the Swiss Army penknife that he got for his birthday alongside it.

Wednesday and Thursday saw the tree move further to the left. On Thursday night, when Jack went down to tie a packet of plant food onto the trunk, he measured it had moved five feet over. Jack knew that however much five feet was, it wasn't very much when today was Thursday and Saturday was Saturday.

He had drawn multiple routes on the map all leading from the garden but now he realised what he'd forgotten. From the garage he carried the small steps to the bottom of the garden and placed them behind the tree so that they led up to and over the wall.

On Friday Mr Wallace was beginning a New Carpentry Project and demanded all garage equipment be returned so that he could assess its usefulness. The tree hadn't used the steps at all; it had moved further to the left beyond them.

Jack worried and puzzled over what to do. He spent the day rereading the Plan aloud to the oak. He attached a flask of water, a bottle of sun cream, a packet of digestives, and a first aid kit to the tree. The tree's branches sank softly under the weight. After a while he removed the sun cream and the digestives, which he ate one after the other while walking over the ground the tree had broken up.

On Saturday morning Mr Wallace spread his toast with his wife's blackberry jam and watched Jack eat his cereal hoops one at a time. Something felt different but nothing was different. He picked pieces of toast from his moustache and chewed.

'Lorna,' he said, 'come in here a bit.'

Lorna came, wiping her hands on a dirty apron.

'What's different, Lorna?' he said. 'Something's different.'

'It's the weekend,' she said. 'It always feels different.'

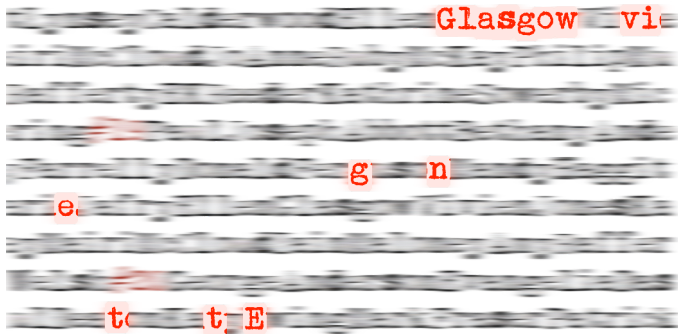
Mr Wallace scratched his head where his hair used to be and said, 'That must be it.'

Jack counted 136 Cheerios, and at 137 he realised that something was different, and that he knew what it was. He said, 'It's the light, it's lighter. The tree's moved.'

Mr Wallace looked at his youngest son and twisted round in his chair to stare out the window. Then he called in his wife. They agreed the tree wasn't blocking the sun anymore.

Mr Wallace cut the oak tree down at eleven thirty that morning. Mrs Wallace said it was because he lost his job. Jack said nothing.

Aileen McKay



5.30 p.m., Friday 3 October

Stone archway, Trongate.

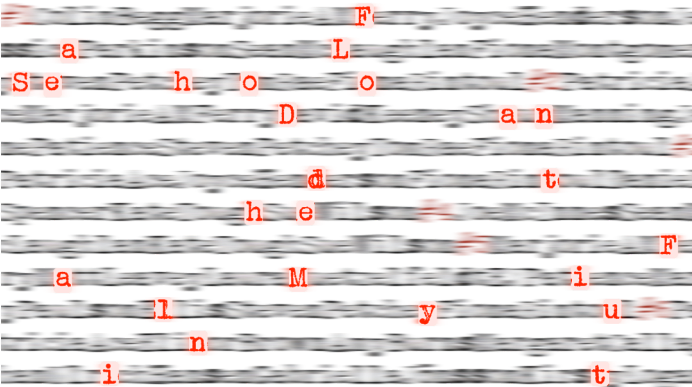
A drunk hollers his misgivings at the sky

(charcoal-grey, smudged)

over and over and over.

*Aileen McKay is a Comparative Literature Masters student,
English tutor and political activist.*

Alan Wanders



Alan Wanders likes to put words together, sometimes more successfully than others.

Letting air from balloons
In an empty village hall.
You, somewhere with the car,
I, surrounded by small footprints in cake.

Dark outside.
Smudged across the window looking out
Over the gravelled parking lot,
Fingerprints and frost
Are enhanced by sodium-orange gauze.

Just dropping David or Timothy
Off at his father's. See you soon.

The recent memory of
Hot breath and jacket potatoes,
Games and songs and gender divides
Jingling, cajoling.

