

New writing from  
Scottish Book Trust's  
Writer Development Programme  
2009/10

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# Introduction

The Scottish Book Trust writer development programme supports writers at all stages of their careers. We have been lucky enough to work with some very talented people over the years, but it is always particularly exciting to work with emerging writers. However this stage is also a difficult one, and we believe that it is important to encourage and support new writers in reaching their potential. This year's eight New Writers awardees faced stiff competition to gain a place on the programme, but we loved their diverse range of work which includes a children's fantasy novel, historical fiction, short stories and poetry. We have been bowled over too by the commitment of the three writers on our Young Writers programme who have been working with mentor Catherine Forde to develop their skills, as well as learning about the industry from agents, publishers and other writers. We are also delighted to be working with the Gaelic Books Council for the first time, supporting the development of new Gaelic talent, and both writers have proved to be a valuable addition to the New Writers Programme.

All the writers on our programme have demonstrated talent, commitment and the drive to keep getting better. We are delighted to see the results so far.

*Caitrin Armstrong, Writer Development Manager, Scottish Book Trust*

The New Writers Awards (formerly the Scottish Arts Council New Writers' Bursaries fund) offer a unique opportunity for emergent writers to refine their practice by working closely with an experienced mentor. Past awardees have noted that engaging with experienced authors and industry professionals over a concentrated period of time on a specific project has had a significant, positive impact upon their craft. Scottish Book Trust carefully create a bespoke package of mentoring and networking opportunities for successful applicants. Creative Scotland is very proud to support these important awards, which afford all the diverse possibilities of a real "creative crucible" for new writers. We hope the awards will continue to uncover and nurture the fresh literary talent which continues to burgeon across the country.

*Dr. Gavin Wallace, Portfolio Manager, Literature,  
Publishing and Language, Creative Scotland*

An rud as fheàrr a th'ann an dràsta, ann an saoghal an fhoillseachaidh, 's e gu bheil ginealach ùr de sgrìobhadairean Gàidhlig air faire. Tha Niall O'Gallagher agus Ishi NicIleathain, a' chiad dithis a fhuair taic tron sgeama ùr seo, nan deagh eisimpleir. Tha an dithis shònraichte seo a' cruthachadh rosg agus bàrdachd a tha ùr, eadar-dhealaichte agus a cheart cho làidir ri stuth ann an cànan eile. Bha e na thlachd dhòmhsa a bhith a' stèidheachadh sgeama ùr mar seo eadar Comhairle nan Leabhraichean agus Urras Leabhraichean na h-Alba. Guma fada a mhaireas an taic, agus guma math a thèid le ùghdaran ùra an Alba – gus am bi sgrìobhadh de gach seòrsa anns gach cànan.

*John Storey, Ceannard Litreachais is Foillseachaidh, Comhairle nan  
Leabhraichean*

One of the most encouraging things about being involved in Scottish Gaelic publishing right now is the emergence of a new generation of Gaelic writers. Niall O’Gallagher and Ishi MacLean, the first ever recipients of the Gaelic New Writers Awards, represent this new talent. These two writers create contemporary, exciting poetry and fiction in Gaelic, exploring themes and subjects as varied and interesting as those in English or any other language. It is an absolute pleasure to have been involved in establishing the Gaelic dimension of this scheme with Scottish Book Trust. Long may the encouragement of new writing in Scotland continue, in all its linguistic diversity.

*John Storey, Head of Literature and Publishing, the Gaelic Books Council*



New writers

## KRYSTELLE BAMFORD

Krystelle Bamford was born in Paris in 1981 to an American father and French mother but moved to Massachusetts when she was only a few months old. She studied English Literature with a specialisation in Creative Writing at New York University, graduating *magna cum laude*. Upon graduation, she spent a year and a half teaching English and polishing her füsßball skills in a small city in the South Bohemia region of the Czech Republic. She returned to New York for a year and a half to work in collection development at JSTOR, a scholarly online archive. In 2007 she moved to Scotland to do an MSc in Writing and Cultural Politics at the University of Edinburgh, graduating with distinction. She then temped in a series of tolerable and less-than-tolerable jobs for ten months after graduation, and was finally lucky enough to land a job at Canongate Books, where she now works as the Foreign Rights Executive, selling translation rights to publishing houses abroad.

# All Saints' Day

[Všech Svatých]

We talked about buying  
a long, yellow farmhouse  
with a prayer station at the crossroads  
full of bright plastic roses.

Every day, the thinking went,  
we could buy our *chleba*  
fresh from the bakery – heavy loaves  
like stones for building our house.

I would get a bicycle and cut through  
the wind at top speed. When the bridges  
closed from the floods we would laugh  
and take the back road.

I would learn to solder and make shining  
piles of steel in our courtyard. You  
would lick the black off my fingers  
and make me thick soup.

For All Saints' Day, we would ride to the cemetery  
and light candles in jars on strangers' graves  
so later, from our window, we could enjoy  
our own brief coordinates of light.

# The House at Westerly, Rhode Island

The house was the sea.  
Or a ship on the sea.  
Or a deer blind  
deep in the woods.

From the deck, they watch bitterns  
skulk at the hem of vernal pools,  
while greenheads  
bomb through the dusk.

He is a wooden Indian  
and she is a corn-husk doll.  
He stormed the beaches  
and she had a thousand sad children.

They split open lobsters,  
shucking them like corn,  
and toss the husks  
into the pooling shadows.

Behind them the house,  
all striped awnings and brass rails,  
calls them to sleep, to fill with yellow varnish  
and sawdust their ordinary silence.

# Valentine's Day

We skate on the frozen river,  
our rusted blades carving  
out wide loops in the ice.

The river struggles underneath –  
patches of watery black remind us that it is  
dark and thick with life and still moving.

My skates touch the messy edges  
of the bank, clotted with weeds  
and small, uneven stones.

There's a stain on the milky lens –  
blood like a heart or a banner  
or a dark country with jagged borders.

I imagine the raccoon, a tiny stooped bear  
with immaculate paws, tearing  
into the belly of a fish, leaving a love note  
on the ice, to a river impatient for spring.

# On Reading Greek Mythology as a Child

It was the unfairness that struck me hardest:  
With their fruit that was always something else  
and their unpredictable fits.  
Their vulnerable sexes, their dirty feet,  
their eyes as beautiful and blank  
as a peacock's feather.  
An apple, a stag, a snake, a wind –  
they were incapable of keeping quiet.  
And the mortals as bad by half –  
with the skittering panic of horses in battle,  
they fell again and again for these dirty tricks,  
as if they were made solely  
from the body's softest parts.  
The best you could ask, to be turned  
into a peahen at the moment of your execution,  
to spend the rest of your days  
scratching at the dust,  
warbling in the thorns,  
eyes cast upward, longing  
for a seed to fall.

# Mosquitoes

Slogged with Mexican beer, we find  
it useful to think of the embankment  
as a body; in the dark, lighters gutter  
with tiny, blue hummingbird hearts.

When I am tired, I say  
my heart is a root.  
My heart feels brown  
with old blood.

In the dark, insects are lost,  
then, lovingly,  
reveal themselves  
on our necks.

Other days it is a teenager's  
organ, imagines itself glowing  
inside its skin, too big  
for the bones around it.

The swarms fly formations  
against the dark.  
In the dark we hunt each other  
briefly as lighters catch and flare.

## JANE FLETT

Jane Flett is a philosopher, cellist, and creator of unusual fictions. She has read to acclaim and whooping in Berlin, Cambridge, the Edinburgh International Book Festival and Shakespeare and Co. Currently, she is working on a collection of urban fairytales that exist somewhere between the glitter and the gutter.

*Find her at <http://wordsthatloiter.blogspot.com>*

# Missed Connections

**E**

lectroGirl is wiring her fingers up with LEDs, braiding baby-doll lace into her hair, dying her knee socks fuchsia. She is tired of not causing a stir. She is bored of the vitamin-junkies and the shoe-lacers and the look-both-waysers, the ones who are normal and unconsidered, the ones who never wonder whether automatic doors feel depressed if you don't go inside. They are out there: the kind who have never staked a dollar bill on the waxing of the moon; who don't collect pencil sharpenings in their toolbelts for confetti; who never lie awake at night in terror that the earth is a great shard of rock with fire in its belly, hurtling through the inky-everlasting, even when the sun shines. It isn't easy to subsist in the same strata and zipcode as these people. It takes finesse and patience, along with a long and dampened fuse. Unfortunately, ElectroGirl has only the first of these and gets by on her wits and wings. If nothing else, she can make a hasty exit when a hasty exit is required. ElectroGirl has daddy-long-legs and isn't afraid of tripping at all.

The party is to celebrate the fact that the weekend has finally shown up after the long mulch through the working week. This doesn't mean much to ElectroGirl, who has spent the past few days trading candy hearts with a jack-in-the-box and trying to train the spiders to lead a revolt against the flea circus, but ElectroGirl gets lonely sometimes and has to scuttle around the real world for an hour or two. If nothing else,

there will be people and dancing and she can try to convince herself that she really exists. Sometimes ElectroGirl gets nervous that she doesn't. Sometimes it's hard to tell. The rest of the town swarms around like stop-motion animation flies and she sits and wonders if the words in her mouth mean anything, or whether they are just small crafted curiosities made out of Spaghetti-Os and pygmy dust and cat's cradles, little use to anyone at all.

Late at night when she is alone with her computer and worrying, ElectroGirl trawls Craigslist for Missed Connections, trying to find herself. She is convinced that one day she will recognise herself in the world of subway stations and morning commutes. Somewhere out there someone has been watching, and this is incontrovertible evidence that she is, in fact, real. However, no matter how long she wades through the red-haired girl in striped socks reading Wittgenstein on the L train, and the blond flat-top cutie with the piercings in Trader Joe's, and the stunning one in the dufflecoat picking nervously at her nails near Union Square, she never sees any descriptions that fit her own body like Cinderella's slipper. She sighs and closes the laptop and heads outside. Trying frantically to make a stir, to agitate the pot.

It is a long climb to the fourth floor on heels crafted from silk bow ties and purloined gold fillings. The stairs are thick with people and cigarettes and ElectroGirl feels herself tottering. She is not yet cocooned in the fearless coating of alcohol that would render her charming and conversational. She would like to pretend that she is thrilled, drawing raised eyebrows and glances, but in truth she is terrified. Sometimes she feels like a roulette wheel, clattering and racketing around as the world spins faster. So long as she keeps moving, everything will be fine and there will still be hope, but as soon as she stops the world will crystallise and the boundaries will set. ElectroGirl isn't ready for that kind of responsibility or that kind of ending. She keeps drinking, careering around corners, keeps going. She runs up the stairs.

The room that the party is concentrated around has high ceilings and plenty of doe-eyed people. There are empty beer bottles with ash-smudged necks lined up on every surface. Music is playing from a laptop in the corner and it isn't quite loud enough to drown out the chatter. Sometimes ElectroGirl feels like she is watching a wildlife documentary about a foreign species. She wants to be the helicopter and the microphone man in their midst. She doesn't think she could learn anything about how better to behave, but likes to watch them interact, come together, fall in love, fall apart. They are something else. Or rather, she is something else. ElectroGirl realises she needs a drink.

Freezers are the best place to find party liquor. ElectroGirl turns up frozen peas, empty ice-cube trays, two greying steaks wrapped in clingfilm, and the jackpot of an almost full bottle of supermarket gin. She thinks about decanting some into a plastic cup but they are all smeared with mysterious-coloured sticky liquid or cigarette butts, so she raises the neck to her mouth instead and lets the skin on her lips stick to the ice. The gin marches down her gullet like a fearless Inuit army with hunting spears. She swigs a third of the bottle in rapid gulps then sets the bottle down on the table, shuddering. Turns and looks for a midst to launch herself into.

Time has passed. ElectroGirl can't remember which time or how it has been used. She is balanced on a table, shaking her ass like a hip-hop bellydancer. There is blood on her bare feet but they don't seem to hurt at all. She has a beer in her hand which she doesn't remember putting there and a cigarette tucked behind her ear like an Indian's feather. ElectroGirl wriggles and her tassels jig. Someone reaches a hand up to her and she takes it and steps and lets herself fall down down down the rabbit hole.

In a corridor. Kissing. Someone's tongue jutting in her mouth like a pigeon bobbing its head. Music loop-the-looping in her ears until she gets rollercoaster sick. Bumping and pushing. ElectroGirl feels like a genie left

out of its lamp for too long. Somehow the night has ended, or perhaps the lights have just been switched on. She puts her hands against the chest that is pressed into her and moves it away, mumbling promises. She doesn't head for the toilet. She heads for the stairs and home.

Here is what the Missed Connections say this morning:

**Beautiful Asian girl on downtown crowded 4 train – m4w – 36 (Grand Central).** *WE WERE NEAR THE BACK OF THE TRAIN PACKED IN PRETTY TIGHT. I THINK YOU GOT OFF AT THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE STOP. YOUR LIPS AND HAIR WERE INCREDIBLE.*

and

**Cutie with the KeyFood Bags on the Q Train (me, blue Mohawk) – m4w – 25 (Brooklyn Bound Q Train).** *Well first you sat next to me, then later across from me, you gave a friendly smile, I didnt return with much (stupidly) as I was tired from work... You had two bags from Key food I believe and were super cute! You got off at Kings Highway... Me I just had my music and a blue mohawk (Yeah I know it wasnt done up, ya know cant do it at work) :) Would love to hear from you!!*

and

**Cute girl with a diamond tattoo behind her ear – m4w – 29 (Union Square)** *hi! i saw at the union square L stop going to brooklyn at 430pm on tuesday march 16th. you were a short in height, blonde with a cute diamond tattoo behind your right ear/neck and you wore a nose ring. i was the asian guy with a beard wearing a blue raincoat and grey wool winter hat. you got off at bedford ave. i stood in front of you on the train. you smiled at me when the doors closed. bummer!*

Bummer, thinks ElectroGirl, and her heart breaks a little bit. There is no

call for the peacock-feather princess, for the girl with scrabble tile poetry in her hair. She had better keep trying.

There are a few things ElectroGirl is seeking, and she doesn't feel she is asking too much. She would like a supporting band to hand her a megaphone adorned with EL wire and ask her to step up to the fore. She would like a green leather suitcase full of handwritten love letters she could unbuckle and paw through when she was feeling low. She would like a keytar and a tazer and a pet cactus as tall as her belly button. Most of all, however, she would like a cobalt-eyed boy with a sack of records and a bunch of UV gardenias and a bottle of Malibu, who will lock her in his bedroom and turn up the heating and scatter the floor with sand, who will take off all her clothes and sit her on the ground and whisper play-pretends in her ear that they've reached Hawaii.

Make-believe and colour spectrums and synthesizer music. ElectroGirl believes that everything could be better if only it was cached in prettier words and amplified and set to midi-metronomes. If only it was infra- or ultra-

If only, if only.

It's so easy, she thinks, stretching her limbs on the sofa and closing her eyes. On her retinas are carved a Mardi Gras parade with an elephant in a feather boa marching down the subway stairs. On her retinas, a burlesque ballerina poised on the highest trapeze. Her screens flicker. She runs through a shallow river, over sun-warmed stones, her lungs full like balloons. She cascades down a waterfall, skins her knees, ties her hair up with creeper vines and jungle flowers. Somewhere in the world there are Excel spreadsheets and reality television phone-voters. And everyone everywhere is looking for their own glass slipper bearer. Waiting to escape.

## ROY GILL

Roy was born in Edinburgh, but grew up in Fife. When he was small he made regular visits to his grandmother who lived in the city. She would take him on whirlwind trips to the lunar landscape of the Botanic Garden glasshouses, to the stuffed animals and steam trains at the Chambers Street museum, and to Jenners for cake (where once she left him at the checkout, like a forgotten bag of shopping...).

As a teenager, he snuck through when he could, and sometimes when he shouldn't, hung around in unlikely places, and staggered home with bootleg VHS of long-forgotten low-budget horrors. The allure of Edinburgh grew, and he finally moved back to the city when he was twenty three.

Roy didn't set out specifically to write for children. His aim was to dream up a novel with the appeal of those he read as a kid – like *The Dark is Rising*, *The Neverending Story* or *Eight Days of Luke* – stories you can return to again and again, and never truly grow out of, only more into. *The Resurrection Spell* is set firmly in Edinburgh, but it's an Edinburgh that fulfils his childhood dreams, and justifies his teenage suspicions.

So far *The Resurrection Spell* has been shortlisted for the Sceptre Prize, and won Roy a New Writers Award. Over the past year he's had a great time working on a final draft with Lindsey Fraser, and now it's ready to go out into the world at last...

*For more about Roy and his writing, see [www.roygill.com](http://www.roygill.com)*

Extract from novel

# The Resurrection Spell

*It was over coffee and biscuits that Grandma Ives calmly offered to return Cameron's father from the dead.*

*"It won't be easy, of course," she said. "It's old magic, and quite unwieldy..."*

**Edinburgh exists on three levels. There's Edinburgh<sup>humanian</sup>, where the people live. There's Edinburgh<sup>daemonic</sup>, where the monsters lurk. And wriggling in between is Edinburgh<sup>parallel</sup>, a place where the two worlds touch...**

**T**

he rope ladder swayed and dangled alarmingly. *There is no reason*, thought Cameron, *why it should be any harder to climb up than it had been to climb down*. But every movement he made upon the ladder seemed to be amplified, so the slightest shift of his foot caused a sickening wobble, and any decisive move felt like it could trigger an avalanche.

His fingers dug back into the stonework around the shuttered window. Of course, it didn't help that the whole building to which he was helplessly clinging was suspended – impossibly – upside down in a deep dark shaft. Way above his head, near what should have been the tenement's ground floor, he could see the opening of the pit, and

above it the bright blue sky. Dangling all the way down the side of the building was the ladder on which he stood, its rope strands turning as thin and spindly as a beetle's leg as they vanished into the distance. Far beneath him, at the building's roof, curls of smoke from the chimneys drifted lazily away into the endless darkness.

Maybe, if he turned his head round to match the crazy angle of the building, it wouldn't all seem so disturbing.

He tried.

The ladder danced and reeled once more – or was it just the inside of his head? Either way, it'd been a bad idea. He placed his feet, still threaded over the ladder's rung, onto the more stable surface of the window ledge. (Did you still call it a window ledge when it was actually the window top, and everything was upside down?)

He knocked with his fist on the shutters.

"Miss, miss? Can I come in? I've got kind of stuck."

The shutters flew open, shunting him off the ledge. For a few giddy seconds the rope ladder swung out into the void, then he and it thwapped back into the side of the building, forcing the air from his lungs.

"You still here?" said a bored voice.

"No thanks to you—" Cameron moaned. He stopped. "Oh. You're different."

This didn't look anything like the daemon-woman he'd spoken to before. She'd been good-looking, with long red hair and an iridescent pair of wings that fluttered delicately on her back. This person's face was sallow and lined, and her wings were a cloudy grey, like those of a bluebottle. A curved pipe dangled from the corner of her mouth.

"Glamour costs, sweetie." She let out a puff of smoke. "And you ain't paying. What do you want?"

"I've got myself, um, stuck," said Cameron. He forced himself to smile, in what he hoped was a winning way. "I was thinking – is there any

other way up? Maybe I could come in the window, and use the stairs?"

"No, you'll contaminate my stock! Flying's the best way." She cupped a hand to her ear. "What's that? You don't have wings? Too bad – so sad. You'd better get climbing." She took hold of the shutters.

"Hold up—" Cameron's palms were getting sweaty and he wasn't sure how much longer he could hold on. He certainly couldn't stay perched on this window ledge forever, like a pigeon with a bad case of vertigo.

He tried a different tack.

"You do realise if I fall, and end up totally dead, this'll be the last time you trade with my Gran?"

The woman sucked on her pipe reflectively.

"No, I don't buy that, precious. Lady Ives is one resourceful mama. She'd find another goon. Nice try, though."

The shutters slammed shut.

Cameron groaned. How had he let himself get into this mess? He'd been so proud when he'd first mastered the world-shift, so eager to try out his new abilities...

At the start it had all seemed totally impossible.

Grandma Ives had begun by asking him to bring back Mr Hughes' book, as if it was the easiest thing in the world. Cameron had felt then he could no more succeed than if she'd asked him to turn bright green and explode.

He remembered staring at the patch of air where the book had been.

"Amy's brother used to see things that weren't there," he said, playing for time, "back before Amy's Mum got mad, and said she'd chuck him out if he didn't stop messing around."

"This is different, as you are well aware."

Cameron could feel his eyes twitching and burning.

"No. It's no good. I'm gonna go cross-eyed."

"Don't just stare into space," Grandma Ives snapped. "Try to feel your way to the parallel."

“And how do I do that exactly?”

“When you went to Montmorency’s, was there any kind of sensory disturbance that accompanied the shift?”

“Yeah...” He remembered the rush of sound. “It was like the noise from a radio that was off-station. Lots of songs all mixed up at once, you know?”

“That’s good.” A smile played across Grandma Ives’ thin lips. “It suggests you simply need to focus. Do you recall any tune in particular? Try to remember, and to bring it to mind.”

He shook his head gloomily.

“No, I can’t. It was totally random.”

“Perhaps you need another stimulus.” She went to the cash desk, and removed a dark wooden box from one of the drawers. Its lid was embossed with two gold letters: E<sup>P</sup>. “For me, Edinburgh<sup>parallel</sup> has always been like a tune. I bring it to mind, and the parallel appears. The artist who made this copied it down as best he could.”

Cameron felt a strange frisson run through him as he took the box.

“I’ve seen this somewhere before...” He lifted the lid. A hidden mechanism started to whirl, and a complicated tune began to play. There was a yellowing bit of paper stuck inside:

‘From Grandma to Cameron, with love –  
I hope you find music opens up a world of its own.’

*It was the present she’d tried to give him on his seventh birthday, that one and only time he’d met her, back before Dad died...*

“You’ve been planning this a long time, haven’t you?” he said. “Even then, you were wondering if I was ready.”

She nodded, a strange expression on her face.

“I hoped you’d be the one to keep the family tradition going. How does it feel, when you hear the box play?”

He listened to the sequence of pings and chimes.

“It’s OK, I guess, but there’s nothing happening. I’m still here.”

“Listen closely. There’s a pattern there, even if you can’t hear it at first. It’s beautiful, like a trumpet solo.”

Cameron pulled a face.

“Jazz again. I like something you can sing, words you can think about.”

“The way to the parallel is different from person to person,” said Grandma Ives. “It comes from inside, from who you are. Maybe you don’t follow me that closely after all.” She peered at him sadly, as if this revelation was a colossal disappointment.

Cameron’s heart sank. He knew he must have the ability, from the glimpse of the parallel he’d already had. But this music was so twisty and turn-y, it was hard for him to follow: as soon as he thought he’d figured the tune out, it darted off in a new direction. Somehow it reminded him of Grandma Ives; the way she liked to keep things hidden, and only reveal them when it suited her...

“Or maybe it’s just – that tune’s too much you!” he said suddenly.

“Whatever can you mean?”

“I’ll show you.” He ran to the back of the store, and fetched down the acoustic guitar. Eric had taught him a few chords ages ago. He hoped he could still play them.

“It’s like – maybe I need to find my own tune? One that’s for the parallel and me only.”

That night, he had taken the guitar and the music box back to Grandma Ives’ house. Alone in his room, he listened to the box play over and over. As he listened, he strummed the guitar, and tried to find ways to get the chords he knew to fit the music. In the end, he wasn’t sure if the tune he uncovered was the same one the music box had been based on, in its over-complicated way, or if it was entirely his own invention. But when he found it, it was there, and he knew it was his. It was as if some supernatural program had been quietly downloading inside his head, and suddenly – ping! – it was done.

He'd taken a trip to Montmorency's corner store, to give his new skills a road test.

He remembered standing in the aisle, and calling the mysterious tune to mind. His fingers shifted by his sides without him noticing, as if searching for the right chords. Swiftly, the shop had changed around him. In contrast to the chaos of whirling shelves from his first visit, this time everything unfolded in an elegant dance, movements timed perfectly to the music that now ran through his head.

"Awesome." He grinned, and picked a couple of jars off the shelf. What on earth was Selkie Oil or *Bean Shith* Freshener, and how would you use them?

Montmorency had been amused to see Cameron's new-found confidence. "You've got the hang of it! You'd better watch out. She'll have you doing all sorts now." He steepled his hands together like a kung-fu master dispensing wisdom. "So the pupil becomes the master."

Cameron laughed.

"Who are you, Yoda now?"

"You think daemons don't watch movies? I do a lot of rentals to the daemon world, as it happens." He indicated a rack of battered DVDs, and tapped his nose. "Not a word to your grandmother."