Laura Guthrie

BeardAlanBissettMukulDahalRodg
ckHollowayAnnelieseMacintoshJu
ncanMuirRaymondSoltyssek#18Paul

Anna is a Young Adult novel-in-progress about a thirteen-year-old girl with Asperger's syndrome, who has come up from London to live with her estranged mother in the Central Belt of Scotland, following the sudden death of her father. Armed only with a determination to find happiness in everything and everyone, she must use the social and communication skills she has to integrate herself into her new life, discovering her past and reconnecting with her community in the process.

Laura Guthrie was born in Inverness, Scotland, and grew up under the shadow of the Caiplich Beast and Nessie. She is a poet, short fictionist and playwright, and is completing her first novel. Her poems have been anthologised and shortlisted, and her plays have been adapted for radio and performed at numerous Edinburgh festivals, including the 2012 Fringe Festival. She is currently a Creative Writing PhD candidate at the University of Glasgow.

Chapter One: In which I get a bus, followed by a cab, to my mum's house.

There was a huge storm as I was coming up on the bus. I was happy that I was warm and dry, and not being soaked with rain or splashed by spray from the lorries and cars. I didn't really know where I was going. I was happy that, unlike me, the bus driver did know. I'd travelled without Dad before, but never without an adult to look after me. I tried to be pleased that I was doing so well on my own, and that there hadn't been any hitches.

The man next to me looked about thirty-five. He had his head tipped back, and was snoring gently. His hair was curly and brown, and he had freckles around his nose, like me. One of his elbows was sticking into my side, but it seemed selfish to wake him.

The bus lurched to one side. It was aquaplaning, which meant the driver really should have been going slower. The sudden movement woke up the man next to me. He jumped and gave a gasp.

'It's OK,' I said, patting his arm, 'just a little skid. We're fine now.'

'Ah, so we are.' He chuckled, and his cheeks reddened.

I held out my hand. 'Hello,' I said. 'My name's Anna. It's very nice to meet you.'

He looked astonished, then smiled. 'Ben. Nice to meet you too.'

'I'm on the bus up to my mum's house.'

'I see.' There was a pause. 'I take it your mum and dad don't live together then?'

'Well, no. Not exactly,' I replied. 'I've never met Mum – well, apart from when I was born of course. I've lived with Dad all my life. And, well, then a thing happened, and I ended up with Alison – she's the emergency foster carer. And now I'm going to live with Mum.'

'I see.'

The other passengers murmured quietly in the background, along with the hum of the engine, and the rain which now

pattered, rather than pelted, against the windows. I pulled out my pen and writing pad, and tore out a blank page.

‘Want to play noughts and crosses?’

We played fifteen games, one after the other. I won eight, we drew in five, and he won in two. About two thirds of the way there we got held up in a half-mile-long traffic jam. The bus driver made a phone call, and then announced over the speaker that a lorry had jack-knifed and we were waiting for the rescue services to get there. I decided to be happy that it wasn’t anything more serious, and that nobody had been hurt or killed.

‘Well, thanks a lot for telling us,’ Ben said. His voice sounded grumpy. He must have been being sarcastic.

‘Don’t they usually tell people what’s going on if there’s a hold up?’

‘Huh – I wish!’

‘Nobody getting out to smoke,’ I said.

He glanced up. ‘Too rainy.’

‘At least that means they’re less likely to get cancer.’

‘One way to look at it, I guess ...’

‘Why do you think people smoke when everyone knows it’s so bad for you?’

‘Well, it’s an addiction, isn’t it? Hard to overcome those.’

‘I know. I sucked my thumb for ten years. Do you want to know a game?’

He blinked. ‘OK.’

‘Right. Imagine you’re going to a wedding, which gets cancelled because of ...’ I glanced out of the window, ‘rain.’

He closed his eyes. ‘I’m imagining.’

‘Good. Now, how do you make the best of that?’

‘Hmm ...’ I watched to make sure he didn’t fall asleep again.

‘Because ...’ he said, eventually, ‘Because then the bride and groom could have extra time to think things through and call it all off if they changed their minds.’

‘That’s not a happy thought!’

‘Ahh, so *that’s* the game, is it?’ He raised an eyebrow and twisted his thumbs together. ‘Well, what’s *your* answer, then?’

‘I’d be happy because when it was rescheduled it would be

extra special due to the heightened anticipation.'

'That *is* a good reason,' he admitted. 'Beats mine hands down.'

'Are *you* married?'

His eyes moved towards the rain running down the window. 'Nope. An island unto myself.'

'Would you like to be married?'

'If the right person said yes ... '

I waited, but he said nothing else.

*

When the bus pulled into the station I collected my two suitcases and looked around for someone who could be my mum. There hadn't been any photos of her in the London flat. Dad had curly light brown hair, like a Jersey cow. My hair is brown too, but with hints of red, and it's straighter than Dad's. Therefore Mum probably had straight red hair. Dad had freckles, like me, but not as many. However, freckles are as much environmentally determined as they are a genetic trait, so it was impossible to tell whether Mum would have any or not. Dad had a square-ish jaw, so Mum probably had a round face like me. But there were no round-faced, red-haired women at the stance. I sat down and tried to think of a happy thing about that.

After fifteen minutes I felt a tap on the shoulder.

'Is nobody here to meet you, Anna?' Ben asked.

'Well, Mum *should* be ...'

'Have you got her number?'

'I don't have a phone. I've got her address though.' I rummaged in my pocket and pulled out the Post-it note Alison had given me. 'Sixteen McCallish Court.'

He opened his mouth at the same time as taking a sharp breath.

I had a sudden idea. 'Where do you live? Perhaps ...'

He shook his head. 'I can't give you a lift, if that's what you're thinking.'

'Why not?'

'Because ... because it just wouldn't be appropriate.'

'Why not?'

'Oh, well ... because it just wouldn't.'

'OK.'

'How old are you, Anna?'

'Thirteen.'

He mouthed the word 'thirteen', looked at me hard, and bounced on the balls of his feet. Ten seconds passed. Then he sat down. 'Well, let's give it a few more minutes.'

*

We played rock, paper scissors. Ben kept looking up and around with narrowed eyes, until finally he glanced at his watch and got to his feet.

'Right. You can't wait alone. There's no telling who might come skulking round here.'

'What do you mean?'

'Some people, well, they're less than savoury.'

'Ah ...'

'We need a plan. Tell you what – there's a taxi rank at the front of the station. How much money do you have?'

'Five pounds.'

He took his wallet out of his pocket and extracted a ten pound note. 'Here. Fifteen pounds should be more than enough. Have you ever taken a cab before?'

'Not by myself.'

'Well, I'll help you get started.'

We left the station through the double sliding doors at the front, and came out onto a curved street lit by the glow of the bus station's lights. We were the first in line, but there were no cabs.

'Shouldn't be long,' Ben said, hugging himself as the wind gusted. A strand of hair blew across my face, and a lone spatter of rain hit my cheek.

'I've found something else to be happy about.'

'Fire away.'

'What does that mean?'

'Oh, it just means go ahead.'

'Well, Mum may not have been there to meet me, but at least *you* were.'

'I ... yes. I suppose so.'

A cab rounded the corner and turned in to the taxi rank. On impulse I gave him a hug round the middle. He flinched at first, but when I stepped back he was smiling.

‘Fare thee well, Anna,’ he said. ‘Perhaps our paths will cross again.’ He opened the cab door, and motioned for me to get in.

*

‘Where’re you off to then?’ the driver asked, once Ben had slotted my luggage in and slammed the door.

‘Sixteen McCallish Court.’

‘Right you are.’

Sitting in the back of the cab, I got my first good look at the town. The junctions, traffic islands and lights came into and out of view, like drawings on an infinite, unravelling scroll. The houses were a mix of very old and very modern, and the streets, although urban, were quiet, less packed and interspersed with more greenery than those in London. The streetlamps glowed orange against the blue of oncoming dark. I looked in the windows of houses as we went by. Most of the time we were travelling too fast to see anything in detail, but sometimes I had a glimpse when we stopped at a red light. There was a yew tree in the garden of twenty-two Stuart Lane, which cast a shadow right across the lawn. In the window I saw a woman, who looked about thirty, holding a toddler. Another older child sat at a table directly in front of the window. There were lots of shops, too. Mostly general newsagents, but also a toy shop, a tourist information centre and an old-fashioned greengrocer.

We turned off the main road into a narrow alley which was not well lit, and then left again into a sort of courtyard with groups of houses either side, each facing the car park and each with two windows in their visible walls. Most of the windows had their blinds down or the curtains were closed. Yellow light shone through gaps and round the borders. The houses’ lawns were small, and had wooden fences with gates in them along the front. Two had high hedges. I wondered why people would have those, as it surely made it harder to talk to each other across gardens.

‘Here you go, doll,’ said the driver. He reached up and

stopped the meter. 'That'll be eight pounds fifty.'