Grandma Ives had been pleased at Cameron's progress, he recalled, and it wasn't long before she started to send him out on delivery runs for the secret side of her business.

"This will be good practice for you whilst I do some dry research," she insisted. "Besides, we've both got to live, even while we bring back the dead."

She would disappear into the basement and emerge with a box – usually firmly sealed, to his disappointment – and give instructions on where to take it.

Cameron would slip it into his old school bag and set off, eager to discover what he might find. Every time he came to trigger the shift, a

thrill of anticipation ran through him. He never knew until that moment how different the parallel place might be.

That morning she'd given him a delivery for Heave Awa' house.

"Strange kind of name," he had said.

"It's a sad story," said Grandma Ives. "Back in the 1860s, a tenement suddenly collapsed. The only survivor was a young lad who shouted to his rescuers to 'heave away'. The building that was eventually raised in its place was named after that. But I dare say you'll hear all about it... I'd take this myself, but I'm not as agile as I was."

"Simple swop, is it?"

"Oh yes." She opened her books, her attention already elsewhere. "Nothing can possibly go wrong."

The building was on the lower half of the Royal Mile, an ancient sloping street that started at the top of Castle Rock and ran all the way down to the Palace of Holyrood House. Wedged between two shops he spotted an arched doorway, above which rested the carved stone head of a young boy. A curling banner running above him was inscribed with the words "Heave Awa' Chaps, I'm no' Dead Yet!"

The boy's face looked hopeful and just a little cheeky. *Good for you, mate*, Cameron thought. Now for the world-shift... He concentrated, doing his best to ignore the whine of a bagpiper busking to a group of cold-looking tourists. Slowly, the rolling, strumming rhythm of *his* version of the Edinburgh<sup>parallel</sup> tune rose within him, and the world around began to change as he shifted through to the parallel. The tourists melted from the street, like a bunch of snowmen caught by the sun, while the archway began to stretch wider and wider, until it straddled a space as broad as a building.

There was a loud *glop*, and a hole swirled open between the legs of the arch.

The lids of the stone head blinked over pupil-less eyes.

"Goin' doon, are ye?"

“You can talk!” said Cameron.

“It’s about all I can do,” said the head. A smile crept across his grey features. “Hiv ye heard ma story?”

“A bit...” Cameron was finding the head’s blank-eyed stare a little unnerving. “The old tenement fell, right?”

“We called it a *land* back then.”

“A land. Got you.”

“I wis in the stair lookin’ for rats when it fell. Hiv ye ever ratted?”

“Um, no.”

“Ye should. We used tae get paid for every tail–” The head launched into a long speech on the cunning of rats, and the best methods for outwitting them.

Cameron waited politely for a break, but realising none was forthcoming – *perhaps stone heads don’t need to stop for breath* – edged forward and peered curiously into the hole. It was like looking into the entrance of a mineshaft. A rope ladder was anchored at the pit’s edge. It ran down past what looked like the bottom of a wooden door, and then–

“You’ve got to be kiddin’ me.” He stepped back quickly. “There’s a whole building hanging upside down in there!”

“Oh aye,” said the head nonchalantly. “When the land fell, it jist kept on fallin’, right on doon tae the parallel.”

Cameron gulped. It looked like he was going to have to inch down this dangly ladder.

“Heights are not really my thing. Are you sure it’s safe?”

“Safe as hooses. Nabody’s broke their heid open for a year or two now.”

“Cheers.” Cameron glanced up at the boy. “Bare good news there.” He tested his foot on the ladder. *If he went quickly, and kept his eyes straight ahead, he’d probably not even notice a thing...*

“Haud on, are ye no wantin’ to hear ma story?”

“You go on and tell it,” said Cameron. “I’ll keep an ear open...”  
He gingerly made his way down into the darkness...  
And that’s how he’d ended up here, stuck on this ledge.

## BARRY GORNELL

Barry Gornell was born in Liverpool and now lives on the west coast of Scotland, where he is trying to grow up with his children. He is supported in this by his wife. He is a screenwriter, ex-firefighter, truck driver and bookshop manager. His short films, *Sonny's Pride* (1997) and *The Race* (2004) were both broadcast on Scottish Television. His short fiction has been published in *The Herald* newspaper, *Let's pretend: 37 stories about (in) fidelity* (Freight 2009) and *Gutter*. He has completed his first novel, *The Healing of Luther Grove*, and is working on his second, *Dog Evans*. He graduated with a Masters from the University of Glasgow Creative Writing programme in 2008.

Extract from novel

# Dog Evans

**N**

obody spoke as they left the burial behind, dispersing through the village, eyes to the ground, soiled hands stuffed deep into winter pockets. The further Nugget and Lynne trudged, the more the footsteps of the others faded. Turning onto the path to their home they could hear Bru's whimpering, cutting into the quiet of the night and see him waiting in the light that leaked beneath the door.

"Shit," said Nugget, "listen to that. He must be wondering what he's done wrong. Has he ever been locked in on his own before?"

"You tell me; he's your dog."

Lynne strode past Nugget into the house as the dog jumped up to greet him, licking his unshaven neck and jawline, causing Nugget to laugh and push him away, back to the floor. When Nugget stood up from stroking Bru, the smile was knocked from him and he was forced to take a step back as she threw his work bag at him. He caught it. He looked at it, he looked at the dog; he looked at her.

"Lynne?"

"Well, come on then," she said. "What are you waiting for?"

His eyes widened as it dawned on him what she meant.

"Really? You think I should go now, so soon?"

“Well, he won’t be going home anymore, will he?”

“But.” He shifted his weight from foot to foot as he thought. “Lynne, don’t you feel bad, even a little bit?”

“Nugget, I feel poor, a lot.”

“But.”

“No buts,” she said, sliding open the frosted glass door on the dresser, revealing their drink store. Lynne dropped a half bottle of whisky into the bag. “You know it’s there. Everybody knows it’s there. Be the first. Go and get it,” she said, patting the bag.

He was still watching her hand when it stopped and he knew she was staring at him.

“Doesn’t it feel disrespectful to you,” he said, “so soon?”

“There was no respect in the killing and the burying, was there?”

They were silent again. The only sound was the clicking of Bru’s claws on the linoleum floor.

“You think it’s wise though? Really?”

“Oh please, tonight of all nights, show me some of the old Nugget magic.” Her filthy smile spread wide in response to his dirty grin. “You still got it in you?”

“Oh yes.”

“You’re still the guy, the one who told me he was going to be somebody, aren’t you?”

“I believe I am that guy.”

“The guy I’ll do anything for when he gets back?”

“Anything?”

“When you get back. Plus things you haven’t even dreamt of. You my guy?”

“Absofuckinlutely.”

His tongue was thick and his throat was dry as he spoke to the dog.

“What do you think Bru, you want to go?”

Bru wagged his mongrel tail. Bru always wagged his tail.

“Here,” she said, “something to keep you going.”

Nugget opened his mouth and took the tablets but he couldn't swallow them and needed help from the bottle to get them down, one gulp for each tablet. When he put the bottle back into the bag he kissed Lynne, before leaning down to run his hand across the smooth fur of Bru's head.

“Come on then, boy.”

Shaggy haired and bright orange, hints of retriever and collie dwelt beneath the overwhelming blanket of red setter that followed Nugget back out of the house.

Adrenalin, amphetamine and alcohol sped through Nugget as he sat observing the house. His right knee bounced up and down while his left knee supported his left elbow. His chin rested in the palm of his hand as he forced the stumps of fingernails over his lower incisors, gnawing them clean. He took a sip from the bottle. The rough blend stripped another layer off his windpipe, scalded his stomach and burned along the fuse wire of his veins to his extremities. Goosebumps crackled across his scalp like fire through stubble after harvest and his face prickled with growing sweat beads. He screwed the lid back on and bagged the bottle. Patting Bru a couple of times, he stood up and they approached the dead boy's home.

The tarnished brass of the back door handle chattered in its casing like a clockwork bite when Nugget gripped it.

“Fuck.”

Letting go, he glared at the curled fingers of his hand as though they had dropped the golden apple.

He took a step away from the Evans house. Over his shoulder, marsh water caught the moon and the village feigned sleep. His nose ran. He wiped his sleeve across his face, before snorting the slimy remains into the back of his throat to be spat straight onto the porch floor. The two

upper panels of the door glared at him. Nugget twitched, willing himself not to think of the house as a living thing.

“Glass and timber,” he said, nodding, rocking from heel to ball. “Glass and timber.”

He scooped the half-bottle from the empty postbag slung over his shoulder. He sucked a mouthful out, then another. He took a deep breath, held it and released it slowly. Stepping forward, he fingertipped the handle. His touch was steady. He grasped, turned and pushed in one breath. The door stopped after a few inches and he collided with it comic-book style, the slapstick splitting the skin above his eye. He stood up and straightened himself as he glanced around for anybody who might have seen. Nobody had. It was quiet and still. A barn owl ghosted by. Bru was motionless.

Exploring the cut, his fingertips came away wet and he could feel the blood trickling through his eyebrow.

“Shit. Nugget, come on. What is wrong with you?”

Bru whined.

“Shh boy, keep that down.” He crouched and held the dog’s head in his hands, his blood streaking its fur. “You don’t want them all to hear, do you Bru? Don’t you want your share? Steak every day; think about that. All for a little shush and for helping Nugget with the search. Steak every day, my God, it even sounds good to me.”

Pulling a used handkerchief from his pocket he applied pressure to the wound as he pushed against the door again, using his meagre body weight to steadily increase the force. There was some give, before it stopped again.

“What do you think boy, winter damp?”

Partially open, he edged his head into the gap to try and see inside but snapped back as he inhaled the interior smells that seeped out to blend with those of the nearby marsh. The rank cloud of bad air wrapped itself around him and slammed him back against the wall as

he gagged at the stench of butchery and cooking, or maybe rendering. Bru backed down into the corner behind Nugget's feet and lay his head on his front paws as though to keep below the smell, only standing when Nugget shook his head to clear it and pushed himself off the wall.

"Come on, boy, let's get this thing done. Go home rich."

When he thought he could handle the smell, he took a few steps back before throwing himself at the door. He shouldered it open enough to be able to get in, scuffing a fresh arc into the grain of the floor. Looking down, he saw that it was wedged on paper. Hovering between the moonlight and the interior, he peered in, trying to make sense of the room. Taking his head torch from his pocket, he turned it on and held it high like the probing searchlight of a police helicopter. It lit upon a flotilla of tiny origami boats. A densely packed column, about a foot wide, sailed across the floor, away from him, like an exercise in perspective, towards the pale light of the rear window. Bending down to pick one up he realised it was currency, crisp and clean. They were all identically folded banknotes. It was the last of the fleet that had caused the door to jam.

"Well, looks like he didn't use this door, wouldn't you say?"

Strapping the torch on, he used the handles as a pivot and swung into the room, aiming to avoid the boats. One crunched beneath his foot. He was still holding onto the handles when he saw that Bru had stayed outside, framed in the tall slit of partial doorway, a burnished copper statue in the night's light.

"Come on, boy." Nugget bent his fingers towards himself, calling the dog. The dog leant forward. "That's it, good boy, come on." Bru crept in, head low and tail down.

Once inside, Nugget saw that the boats bisected the room in a line of unchanging width and direction; passing over a small coffee table, one of the dining chairs and an upturned box. Straight as a Roman road,

determined as a cockroach migration. To the right of the line was what he took to be the living area. A large sofa and a leather armchair faced an open fireplace. Embers still glowed in the hearth. To the left looked to be the dining area, a table and chairs, next to what he assumed to be the kitchen.

Curiosity bounced the erratic beam of light around the room, each movement corresponding with the pop of a thought in Nugget's head. It wasn't dirty, as the smell had suggested. Although it was a world created without recent adult guidance, a kind of order was in place. But the manner of things gave a sense of the awful. Animal traps, both gins and snares, against the back wall. Pelts draped over the sofa gave it the look of a sleeping bear. Worst of all were the skeletal remains. Piled in the space beneath the stairs on the left-hand wall, pale collections, with the look of both ossuary and shrine; the charnel-house contents of some other way of life – size-graded cairns of skulls, limbs, ribcages, the awkward shapes of pelvis and scapula; the tiny disassociated links of the tails, feet and spinal columns of all manner and size of beast.

“Jesus.”

He covered his eyes against it but he still had the retinal print of what he had found. He turned away and opened his eyes to journey, like the boats, toward the pale square of the far window, to be somewhere else. As he became fully accustomed to the surrounding gloom, his attention came back to the boats.

“Just look at all that fucking money, Bru. It's why we're here, boy. And there's more, lots more.”

He held some of the notes to Bru's muzzle.

“I know for a hand-delivered fact that this fucking navy is but a small part of the boy's treasure. Let's find it. Search, Bru. Search.”

He had pushed monthly packages through the door for years now. They were always the same size and weight. Occasionally, the

envelopes changed colour, when a packet had been finished maybe, or when the sender couldn't lay his hands on his usual supply. The postmark was rarely the same, coming from anywhere in the country, although predominantly east coast. It was obvious what they contained, so obvious that one time he had opened a package to check. He had found a slim bale of banknotes wrapped in a piece of paper, plain save for the line, "buy a good thing," and the swirl of an "S" in the bottom right corner. Maybe the message had changed with each package but the contents hadn't, he was sure of that, utterly convinced. The delivery had become a talking point amongst the three postmen. Eventually, the whole village suspected what he knew. Lynn was right. Sooner or later, others would come; probably sooner. The temptation would be too much. Even conservative estimates made his head dizzy. The money had come to dominate his thoughts to such a degree that he rejoiced when the office was downsized and he had the fortune to become the sole full-time delivery man, responsible for every property in and around the village.

Nugget knew the boy had never bought anything, good, bad or indifferent. On the rare occasion he was seen in the village, he was avoided but watched. He never once stepped into a shop. Clothes they had seen his father in came to fit him and he seemed to have no need for bought food. The one display along Main Street that did attract him was the bookshop. He would stand for hours looking at the books the way others would watch a bank of televisions, smiling, as though imagining the lives and journeys within each volume. It struck Nugget as strange that the boy never bought a book. They all knew he could read. He scanned the room for a bookshelf, before slapping himself across the forehead, knocking his torch to the floor.

"Books?" he said, refocusing the light before refitting it. "I'm not here for books. Come on, Bru."

His mission back on track, he proceeded to ransack the place, pulling

drawers open, smacking cupboard doors back on their hinges and slapping the lids off any boxes that he found. Nothing.

“She’s right.” He was fretting, his breathing shallow and quick. “I was stupid for leaving it this long. I don’t know what I’ll do if someone else has got to it first. Every delivery was an investment. I’m here to withdraw.”

The circle of his light flashed across the wall, stopped and backtracked to the fireplace. On the mantelpiece was a low neat pyramid of packages, offset like brickwork, their placing so uniformly precise that they had looked to be part of the fireplace surround, an intricate carving, the peak of which obscured a small section of the mirror that hung above the fire. Nugget grinned.

He ran his hands down the paper sides of the money mound. He was gentle, barely touching the unopened packets. Something half-way between a sob and a whimper escaped from his chest. Wiping the dust away, he looked into the mirror. There were tears in his eyes. The three gold teeth that gave him his name, one each of incisor, canine and molar, shone in the torch beam. He kissed his fortune. He had anticipated this moment for so long but never pictured it like this. Hidden in a drawer, a cupboard, a box in a wardrobe or a bag under the bed maybe, even buried. Not on display, there for the taking, unprotected. It was too much.

A glistening far behind him caught his attention. It came from the bottom of the largest bleached mound. Deep in the reflection he saw the ivory dome of a human skull. He vomited, sluicing his nostrils with whisky and bile, spraying the sleeping bear. The acid boiled in the back of his throat. Sweat iced his body as he hunched over, leaning on his knees, spitting. When he could stand, he used the strength remaining in his shaking frame to scoop the money into his postbag. He closed the flap and hugged it like a lost child.

Nugget shivered as he stooped to inspect the skull. He knew that it had been the starting point, the foundation; that the rest of the skeleton

was at the bottom of each pile. A silver chain was threaded through both eye sockets, wrapped a couple of times around the ridge of bone that separated them. The large crucifix attached to the chain leant against the skull, partially occluding one of the sockets. Nugget moved the cross to reveal an irregular dent in the forehead. Hairline cracks radiated from it in all directions. Nugget shook with wheezy laughter.

“So that’s where you got to, you fucking mad bastard.” He knelt. “Father Finnegan – Fireball Finnegan. Just look at you. Here all the time. Jesus. And the company you’re keeping.”

Nugget brushed the dust from the crucifix. He lifted it. It was heavy, solid silver. It wouldn’t fit through the eye socket and he couldn’t find the end of the chain so he tried teasing it undone with gentle pulling. When the whole pile of bones shifted he started and dropped it. Bru backed away, growling.

“It’s okay, boy. It’s okay.” He pulled the dog close with the hand not holding onto the money. “It would have been a bonus. We’ve got what we came for. He can keep it.”

Nugget managed a grin as he sat back on his heels, able to relax with the skull now he knew who it was.

“Seems like yesterday, seeing that cross again. The fucking trouble you caused. You fucked with this village more than anything else, you know that? Poor Mary, she still thinks you’re coming back. Can you believe that? She wrote to the Pope, asking where you’d been sent. No reply. She had another boy; he’s got your hair.” Nugget made the sign of the cross. “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned; but not as much as you did.” Nugget stood and backed away from the priest’s skull.

“You look better without the moustache though, I’ll grant you that.”

*This extract has been edited to make it suitable for a wider audience. An unedited version can be obtained from Scottish Book Trust.*

## KIRSTY LOGAN

Kirsty Logan is a writer, editor, teacher, book reviewer, and general layabout. In 2008, Kirsty graduated with distinction from the University of Glasgow's Creative Writing Programme. She is currently working on her novel *Little Dead Boys* with mentor Judy Moir. Kirsty is the co-editor of new fiction magazine *Fractured West*, and the reviews editor for *PANK*. She has had eighty short stories, poems and personal essays published in places like *The Rumpus*, *Flatmancrooked*, *Chroma*, *Pear Noir!* and *Gutter*; along with pieces in the anthologies *Girl Crush* (Cleis, 2010), *100 Stories For Haiti* (Bridge House, 2010) and *The Book That Changed My Life* (Luath, 2010). She likes coffee cupcakes, retold fairytales, and sticking pins in maps.

*For more about Kirsty's work, see [www.kirstylogan.com](http://www.kirstylogan.com)*

# The Rental Heart

**T**

he day after I met Grace – her pierced little mouth, her shitkicker boots, her hands as small as goosebumps writing numbers on my palm. The day after I met her, I went to the heart rental place.

I hadn't rented in years, and doubted they would have my preferred model. The window display was different, the hearts sleeker and shinier than I remembered. The first time I had rented it was considered high-tech to have the cogs tucked away; now they were as smooth and seamless as a stone. Some of the new hearts had extras I'd never seen, like timers and standby buttons and customised beating patterns.

That made me think about Grace, her ear pressed to my sternum, listening to the morse code of her name, and my own heart started to creep up my throat so I swallowed it down and went into the shop.

An hour later I was swallowing lunch and trying to read the instruction leaflet. They made it seem so complicated but it wasn't really. The hearts just clipped in, and as long as you remembered to close yourself up tightly then they could tick away for years. Decades, probably. The problems came when the hearts got old and scratched: shreds of the past got caught in the dents, and they're tricky to rinse out. Even a wire brush won't do it.

But the man in the rental place had assured me that this one was

factory-fresh, clean as a kitten's tongue. Those heart rental guys always lied, but I could tell by the heart's coppery sheen that hadn't been broken yet.

I remembered perfectly well how to fit the heart, but I still read the leaflet to the end as a distraction. A way to not think about how Grace looked when she bit her lip, when she wrote the curls of her number. How she would look later tonight, when she. When we.

It was very important that I fit the heart before that happened.

Ten years ago, first heart. Jacob was as solid and golden as a tilled field, and our love was going to last forever, which at our age meant six months. Every time Jacob touched me, I felt my heart thud wetly against my lungs. When I watched him sleep, I felt it clawing up my oesophagus. Sometimes it was hard to speak from the wet weight of it sitting at the base of my tongue, but I would just smile and wait for him to start talking again.

The more I loved him the heavier my heart felt, until I was walking around with my back bent and my knees cracking from the weight of it. When Jacob left, I felt my heart shatter like a shotgun pellet, shards lodging in my guts. I had to drink every night to wash the shards out. I had to.

A year later I met Anna. She was dreadlocked, green-eyed, full of verbs. She smelled of rain and revolution. I fell.

But the parts of me that I wanted to give to Anna were long gone, down the gutters of the city, mixed with the chemicals of forgetting. Those shards had dissolved, washed away forever, and there was not enough left that was worth giving. The edges of my heart were jagged now and I did not want to feel those rough edges climbing my throat; I did not love her enough to cough blood. I kept what was left of me close, tucked under the long soft coils of my intestines where Anna wouldn't see.

One night, still throbbing, Anna opened her chest. Her heart nestled, a perfect curl of clockwork.

*This is how*, she said.

I could hear its tick against the soft embrace of her lungs, and I bent close to her to smell its metallic sharpness. I wanted.

The next day she took me to the heart rental place. I spent a long time pressing my palms against the polished metal until I found one that felt warm against my skin. I made sure that the sharp edges of the cogs were tucked inwards, kept safe from the just-healed rawness of my throat.

Back at Anna's, she unwrapped the plastic, fitted the heart, closed my chest, took me to bed. Later I watched her sleep and loved her with every cog of my heart.

When Anna ran off with my best friend I took the heart back to the rental place. Nothing choked or shattered or weighed me down. It looked just as sleekshiny as when I had first taken it out of the wrapping, and the rental guy gave me my full deposit back. I deleted Anna's phone number and went out for dinner.

The next year, when I met Will, I knew what to do. The heart this time was smaller, more compact, and it clipped into place easily. Technology moves fast.

Will taught me about Boudicea, the golden section, musical intervals, Middle English. I soaked him up like I was cotton wool.

Sometimes, pre-dawn, I would sneak into the bathroom and open myself to the mirror. The heart reflected Will back at me, secure in its mechanics. I would unclip it, watch it tick in my fist. I would put it back before sliding into Will's arms.

On our first holiday, I beeped through the airport barriers. I showed my heart and was waved on. It wasn't until the plane was taxiing that I realised Will had not beeped. I spent the whole flight wire-jawed with my paperback open to page one, unable to stop thinking about the

contents of Will's chest. We never mentioned it; I could not stand to think of his chest cavity all full of wet red flesh.

When I left Will, I returned the heart again. I couldn't sleep for the thought of his heart, shot into shards, sticking in his guts, scratching up his gullet.

After that I rented hearts for Michael, and Rose, and Genevieve. They taught me about Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle and how to look after a sausage dog. They smelled of petrol and hair oil and sawdust and honeysuckle.

After a while, the heart rental guy started to greet me by name. He gave me a bulk discount and I got invited to his Christmas party. Soon I found that halfway between sleeping and waking, the glint of the rental guy's gold incisor would flicker at the corners of my eyes. I wondered if he licked the hearts before renting them to me, so molecules of him would be caught down in some tiny hidden cog, merging into my insides.

The glint of the rental guy in my dreams started to make me uncomfortable, so I switched to a new rental place. There were plenty to choose from, and I preferred the ones that didn't gleam their teeth at me. They never gave me back my security deposits, but always kept their stares on the scratched glass counter when I returned the hearts. Their downturned eyes were more important than the shine of coins.

I got older, the hearts got smaller. After Genevieve I moved away for a while, to an island where I knew no one and nothing, not even the language. I lived alone. I did not look anyone in the eye; I did not need to rent a heart. My empty chest made it easy to breathe, and I filled my lungs with the sharp air of the sea. I stayed there for a year.

Back in the city, back in the world. Among words and faces I knew. One night, many drinks, and Grace's number scrawled tiny on my skin. Then the downturned gaze, the scratched glass counter. The sleekshiny new heart.

I swallowed the rest of my lunch and went home to fit the heart. Three years later, autumn afternoon, curled on the couch with newsprint on my fingers and Grace's dozing hair in my lap. I stuttered on a small notice in the corner of the page:

*Product recall: Heart Model #345-27J. Defective.*

I pressed my hand – the hand holding the dark length of Grace's hair – against my chest. I hadn't opened myself in years, trusting the tick of the heart. I'd kept it for so long that I knew I'd have lost my deposit, but I hadn't wanted to return it, to lose the image of Grace coiled in the centre of it. I'd forgotten the face of the rental guy; had forgotten the warm weight of a new heart in my palm.