*

Once the cab had gone, I stood alone in the road. The sky was almost black, though it lightened to blue just above the horizon. I could see countryside in the distance between the houses. The rain had stopped, and a soft breeze blew over my face. It smelled of grass, and something else to do with the country which I couldn't identify. Traffic sounds carried from the main road, but apart from that and the shifting of leaves against each other, there was silence.

The gate of number sixteen was white, with several chipped and rusted areas. The ground floor windows had their blinds down, casting two striped pillars of light across the lawn. A concrete path led up to the front door. I dragged my wheelee-suitcase behind me, and lifted the other case in short bursts. It took a few tries to work out how to unlatch the gate – the hook had an extra catch on the underside.

It was difficult to know what to do once at the door. It seemed rude to simply walk in, but I wasn't sure whether it was appropriate to knock either given that this was my home and she was my mum. As a compromise, I knocked three times and called 'Hello?' through the letterbox. The silence seemed to extend. Then there were gentle footsteps, and the sound of a lock being turned. My mouth went dry, my hands went wet, and the door opened.

The woman who stood there was only about two inches taller than me. She wore a pink fleece dressing-gown with purple squashy slippers. And she did have a round face and straight red hair! She also had big, brown eyes, which were highlighted by her make-up.

She stared at me, her mouth slightly open.

'Mum?' My voice wobbled and went up at the end as I tried to smile. I had a sudden doubt. Not only did she not smile – in fact her face didn't change at all – but she looked really, really young. I wondered if there was a sister or half-sister I hadn't been told about, and who hadn't been told about me. Then she shook her head and gave a smile which made her lips go white, and which didn't crinkle her eyes as Ben's had.

‘Oh ...’ She cleared her throat.

I wanted to give her a hug, and to tell her how I had been looking forward to meeting her, and how happy I was to be coming to live with her, and ask what she had been doing all this time and why she hadn’t come to the bus station, or ever written or come to visit, and why I’d never seen a picture of her, and why she and Dad had decided not to live together once I was born – but I couldn’t move or speak.

‘But you ...’ She turned away and checked something which seemed to be stuck on to the other side of the door. I tried to copy her Scottish accent under my breath while she wasn’t looking. Then she faced me again. ‘You’re supposed to be here tomorrow. They *said* tomorrow.’

‘Well, here I am.’

‘Yeah. Here you are.’

She glanced past me, before biting off a fragment of her right thumbnail. ‘So, how’d you get here?’

‘A man called Ben got me a taxi.’

Her eyebrows twitched. ‘Yes, well ...’ She gestured. ‘Come in then. Shoes off.’

*

I heaved my suitcases into a bright, cosy little kitchen. There was a gas cooker in the corner, a wooden pulley for hanging washing on when it’s too rainy to put it out on a line, and a tall, humming fridge-freezer. It looked perfect for making lollies in. The fridge at Dad’s flat was only about three feet tall, and the freezer section was so small you could only really get essentials in. The TV was on in the living room.

‘I was right about your hair,’ I said. ‘It’s really pretty. Some people say red’s unlucky, but Dad said that was a superstition, and superstitions are just things that people invent because they’re afraid of Difference. But he thinks – he thought – that Difference is good. Otherwise how would the world move forward, if everyone did things just the same? Will you let me style it for you? I love styling hair ...’ I reached out to touch it, but she cringed away. ‘The – the bus trip was OK,’ I continued. ‘That’s where I met Ben.’

‘Better get this lot upstairs.’

I followed her through a door on the other side of the kitchen, which opened out into a hall dominated by a flight of stairs. She took my wheelie-case from me and went first, dragging it by the handle – THUNK, THUNK, THUNK. I followed, lifting the other case a step at a time. Every time the wheeled suitcase bumped up a step the floor shook.

There was only one bedroom, which was dominated by a huge double bed covered with a white lacy quilt, its head against the far wall. When I was a toddler and screamed at night, Dad used to lie on the bed beside me until I got to sleep. I tried to imagine sleeping in bed with Mum. Something like a huge hot water-bottle that never grew cold. The window was set in the left hand wall, and the curtains were white. Although they were closed, I could see pink ribbons that clipped round them in the day. There were two wooden chests of drawers next to a full-length mirror against the opposite wall, with a dresser for make-up in the corner nearest the door. Beside the bed there was a desk with a laptop on it, and an office chair pulled up. Then there was a wardrobe, and a bookshelf stuffed completely full of books. I remember one year Dad challenged me to read my height in fiction over the twelve days of Christmas. Normally I wouldn't be allowed to read past ten in the evening, but he made an exception for that period. I'm fairly tall for my age, but I managed it – just. I'm quite a fast reader.