I slid out from under Grace. She mumbled half-awake, then quietened when I slipped a cushion in under the heat of her skull. I tiptoed into the bathroom and opened the rusted hinges of my chest.

The heart was dusty and tarnished and utterly empty. In the centre of it was no picture of Grace, no strands of her hair, no shine of memories, no declarations. The rusting metal squealed when I pulled it out.

## GARRY MACKENZIE

Garry MacKenzie grew up in Glasgow. He graduated from the University of St Andrews in English Literature and International Relations in 2007. He then completed an MLitt in Creative Writing, specialising in poetry, under the tuition of Douglas Dunn and Don Paterson.

He has taught creative writing in schools as part of the StAnza Poetry Festival, and edited *08\08 Poets*, an anthology of work by students on his Masters course. His poem 'Humphrey Spender: Photograph of Newcastle United Football Club Changing Rooms, 1938' won the 2009 McLellan Poetry Competition at the Arran Arts Festival.

Garry lives and works in St Andrews, and is spending this year developing his writing, with poetic syntax becoming an increasingly strong obsession. He spent last year working in a bookshop, coveting its contemporary poetry section and trying to sell books by W.S. Graham to as many people as possible.

# Lewisian Nights

Abandoned air force buildings – mess hall,  
dormitories, clifftop cells where visions  
of war were drawn from a metal sea –

have become a village, concrete shells  
that sheep wander like tinkers. In the cold war  
of wind and land, two crofts remain,

and pillboxes black with peat  
guard a beach whose sand  
was sucked into the sea.

Cows stand in the rain. Inside we drink  
and talk of ferry crossings, first impressions,  
sitting in a crofthouse kitchen

built for radar operators' wives.  
At each pause in conversation  
we contemplate the inner exile.

Later, our hostess lifts a gun  
and none of us is shocked or laughs  
as feathers fall near the cattle trough:

a gull flies west with the sun, lead-poisoned.  
Night sweeps its ash into the sky.  
A bus rattles at the end of the road.

# Necessity

The sea's black pressure:  
porcelain and rock  
found barnacled together.

A diver's torch cut dark roads.  
Now this secret tryst,

a symbiosis only known  
to angler fish,

lies lit in a museum,  
a notebook with the middle pages lost.

# Hill Fog

Not the sound of a river  
but the slow seep through grass and air,  
the slip of my boots on wetbacked stones.

In the cloud's collapsed tent  
the hillside was vinyl  
resolving after the music has stopped,

the needle lifting back to the cradle.  
Half-seen: a curve of horn. A shattering  
of hooves, bounding off.

# The Haul

Impossible to tell, in this restless light,  
how far from the town we've walked; impossible to know

how close the heart is to our words  
and how much is ornament, while over our heads

geese cry out the vigour of their lives.  
Maybe the soul is a tide we huddle near,

like oystercatchers, in their subtle flux  
of evening's not-quite-rest, following its line –

or maybe the strength to haul it to our lips  
is only found in fear, or trust, or love.

# A Lục-bát for Roger Deakin

If I came up a weed,  
 a rampant, sprouting seed, I'd be  
 spontaneous and free.  
 Gardeners would fear my *cri de coeur*:  
 the wildness of the moor  
 in the cultured arbours. Scorning  
 the trellis and awning  
 and flowerbeds, each morning I'd grow  
 tall and stand toe-to-toe  
 with roses and sloe, wrestle  
 with a honeysuckle  
 and, still unstoppable, compress  
 the orchid root, distress  
 the pool of watercress, the spud.  
 If I shot out the mud  
 and took on flesh and blood, you'd see  
 Coltrane mid-melody  
 or Queen Hippolyte, bareback  
 and charging, Kerouac,  
 or – if I can change tack – the breeze  
 that blows the opened leaves  
 of books shut, or else Eve's first kiss,  
 a champagne bottle's hiss,  
 the swing in Elvis' hips, remarks  
 of 'Weel done, Cutty-sark!  
 to dancers birling through the dark.

## ALLAN RADCLIFFE

Allan Radcliffe was born in Perth in 1975 and now lives in Edinburgh. He has worked as a stagehand, English teacher, journalist and editor. His short stories and poems have appeared in publications such as *New Writing Scotland*, *Markings*, *Celtic View*, *Gutter* and two of the *Hidden City* collections. He is a regular contributor of features and reviews to newspapers and journals, including *The Sunday Times*, *The Scotsman*, *Scotland on Sunday*, *Sunday Herald*, *The List*, *Metro* and *The Big Issue*. He is currently working on his first novel, entitled *Things from the Past*.

Extract from novel

# It Gets Better

**T**

he ward is dazzling. The curtains have been pulled back from the windows and the lights are on full blast, bleaching the walls and the bedspreads a brilliant, warming white. I walk to the far end of the room and look back at every face, scan the limp, veined arms, the bony, tagged wrists. Eyes strained with age and sickness stare back at me.

A tall, powerful-looking male nurse with tattooed arms confers with a colleague.

“What was the name? Lockin?”

The second voice is clipped, impatient.

“Dunno.” A rustling of paper. “Oh, you mean the suicide? Moved.” More rustling.

The nurse directs me to a smaller ward on the ground floor. When I get there, I see him, straight away. Or rather, I see a version of him – my nephew, David. He looks as though a piece of him has been added or removed or he’s been subtly altered. He lies back with his head sunk into the pillows, staring up at the ceiling. His hair is stiff through lack of washing. His arms are stretched out and pinned to his sides on top of the covers, his wrists manacled to the bed by two differently coloured hands.

One of these hands belongs to a woman, who sits facing me. She is

tall with long thick black hair that doesn't quite match her pale, drawn face. She is talking so fast I can't make out a single word she is saying, the smile on her lips belied by the v-shaped groove in her forehead. Her hair bounces from her shoulders as she talks. This is my sister, Mhairi.

The other hand, darker, heavier, belongs to a man sitting with his back to me. He's short, but stockily built with light, crisply curling brown hair. He sits perfectly still, hunched over, his head lowered towards his chest. Whenever the woman glances across the bed for reassurance, he responds by nodding or shaking his head and tightens his grip on the boy's hand. This is Nicky, my sister's husband and David's father.

I move as close as I can to them without drawing attention to myself. I feel as though I am watching them through a window. I allow myself to look at David's face for only the briefest of moments. When did I last see him? Six months ago? Christmas? No, longer than that. A year? Two years? He's not a child any more. His eyebrows are a little thicker than I remember, and there's faint, light stubble around his upper lip and sprouting from his chin. I stand for a moment, willing him to look at me.

But he just carries on staring at the roof, mouth softly open and eyes half closed and dead.

I retrace my steps through the hospital with the help of arrowed signs, holding my breath against the antiseptic swimming-pool smell. The warren of pale yellow corridors opens out into a vast, airy waiting area. The place has the look and feel of an airport departure lounge: bodies slumped wearily around the place or stretched out across strings of plastic, bolted-down chairs.

I pace around the waiting room. It's after seven thirty. Frank will be sitting at the end of the couch, legs drawn up to his chest, peering at his

book with the radio on in the background for company. Or he'll be in the study, tapping at his laptop. If he can't sleep he'll work long into the night, fingers busying across the keys in a whirl of motion, a vain attempt to make a dent in his workload.

I have no reason to stay at the hospital. David is fine, he's recovering and he is not alone. All I want in the world is to be back home. But something stops me from leaving. I'm anticipating the sleepless night that will come if I don't stay and check that he is going to be okay, my mind racing with unanswered questions.

I choose a vantage point facing in the direction of the wards so I can see all the visitors leaving. I watch as David's mother and father make their way slowly through into the large, wide foyer. I push my shoulders back and start walking towards them. There's a faint sting in my bladder. I might be crossing the classroom floor to begin a lesson or on my way to a job interview.

"Excuse me. Mhairi?"

They jerk round. They are both younger than me, but the bewildered look in their eyes is that of much older people.

I use the voice I use in class, my teacher's voice, deep and authoritative. I don't know why I insist on hiding behind it. This is my sister, after all, I should be able to say anything to her.

"Mhairi, it's me. Phil." I shift my weight from one foot to the other. "I got your text. I came as soon as I got your text."

"Phil." Her smile is strained. She glances over at her husband. Nicky lifts his chin and stares at me. Straight away I see David's large blue eyes and drooping eyelids grafted onto a wider, heavier face. He's wrapped up in a long, grey coat topped with handle-like epaulettes that make his shoulders look cartoonishly square.

"It's good to see you. Both of you." And I shrug. I can't think of anything to say to them that won't sound flippant or mawkish or patronising. "If there's anything I can do. Anything."

They edge closer together.

“Look, do you think we could have a seat?” I indicate the empty rows of chairs behind us.

When they don’t move I start talking rapidly.

“I went up to see David – I was up there just then, not half an hour ago, but I saw you there, sitting by his bed and I didn’t want to interrupt while you were there – I didn’t want to interrupt–”

“You were there?” Mhairi presses her lips together. Nicky’s eyes are searching the floor, his large hands twitching busily at his side.

After a moment he raises his eyes. He stretches out his arm, which I take as a sign that his anxiety is lifting.

I have my mouth open to say something when he takes a step forward, swings his arm right back and catches me hard upon the chin.

It all happens very quickly. I hear my own voice cry out. I stagger backwards as my face registers the jagged pain, my mind surging with the unfairness of it all.

“Nicky. No!”

I lift my head, tightening my shoulders and arms. Try to dredge up my limited self-defence training: *hit first, keep your hands up, stay calm.*

Mhairi has thrown her arm across Nicky’s chest; it forms a protective barrier between us. He stands on the other side, his weight shifting nimbly from one foot to the next – a boxer limbering up for the next round, waiting for the bell. His face is red, taut and so full of rage he doesn’t know what to do with it.



## KATERINA VASILIOU

Katerina Vasiliou was born into a mixed Greek and English family in London in 1980. After completing her undergraduate degree she taught English in a high school in Kobe, Japan for two years before settling in Edinburgh. She graduated from the Creative Writing MSc at Edinburgh University in 2006 and since then has been juggling her job at a disability charity with writing and freelance journalism. In the autumn of 2007 she took a sabbatical to co-manage Atlantis Books in Santorini. Katerina is currently writing her first novel, *Pinching Doesn't Hurt*. Set during 1945, it concerns a young woman with a learning disability and her complex relationship with a troubled older man. Since receiving a New Writers Award in 2009 Katerina is being mentored by Beatrice Colin.

Extract from novel

# Pinching Doesn't Hurt

A large, bold, black letter 'L' that is partially cut off on the right side, serving as a decorative element for the start of a paragraph.

oll, loll, loll.

Stephanie was lolling about on the sofa. She wasn't allowed and she grinned at the thought of her naughtiness. The cushions that surrounded her were plump so she only had a narrow space for lolling. She lay on her back and her eyes whizzed round the ceiling rose above the chandelier. She pushed her hips down repeatedly and whispered "Loll" in time with the shuddering of her diaphragm. Her left hand stroked the velvet cushion pushing into her side, whilst her right hand slid along the velvet below her on the front of the sofa. It was not padded down there: an entirely different sensation.

She didn't have her shoes on. Shoes would get her a slap so, to be clear, she had tucked their tips neatly under the sofa, a sock sticking out of each top. She couldn't be faulted on that count. She had been there for twenty-three minutes. The clock on the mantelpiece said so. She reckoned there would be no more than ten minutes of pleasure left to her, as it was almost lunchtime. She raised her left leg and pointed her toes. If it grew very, very long she would be able to stroke the bottom of the chandelier and she would hear it tinkle, like when Elsie used the

feather duster on a stick. If Stephanie could touch the chandelier it might fall on top of her and then Antonia could make it into a necklace. She lowered her leg and rested her ankle next to its partner on the arm of the sofa. She dragged them from side to side. She liked the feeling of the velvet tickling her skin. Then she went back to lolling.

The door opened, but she didn't turn her head. She knew who it was. Her mother's perfume wafted over her like a warning. She had had twenty-six minutes of lolling. It wasn't bad. The sofa would be satisfied with that.

"Get up, Stephanie. You know you're not allowed in here on your own. Look what you are doing to the velvet! Didn't you hear me calling you?"

Stephanie shook her head so she wasn't lying. She didn't need to look up at her mother. She knew what her face looked like.

"I can't hear you, Stephanie."

"Sorry."