At the foot of the bed was a fold-out mattress-chair, with a pouched sleeping bag laid out on top of it.

'You can have that,' Mum said, pointing at it.

'That makes me happy,' I said. 'When we were doing up my room in London I slept on one of those. They're so comfort–'

'Yes. Well, I'm pleased you like it.'

She drew a pretend line along the length of the floor. 'When you unpack, anything over that line gets put out.'

'Out where?'

'Out of the house for the skip. Understand?'

I nodded.

'Say it in words.'

'I understand.'

‘Good.’ And she went downstairs, leaving me to unpack.

*

That night, as I lay waiting to fall asleep, I tried to feel happy that I was safe and warm and dry and home. It certainly was a great blessing to *have* a place to call home. Alison’s spare room had been like one in a bed and breakfast, but without the ensuite, or TV, or free teas and coffees. It was decorated to be nice and welcoming, but as she was a short-term foster carer, nobody stayed long enough to personalise it. Now I had a place to really make into my own again. But at the same time, while I knew that this was a happy thing, I didn’t exactly feel happy. Alison used the expression ‘turning over a new leaf’ to describe starting another stage of life. ‘I’ll be thinking of you, darling,’ she had added, and there were tears in her eyes.

I went over every aspect of the day in my mind, and all the many things there were to be happy about. It certainly was a new leaf – Alison was right about that. But in all honesty, I wasn’t sure I liked it.

Iain Maloney

rninAmyRaffertyEKReederKathrineS
helleWaering#19PaulJosephAbbottBe
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In the living room. Phone to my ear. Hear it ringing though you've got it on silent. See the discomfort in your face as it vibrates against your thigh, the twitch of your eye, teeth lightly clenched right there in front of me in LED HD 55-inch. The hard line of your jaw next to the fireplace. The joy of rolling news: I know where you are. I know why you're not here. It's there, scrolling across the screen.

...AKING NEWS ... announcement expected from Downing Street ... BREAKIN...

Huw Edwards says – *Live outside Downing Street right now is our correspondent Mark Brighting. Mark, have there been any developments?*

Of course there haven't. But you have to be there anyway, just in case. They announced there would be an announcement and until then nothing will happen. You can't say that though, can you? Can't say:

As expected, Huw, there are no developments. They are all locked inside with a policeman on the door and they'll stay there until they're ready to make the announcement. There was some excitement earlier when a car pulled up and the Home Secretary got out and went inside. Unsurprisingly, he said nothing in the three or four seconds between the car and the door. I will however remain on watch, because apparently I've got nothing better to do.

Nothing better.

Like going to Rome with me.

Never could tell the truth. It's what makes you a good correspondent and a shit partner. I hit redial. I catch the jolt in your face as it connects, though you hide it well. You thought I'd given up. I still have twenty minutes until the taxi comes and the BBC can't show you speculating wildly for that long. There's got to be a weather forecast or sports coming up. There always is.

Rings out.

I want to hear you say it. That's all. Say work is more important. Tell me to go to Rome by myself, that you'll catch a

later flight, meet me there. That it's not your fault, that you don't work in Downing Street, that you can't control the news. You'll be there tomorrow.

'Why?' I'll ask. 'Is there no news tomorrow? Is the rest of the world taking a day off? And if they are, don't the BBC need you to speculate about what they might be doing?'

And you'll think about the day in 1930 when the BBC said there was no news and played music instead. You can't help yourself. It's your favourite anecdote.

Rings out.

In the bedroom I open my suitcase. I need to repack. I need more space. I empty your suitcase on the floor, your neatly folded clothes in a heap. Your scarves: the red one from Morocco, the green one from Cambodia, the blue check one from the Lebanon. The yellow one I bought you in Uruguay. I put the yellow scarf back in your case, quickly fill it with my things. The books will have to wait. I'll send my sister round for them. The records are yours. Through the flat, phone to my ear, making a mental list. The painting from Singapore. The bowl from Turkey.

A different talking head. You're off air. Redial. Straight to voicemail. You've switched it off.

Maybe it's just the signal.

Every evening. Weekend. Holiday: 'Switch it off. Let's have an hour or two to ourselves.'

'I can't. I might miss something. If something happens and they can't contact me, my career will be over.'

Straight to voicemail.

You're back on TV when the doorbell goes. The Home Secretary left again without speaking. *What does it mean?* Huw asks.

We can only speculate.

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