It was not the right answer. Stephanie felt her left arm being grabbed and yanked upwards. She took the hint and swung her legs round and bounced up.

"Where are your shoes? You had better not have lost them."

Stephanie pointed.

"I can't hear you, Stephanie."

"Sorry."

"Well, put them on then."

Stephanie plonked down again and fished out her shoes and socks. Her mother's busy hands plumped up the cushions.

"You are not to do this again, do you hear me? I won't have you making this room untidy."

"Okay."

"Don't say, 'okay', Stephanie. You are not an American."

Stephanie knew she wasn't an American. She wondered why her

mother always said this. Two loops, cross them over, down, round and through. That's how to do up shoes.

"You've become lazier than ever. Do your rests extend to the morning now, as well?"

Stephanie hadn't been resting; she had been doing good deeds. Yesterday when they were all listening to the wireless in the evening she had seen that the sofa wanted to be touched. Her mother and Antonia never stroked its velvet. It needed to be stroked or no one would ever know what it felt like. She was doing it a favour, well, that wasn't exactly true, as softness made her feel nice, but she was risking getting into trouble, so it was a kind of favour. She didn't know how to answer her mother. Maybe this was a rhetorical question. Her mother had told her many times about keeping quiet when she asked Stephanie rhetorical questions. Why did she bother asking them if she didn't want an answer? But Stephanie didn't dare say this.

"Go and wash your hands for lunch and then go to the kitchen and help Elsie load the dumbwaiter."

Stephanie nodded and walked out of the room. Behind her she could hear her mother grumbling to herself. Stephanie thought of her lolling on the sofa with her brown hair that didn't move, rubbing against the green. The sofa would be so grateful for two people in one day, but it would never happen.

The corridors in the old house didn't get very much light and Stephanie liked to trail her hand along the wall to help her keep her balance in the semi-darkness. She walked in the direction of the hall and she could hear voices in the distance. She could make out a high sound and a low sound. She followed the noise. With every step the sounds curved closer to words, but were not quite distinguishable. Stephanie realised that the high sound belonged to Antonia's mouth. Sometimes when the Americans were around, Antonia used to make her voice sound like she had a cold. She would block up her throat and call it

her Mae West voice. But this sound was shrill and shallower. She wasn't being Mae West right now.

Ahead of her she saw Antonia step into their daddy's study. Stephanie wandered up to see what she was doing and through the door she saw their lodger, Mr Tanner, there as well. He held Antonia's arm, but she pulled away, laughing. It was her pretend laugh, the one she did when she didn't find something very funny, but she made it extra loud to make it seem like she did. It was sort of angry laughing. She shook her head at Sidney and then walked out of the study without so much as a goodbye or a backwards wave. Antonia glanced at Stephanie as she came out, and laughed all the harder. She sauntered off down the corridor, letting the sound trail behind.

Stephanie didn't move. The door to the study was now wide open, but the lodger had turned his back and she thought that he hadn't seen her. He had legs that maybe went up to her ears. He paced across the room, stood for a moment and then he slammed a kick into the sideboard. There was a little blue and white Japanese goblet sitting on top, which Stephanie's father used to fill with sweets. It wobbled and then dived, smashing on the wooden floor. Some blue bits, some white bits everywhere.

"The floor is messy."

He spun round and looked right at her. His eyebrows were raised in surprise.

"Did you see what happened?"

Surely he knew he was going to get into trouble. Breakages carried the greatest penalty and no one was allowed in her daddy's study.

"Why did you kick it?"

"I was angry."

That wasn't the sideboard's fault. His face was red. He wasn't shouting, which was what her mother did when she was angry. Mother would be furious if she knew Stephanie was nearly in the study, talking to the

lodger. Two crimes at once. She'd been expressly forbidden from doing either. She grinned. Her mother said that Mr Tanner was low class and Stephanie was not to be influenced by him. Stephanie had never really looked at him for fear of a slap, but she saw now that his hair was almost the same colour as hers so she didn't have to worry, he was okay. She stepped into the room, pelvis pushed forward to show that she didn't care.

"I'm not allowed to talk to you."

He didn't answer but that was okay because people didn't usually answer Stephanie. Instead, he bent down and started to pick up the blue and white pieces. It wasn't much of a crime if they didn't talk. She spoke again.

"I've never kicked the sideboard."

"You should have a go."

He didn't turn round. He had six big pieces in his hand. It would take hours to pick up all the little ones. She would get into trouble if she kicked the sideboard. Maybe he didn't know that. And it wouldn't be very nice for the sideboard either.

"Doesn't hurt?"

"No."

He hadn't finished picking up all the pieces, but he looked straight at Stephanie, his gaze going up and down to try and get a real picture. She copied him, focusing on his little eyes and long nose sticking out between them. His nose made his eyes seem too small, like they had to squint to see over the edge of it. He spoke again and his voice had changed. It was brighter and less choppy.

"You just imagine it's someone you don't like."

"Huh?"

"The sideboard. Who don't you like?" He stood up.

"Don't know."

"There must be someone."

Stephanie considered. She had never had to think about it. People were just around and it had nothing to do with her.

“There must be someone who makes you angry or frightened.”

Well, she certainly knew who made her frightened. An image flashed in front of her: her monster shouting, “vaisha, vaisha, eepa, ooter” out over hordes of men in uniform. His fists banging his podium and his hat wobbling with the force of the impact. She shivered.

“Hitler.”

He seemed surprised. Surely he knew who Hitler was. But then he laughed. His laugh was nicer than his speaking voice.

“All right, if you like. You imagine the sideboard is Hitler and you kick it.”

He smiled at her and it was her turn to laugh. What a funny thing, a sideboard called Hitler.

“But it’s not Hitler.”

“Yes, I know. You just have to imagine.”

He stepped towards her and bent down so that his chin could almost stroke the top of her head.

“I bet your mother doesn’t like you imagining things. Bet she says that she doesn’t want you getting ideas.”

“How did you know what she says?”

He raised his eyebrows at her and smiled. He wasn’t going to tell.

“How?”

He took her arm and whispered.

“You shouldn’t let your mother tell you what to do all the time.”

His breath tickled her ear and she recoiled, laughing. She was very ticklish. He held her arm more tightly, laughing too. Stephanie looked up at his small eyes. They were blue and bright. She had never known before. She was standing very close to him. That’s how she knew now. They weren’t so small close up.

“Bet you get lots and lots of ideas, Stephanie. I get them all the time.”

She wanted to ask what kind of ideas. He seemed like he was very clever. But before she could say anything, her mother's voice whooshed down the corridor and flew into the room.

Stephanie tried to spring away from him but his grip clamped down on her arm.

"Say you did it, all right? Say you kicked the sideboard!"

Stephanie nodded. His face had clouded over and his eyes were small again. She wanted him to think she was clever too. She could lie if she wanted to. She would show him.

"I kicked the sideboard."

"Yes, that's right. That's what you have to say."

He released her. She looked down at her arm and saw four white little sausages rapidly turning red again. She positioned her fingers over them, pressing down to keep them there for longer. Mrs Barrett Brown whisked into the room and Stephanie was ready.

"I kicked the sideboard."

She saw her mother's cheeks turned pink and realised she hadn't thought about this bit, this getting in trouble. But maybe it wouldn't be so bad with someone else there.

"For goodness sake, Stephanie."

"Sorry."

Her mother inspected the shards on the floor. Mr Tanner held out his hand and offered the bigger pieces.

"Was that Daddy's sweetie bowl?"

Stephanie nodded, keeping quiet for fear of making it worse.

"It was an accident, Mrs B.B."

Mr Tanner was trying to smile but he looked quite frightened as well. He was lying to try and help her.

"This is why we have rooms that you're not allowed into, Stephanie. Honestly, I will have nothing left if it goes on like this. You do more damage than bombs."

“Sorry.”

“Yes, you are always sorry, but that doesn’t stop it happening, does it? Go and fetch a dustpan and brush from the kitchen. And go straight there and back, Stephanie.”

There was no mention of punishment. Stephanie walked to the door, but turned round once she was behind her mother’s back. She smiled at Mr Tanner. He seemed to see her out of the corner of his eye but he kept focusing on her mother.

“It happened as I was walking past the room. It really was an accident, Mrs B.B.”

Stephanie felt a fluttering in her stomach, a bit like being hungry but nicer. He was trying to help her. She smiled at him again, hoping that he would smile back.

“Hurry up, Stephanie.” Her mother didn’t turn round, but she knew Stephanie was still there. It was those eyes in the back of her head. They were always open.





# Sgrìobhadairean Gàidhlig

[Gaelic Writers]

## ISHI NICILLEATHAIN

Às dèidh faighinn tro cheum ann an lagh agus bliadhna no dhà a chur seachad an lùib nam meadhanan Gàidhlig, tha Ishi Nicilleathain gus a cùl a chur ri obair airson a dhol mu thimcheall an t-saoghail agus an leabhar air a bheil i a' miannachadh a sgrìobhadh.

Thog an dàrna ceum aice ann an Cànan 's Cultar na Gàidhlig a h-aire 's a h-ùidh ann an litreachas 's chur i roimhpe na sgilean sgrìobhaidh aice fhèin a thoirt air n-adhart. Tha Ishi air eòlas a chur air sgrìobhadh an dà chuid a thaobh film 's telebhisean 's tro na bliadhnaichean tha i air a bhith a' sgrìobhadh 's a riochdachadh diofar phrògraman. 'S ann a thaobh sgrìobtaichean phrògraman chloinne a tha i air a bhith ag obair o chionn ghoirid.

Tha Ishi den bheachd gu bheil e uabhasach cudromach an ceangal eadar an òigridh 's litreachas Gàidhlig a neartachadh 's mar thoradh tha i air a bhith an sàs ann a bhith a' teagasg sgrìobhadh cruthachail do sgoilearan na Gàidhealtachd. Tha i cuideachd air a bhith an sàs ann an obair eadar-theangachaidh air leabhraichean cloinne ainmeil, mar na leabhraichean aig Roald Dahl.

Eadar a cuairtean dànachd air feadh an t-saoghail, bidh Ishi a' fuireach aig an taigh ann am Barraigh.

Having survived a law degree and some years in the Gaelic media, Ishi MacLean has turned her back on the honest working life in order to travel and pursue her dream of becoming a published author.

A second degree in Gaelic Language and Culture rekindled Ishi's love for literature and Gaelic prose and led to a determination to develop her own writing skills. Having trained as a scriptwriter she has spent the last few years working on various productions, most recently developing scripts for children's animation.

Ishi feels very passionate about strengthening the link between young people and Gaelic literature and has been involved in creative writing workshops throughout the Highlands and Islands. She has recently begun translating some well-known children's books into her native language, including the works of Roald Dahl.

Ishi will be based in Barra between various madcap adventures across the world.

# Cunntas-turais a tha fhathast ri thighinn

(A travelogue yet to be travelled)

My fascination with wandering the world set in after I was given the chance to spend a summer working in Nova Scotia whilst at university. My working life then became a means of making money to travel and my leisure time was taken up with devouring travel books that gave me an insight to the world from the comfort and no-cost budget of my couch. Whilst my selection of English travel reading has been wide-ranging in content and varied in style, I have yet been unable to read such a book in my native Gaelic language. I have always harboured an ambition to write my own travelogue, in Gaelic, an ambition I now hope to fulfil as I embark on an overland journey between Egypt and the Island of Barra. Here I have written a prologue to my impending travel plans.

# A

m measg an ioma-thoileachais a tha mi a' faighinn bho bhith a' siubhal, chan eil dad a thig faisg air an fhaireachadh a tha a' thighinn leis an t-slighe dhachaigh; a bhith a' cur eòlas air na h-uiread, is ann an dòigh cho cumhachdach 's gu bheil mi a' miannachadh beatha shocair, shèimh aig an taigh. Ged nach mair an riarachadh-inntinn seo ach cho fad 's a bheir e mo bhaga fhalmhachadh, tha na beagan sheachdainean a leanas turas cha mhòr cho tlachdmhor ris an turas fhèin.

'S ann leis a' bheachd-smuain seo air cùl m' inntinn a thòisich mi air an turas seo a chur ri chèile, a' chiad turas a tha mi gus a ghabhail

leam fhìn. A' siubhal cuide ri caraidean no buidhnean sònraichte, cha robh mi air tighinn mu choinneamh clàr-siubhail a bha gu tur fosgailte roimhe seo, clàr air am faodainn gach nòisean 's neònachas a chur mu mo choinneimh: uill, na cheadaicheas na beagan sgillinnean a tha mi air a shàbhaladh dhomh. Mar a tha mi gu tric nam shuidhe 's mi ag amharc mapa an t-saoghail, bhuail e orm ged a bha rud sam bith, àite sam bith 's slighe sam bith comasach dhomh, gun robh mi airson mo shlighe a dhèanamh tarsainn cruth na talmhainn fhèin. Bha mi airson mo shlighe fhèin a dhèanamh tro dhiofar dhùthchannan, a dhol thairis air chrìochan, an seòrsa turais a tha a' comharrachadh saorsa is dànachd 's a bheir air daoine an anail a tharraing nuair a chluinneas iad na tha fa-near dhut.

'S ann le bhith a' cur an dà bheachd seo còmhla a chuir air An Rathad Fada Geal (The Long Road Home) mi. Turas iongantach a bheireadh eadar an Èipheit 's Glaschu mi, a' crìochnachadh mo thuras leis an aon turas-iteil as d' fhiach. Ged a tha mòran a' sgèith eadar Glaschu 's Barraigh airson a ràdh gun do laigh iad air tè dhe na raointean as cunnartaiche air an t-saoghal (ge brith carson a tha gainmheach 's tràghadh-mara a' sònrachadh cunnart), dhòmhsa, tha an turas seo na chomharra gu bheil mi dha-rìribh air tighinn dhachaigh. Chan eil mòran a thig faisg air an fhaireachadh a tha gam bhualadh nuair a bhuaileas uidheam ri tràigh, 's steall de thoileachais gar lean-tainn, a' seirm gu bheilear aig baile uair eile.

Chan e co-dhùnadh ro dhoirbh a bh' ann a bhith a' cur romham tòiseachadh san Èipheit. Chaidh mo bheò-ghlacadh leis a' bheatha shocair, shona ann Dahab san Fhaoilleach 2009 's mi gam fhaighinn fhìn ann airson a bhith a' dèanamh teisteanas dàibhidh. Às dèidh latha no dhà bha mi a' faireachdainn gum biodh e comasach dhomh m' acair a chur sìos sa bhaile bheag shèimh a bha seo agus ged a sheòl mi à cala às dèidh seachdain, bha e furasta fhaicinn carson a bha na h-uimhir a' dol ann gun tilleadh. Às an Èipheit tha an Ear-Mheadhanach

a' sgaoileadh a-mach: leathad de dhùthchannan dìomhair agus liosta de dh'ainmean aithnichte bho Bhìoball na cloinne a-mhàin. A' leantainn cùrsa lem chorraig, stad mi san Tuirc, a' seasamh mu choinneamh tìr-mòr na Roinn-Eòrpa 's an ioma-shlighe a bheireadh dhachaigh mi. Lìon mo cheann le na bha gach dùthaich a' falach air mo shon, ga dhèanamh do-dhèanta dhomh gabhail seachad air àite sam bith. 'S e sin far an do laigh mo chorrage agus 's ann an sin a thuig mi, 's an dà chuid toileachas is eagal ag èirigh annam, gun robh an Rathad Fada Geal gus fàs nas fhaide buileach...



# Toiseach Sgeulachd Chloinne

(A children's story yet to be told)

Although I primarily want to write for adults, I feel that my experience in children's writing could be drawn on in adding to a genre that is somewhat lacking in original and current Gaelic material. Inspired by writers such as Roald Dahl and Jacqueline Wilson I hope to provide children with entertaining, imaginative reads that will further encourage and develop their Gaelic literacy skills. Here I have provided the first chapter to a children's book about a daring dog called Roofus...

# B

ha a h-uile duine measail air Roofus, oir nuair a leumadh e suas nad uchd airson d' aodann imlich dhèanadh e comhart a bha mar ghàire bho sheann bhodach. “Harf. Harf. Harf.” Bidh sibh air aithneachadh gur e cù a th’ ann an Roofus ach tha mi airson innse dhuibh an-dràsta fhèin nach eil mi a’ bruidhinn mu chù àbhaisteach sam bith, cù nach bi a’ dèanamh dad ach a’ cadal fon bhòrd is a’ comhartaich ’son faighinn a-mach a dhèanamh dileag. Chan eil Roofus idir, idir mar seo. ’S e th’ ann an Roofus ach sàr-chù a tha làn spòrs is dànachd, dìreach mar mi fhèin ’s tu fhèin.

Tha Roofus a’ fuireach air croit bheag ’s chan e croit mhòr le uidheamachd fhuaimheil ’s beathaichean mòra eagalach. ’S e bha seo ach croit bheag laghach air an robh grunn chearcan agus seann each a bha toilichte fhad ’s a thuigeadh a h-uile duine cho glic ’s cho ionnsaichte ’s

a bha e: mas fhìor. Bha seo a' còrdadh ri Roofus, oir bha seo ga fhàgail-san os cionn chùisean 's cha robh dad a b' fheàrr leis. Am measg nan cearcan cracte tha na caraidean aig Roofus, dà isean air a bheil Squishy 's Whizz. Rugadh Squishy 's Whizz air an aon latha, ged nach tàinig iad às an aon ugh agus tha iad uabhasach coltach ri chèile. Tha e doirbh fiù 's do Roofus an aithneachadh ach tha fios aigesan a-nis gu bheil Squishy beagan nas motha na Whizz. Tha Roofus nas motha na an dìthis aca ge-tà, gu math nas motha, 's chan ann tric a leigeas e leotha seo a dhìochuimhneachadh. Seadh, 's e Roofus a tha os cionn na croit gun teagamh sam bith.

Nis, ged a tha a h-uile duine a bha riamh eòlach air Roofus fìor mheasail air, bidh iad cuideachd a' fàs gu math crosta leis. Ach nach e sin an diofar a th' ann eadar coin 's inbhich. Fhad 's a tha coin airson a bhith a' ruith 's a' cluich fad an latha, gun fòr aca mu thrioblaidean an t-saoghail mhòir, chan eil inbhich comasach air fiù 's smaointinn mun a leithid. Tha mise den bheachd gum bu chòir dhuinn leigeil le coin cleas no dhà ionnsachadh do dh'inbhich. Bu chòir do choin clasaichean a chumail ann a bhith a' dèanamh car a' mhuiltein sa pholl agus ann a bhith a' suidhe ann an càr a tha a' dol aig fìor astar 's do cheann a-mach air an uinneig. Bhiodh seo gu math na b' fheumaile na bhith ag ionnsachadh dhaibhsan mar a ghlacas iad bioran no mar a bheir iad spòg dhut. Fada, fada na b' fheumaile, 's bhiodh daoine gu math na bu thoilichte.

Co-dhiù, bha Roofus ann an trioblaid gu tric 's bha a dhòigh fhèin aige airson dèiligeadh ris an seo. Bhiodh e a' teicheadh gu taobh eile na croit 'son greis, a-mach à sealladh, 's nuair a thilleadh e bhiodh fàilte ga cur air le "tut, tut" no dhà agus truinnsear de bhiadh. Ge-tà, nuair a fhuair Roofus e fhèin aig taobh thall na croit air an fheasgar theth, ghrianach a bha seo, cha robh e idir ann an sunnd fuireach leis fhèin 's gun dad aige ri dhèanamh. Bha e a' fàs car searbh den oisean diomhair seo, 's cha robh dad às ùr ri fhaicinn, oir bha e air a bhith

an seo dà thuras an t-seachdain seo mu thràth 's cha robh againn achfeasgar Dimàirt! Thàinig e a-staigh air Roofus nach còrdadh dad na b' fheàrr ris na a dhol a shnàmh san loch. Smaoinich e cuideachd gun còrdadh seo ri na h-iseanan. Cha robh na h-iseanan air a bhith aig an loch riamh roimhe (b' esan an aon fhear a bhiodh a' faighinn air cuairtean cho sònraichte). 'S mar sin shaoil e nach robh beachd na b' fheàrr na a dhol air dàn'-chuairt cuide ri Squishy 's Whizz...

## NIALL O'GALLAGHER

Tha Niall O'Gallagher ag obair à Holyrood mar neach-naidheachd poileataigeach don BhBC. Bho 2004 gu 2007 bha e a' teasgasg aig Oilthigh Ghlaschu agus e a' sgrìobhadh trachdas air obair an nobhailiche Alasdair Gray. Sgrìobh e mu bhàrdachd na Gàidhlig agus na Gaeilge don *Herald* agus don *Guardian*, agus dh'fhoillsich e tionndaidhean Beurla bho bhàrdachd Chrìsdein MhicIlleBhàin. Tha Niall air a bhith ag obair air cruinneachadh bàrdachd le taic bho Mhàrtainn Mac an t-Saoir. Tha e a' fuireach ann an Glaschu.

Niall O'Gallagher works from Holyrood as a political reporter for the BBC. From 2004 to 2007 he taught at the University of Glasgow while writing his doctoral thesis on the fiction of Alasdair Gray. He has written on Gaelic and Irish poetry for *The Herald* and *The Guardian* and published English verse-translations from the Gaelic poetry of Christopher Whyte. Niall has been working with his mentor, Martin MacIntyre, on a collection of poems. He lives in Glasgow.

# Sonaidean

These poems are from a sequence currently in progress. Sonnets aren't common in Gaelic poetry, though George Campbell Hay (Deòrsa Mac Iain Dheòrsa, 1915–1984) translated those of Petrarch into Gaelic. These poems follow an Italian structure which has fewer rhymes than the English pattern. I find writing in strict forms like this fascinating, and enjoy mixing Gaelic elements with those found elsewhere in European poetry. I also like the way in which a lyric sequence – almost like a novel – can be used to tell a story.

## II

Mus deach mi nam bhàrd bhithinn ri ceòl,  
 b' e lorg dhòighean àlainn agus ùra  
 san dèidheadh faclan 's fonn ri chèile mo rùn;  
 bhithinn a' sìreadh co-sheirm a bhiodh beò,  
 a mhaireadh fada às dèidh dùnadh mo bheòil  
 rudeigin a bhiodh a' togail mo phuirt  
 an-àirde, b' e sin amas mo chiùird  
 mus do thòisich mi san dreuchd seo.

Cha deach e na b' fhasa – às dèidh gach òrain  
 a bhithinn a' tarraing bho na teudan  
 choimheadainn gun eòlas air a' bhòrd

mar dhuine nach do thog an t-inneal riamh  
 gun fhios agam càite an dèidheadh mo mheuran  
 no càite am faighinn a' cho-sheirm a-rithist.

## V

Bhruadair mi leat a-raoir (mar a their iad  
 ann am Barcelona, a rèir m' fhaclair),  
 chan ann dhìot, no mud dheidhinn, ged a bha iad  
 uile fìor aig deireadh oidhche eile,  
 ach leatsa. Às dèidh mar a rinn sinn feise  
 chruthaich sinn saoghal eile is sinn nar cadal  
 far an deach sinn còmhla agus m' anail  
 air d' amhaich, do chìoch fo mo làimh dheis.

Is tu, a chiall, subsaig gach gnìomhair  
 a sgrìobhas mi, is tusa brìgh gach dàin,  
 mìneachadh gach seantans is gach briathair,

às bith a bheil e fireann air neo boireann,  
 nam bhruadar, far a bheil a-mhàin  
 ar gaol agus a' ghràmar coileanta.

## IX

*do C. is M.*

Gus am bi e ceadaichte dhuibh pòsadh,  
 biodh an fhàinne againne na gealladh  
 den t-saoghal a bhios againn, far am beannaicht'  
 an gaol a th' aig gach dithis is iad còmhla;  
 biodh a h-òr na shamhla de mo dhòchas  
 nach fhada a-nis gus am faigh sinn ceartas,  
 nach tèid sùil a thoirt air gaol le amharas,  
 gur urrainn nochdach gun eagal fòirneart.

Seasaidh a bann nach brist 'son a' cheangal  
 a tha eadarainn, 's a mhaireas a-chaidh,  
 air a chruthachadh le gaol 's chan ann le ealain.

Gu ruige an latha sin, gabhaibh mo dhàn  
 a tha làn mhearachdan, ach na laoidh  
 don latha air am bi sinn coileanta, slàn.



Young writers

## CALLUM HENDERSON

Callum Henderson is your typical skinny, misanthropic, cynical young writer with a stupid haircut, a poor self-image and a flair for stories with bad language in them. You'll have to forgive this paragraph for being slightly tedious and neurotic, but he's not used to descriptions of himself that aren't angst-ridden confessions from the back of a therapist's chair.

He's currently eighteen years old, which is a lot less exciting than it sounds. You know those kids on *Skins* and *One Tree Hill*? The ones who go through these daily rollercoaster rides of adolescence: the sex, the crime, the drug-taking and drinking? The adrenaline-fuelled, sexuality-driven excitement of youth? Callum's life has had that stuff liposuctioned out.

Callum has recently left school and is going to study Creative Writing and Journalism at Strathclyde University in Glasgow. He likes watching films and TV with his friends; spending too long on the most childish, bizarre and weird parts of internet; and the blood-soaked catharsis of a hard day's video-gaming.

He wishes that he had cool backstory, like that his parents were murdered by bad fan-fiction authors, or that he was bitten by a radioactive book. The truth is a lot simpler: he just loves to write.

# Ghost Story

**T**

he night was silent and frostbitten; still as a limp corpse, save for a banshee wind shuddering through bushes and shaking the branches of trees. With each sighing breeze crinkled leaves danced and flapped like loose brown envelopes, tumbling and skipping over the stiff grass. An iron weathercock perched on top of the steeple turned this way and that, and the sombre gravestones lay in the chapel graveyard; marble, sandstone, granite, undisturbed and grim.

Then, faintly at first, a reedy cry issued from the yard's lone apple tree. Dread clouds began to gather above, strange mists begin to rise. The lonesome call picked up volume and strength, and from out of the smoky fog, emerged a white ethereal figure, pale as death, shining like a star, wailing a wail as heart-stopping as a scream from hell itself.

“Ooooooooooh. Oooooooooohhhh!”

Suddenly a second shimmering being stepped out of the shifting mist, younger in appearance and more gaunt in its features, gliding soundlessly towards the chapel.

“Ummm right yeah Wooooaaah,” moaned the second figure, without much enthusiasm.

“Ooooooh-Oi! Here you! Hang on a minute now!”

The thinner spirit stopped guiltily in its tracks, and turned to face the other.

“What the hell are you playing at?” asked the first apparition, hobbling towards the intruder, shaking an incorporeal fist.

The younger figure shrugged nervously. He had the appearance of a young man, maybe eighteen years old, wearing a hoodie, t-shirt, jeans and trainers, a silver bloodstain leaking from his skinny chest.

“Nothing... just... hanging out... you know—”

“Hanging my arse! You were *haunting!* Trying to haunt my chapel!” The first ghost fumed, his haggard features (or at least, formerly haggard features) bristled with righteous indignation. This spirit was a once much older man, perhaps in his sixties, with tweed trousers and jacket, a flat cap perched on top of his head.

“So? What if I was?” the teen answered, already wishing that he’d tried manifesting in the abandoned cottage down the road. But the chapel had a certain B-movie charm, and its creepiness had drawn him to it, with its crumbling stonework and ivy-covered walls. It seemed like the sort of place he was expected to be. The perfect place for a fresh, young spook to start a new afterlife.

What he hadn’t expected was this old baggage to have been squatting. This was rapidly turning out to be more trouble than it was worth.

“It’s a free country isn’t it?”

“Not in the afterlife it’s not Sonny Jim! You can bugger off! This is my turf!”

“Says who? Did you visit an estate agent? Got a mortgage, have you?”

“Mortgage? A mortgage means ‘till death!’ I don’t think I’m eligible, do you?”

The old ghost began to pace up and down.

“Don’t you know I am? I’m Wailing Wullie!” Wailing Wullie wailed, true to form.

“I’m practically a local legend! All the kids used to dare each other to try it on with me! I’m a respected figure in the post-mortem community!”

“Well I’ve never heard of you! So you can push off, or float off, or teleport or whatever.”

“You cheeky wee scunner! You’d better just watch it before I.”

“Before you what? Start a wrestling match?”

“What would a kid like you even do with digs like this? You’re not even scary-looking! Probably died a virgin.”

The boy’s face contorted with rage.

“Listen you tosser, the worst has already happened to me! Don’t even get me started on what kind of day I’m having! Now leave me alone!”

The boy tried to rest against the tree, fell right through it, and landed noiselessly on the grass.

“Ow!” he yelped, more out of habit than from pain, and waved a fist at the twisting branches.

It began to rain.

The older poltergeist sighed, or at least he made the sound of someone sighing. Sighing is difficult when you don’t breathe. He scratched the faint memory of his head, stubby fingers passing effortlessly through the cap. The boy flinched. He was still getting used to the ins and outs of undeath.

At least he didn’t have to worry about losing his lunch.

“What’s your name, son?”

“Gavin,” the boy answered.

“How did you... you know... pass away, Gav?”

“Car accident,” answered Gavin sulkily. “Girlfriend dumped me and I got drunk. I tried to drive back home and my car went all shaky. Next thing I know I wake up like this. I was looking for a toilet for three hours before I remembered I don’t need to piss anymore!”

There was a pause. Wullie shifted awkwardly. Despite what poets might tell you, the dead hate silence as much as the living. It makes them restless, or more restless than the restless dead are already. Wullie thought about patting Gavin on the shoulder, then thought

better of it, tried to clear his throat, then remembered that this was a technical impossibility. He settled on just speaking.

“Look lad, I know what you’re going through. I remember when I found out I’d been brought back, I was greetin’ for days.”

Wullie neglected to mention that his insubstantial tears were caused by discovering that he had stood to win £1,000 on a horse, and would have received his money if he’d stayed alive for another twenty-four hours.

However, that was not to say he’d been free of emotional baggage. He could empathise.

“It’s no forever, being like this. Just a matter of waiting for The Reaper. I’ve had some mates that have moved on. Just got tae be patient is all.”

Gavin nodded.

“But two ghosts can’t share the one haunting ground, lad. It never works having a room-mate, take it from me. I tried it with old Liz Etting twenty years back. Even dead she still smelled of shite.”

Midway through the sentence, Wullie realised that fond though his memories might be, they weren’t helping.

“I worked hard for this place you know,” he continued, “this is a fine old building. Look at that gothic masonry will you? I was out here, every night, seven days a week, scaring punters shitless before I could call this mine.”

There was silence. Wullie reached into his shining white pocket and picked out a lighter. He took out what must have been a pack of cigarettes he’d died with, picked one of five, lit it, drew in the smoke, and blew it out, watching it coil and mingle with his own blurry outline.

“How did you go?” asked Gavin quietly after a time.

“Killed ma’self,” answered Wullie, without passion or emotion. “Wife died of cancer, so I hung ma’self. It wiz stupid of me but there ya are.”

“I’m sorry,” said Gavin, who was thinking of his own last moments,

when the silver bonnet of his car had crumpled like paper in front of his eyes and the windshield had raced to meet him.

“What for?” said Wullie. “You didn’t kill her.”

“I know,” said Gavin, hopelessly, “but I’m sorry.”

Silence fell upon them, smothering all conversation.

“You know,” Wullie piped up eventually, “I’ve smoked this same pack of cigarettes every night for thirty-two years, and I’ve never once finished it.”

“Careful. Those things can kill you,” said Gavin.

“Hey, I try to live dangerously.” Wullie chuckled.

“Aye, there a few perks with this job, lad.”

“Like what?”

“Like...” Wullie paused. “One time a lassie and her man started goin at it on a Friday night. I blew a gust of wind up her skirt. The sight kept me warm below for a good few nights, I can tell you.”

Gavin looked wistful.

“Plus you can get intae clubs for free,” Wullie continued.

“That’s true. And no taxes either.”

“Aye, some things are more certain than others it’s true,” Wullie agreed.

“I saw my mum speaking to the coroner today,” said Gavin “She was talking about having Elton John at the funeral. I mean *Elton John* for God’s sake! I told her if I ever snuffed it I wanted Korn, but she never listens. I wanted to get to donate myself to medical science, but I was scared that the students would laugh at my tackle.”

There was another long pause.

“There’s so much I don’t know,” murmured Gavin quietly.

Wullie looked thoughtful.

“Look Gavin, you seem like you’ve a good head on your shoulders. If you’ve really nowhere else to go, ach, I dunno, how about you stay here with me a bit. I’ll show you the ropes till you find your feet.”

Gavin beamed at him, pale eyes shining even brighter.

“What, like an apprenticeship?” he asked.

“Aye, aye, like an apprenticeship.”

“Oh, thank you Wullie, thank you! You don’t know what this means!”

“Shake on it, lad.”

There was a pause.

“Well... don’t really... you know what I mean.”

Suddenly three very solid, very corporeal shapes clambered over the red brick wall and dropped heavily onto the grass. They wore baseball caps, tracksuits, and each held a can of-

“Spray paint!” Wullie exclaimed, shaking with fury. “The gallous wee bastards!”

“Vandals?” asked Gavin.

“Aye. Vandals.”

Wullie stood up, his grin a manic, leering crescent, his face a mask of terrible vengeance.

“Come on, lad. Let’s give them a haunting to remember!”



## **AMBER KENNEDY**

Amber was born on 26th December 1993 and lived in Kilmarnock until she was nine, after which time she moved to the Orkney Isles, where she currently lives. She is studying drama, English and French at school. Other than writing fiction, her primary interests are reading, blogging, and both creating and listening to music. She also enjoys poetry, contemporary art and theatre, and is often inspired by film. Until the Scottish Book Trust Young Writers Awards, the main outlet for her writing has been the internet.

# Going On Extinct

**O**

ne morning she is a rock star and her name is Arielle, the last part drawn out like she's from someplace different, ay-ree-ell-eh. She prints it on her arm in felt-tip. Then she steps out the house and takes the biggest strides and looks up, up at the sky. She doesn't need to see faces around her; she could see a face any time she wanted. No. The sky is full of endless colour. She sings to the empty town at 4 a.m. She sings with her body, flinging every part of herself up into the atmosphere. There is love in her veins.

Arielle is a miracle. Arielle is a lie that is yet to become true.

A window opens and a man sticks out his head, eyes bleary, voice sleep rough as he yells, "Can you keep it down?" He thinks she's a drunken kid out alone. The sun is nearly rising. There's a telling tinge of red on the horizon and the sky is brighter than it has been.

"All right, sorry."

He disappears. The window closes. Silently, she dances home.

Silvee opens her eyes in the late afternoon with no words to sing, but a violent, melancholy desire, and is a groupie who wears chains around her neck and bracelets up to her elbows. I am Silvee, Silvee Scandalous.

She sprays her hair and paints her face until she's not herself anymore but a cartoon, a caricature. Blows kisses at her reflection and lipstick comes off on her fingertips. Dances, eyes closed, to the music drifting from the stereo. Imagines that the voice that's singing out (singing everything she couldn't have put into words herself) is right there at her ear. She can feel the closeness. She can feel the breath on her neck. And she feels beautiful, beautiful, beautiful.

She opens her eyes again. She has her arms outstretched, hands snatching at air. Her reflection is an absurdity, paralysed with its head tipped, anticipating a much-imagined touch.

She unfreezes. She gives up.

She is ugly, ugly, ugly. Strip off. Strip everything off. All falls to the floor. Her sixteen-year-old back is already scarred. Not enough. She takes her hair down. There she is. She's shrunken. Her skin is pockmarked and sagging. Her ribs protrude like she's sick.

She's very aware of her heart beating.

She says out loud, "*You are a pretender.*"

She hides in her bed.

The relentless glamour, the fame, the screaming, the fierce hot claustrophobic sweating miserable passionate shuddering noise is perfect for some people, but not this girl here, this plain Jane Smith of a girl, under whose feet the kitchen tiles are cool, and she, right here, is concentrating wholly on squeezing the little tube of icing, shaping whimsical flowers on top of each tiny cake. She is creating something tangible. She is something tangible, and she is warm with that knowledge.

Passion is not always unpredictable. She lives as a lover.

She wakes up a boy.

*He.* He wakes up. His name is Jim. Three letters. A name he'd always liked.

It occurs that nothing matters. Not love. Not what people say. Not how he looks. Not what the girls think. Just what he does, just that he proves himself. That he keeps on living. He keeps his head up as he runs around the block and passes cars and gardens and litter and hedges and cats peering wide-eyed around the sides of bins, each image bright behind his eyelids when he blinks. He's short of breath but he focuses on the rhythm – in, *two three*, out, *two three*, in, *two three*, out – and he feels that he will live forever.

He doesn't care, is the thing. At this moment everything is falling away. He picks up his pace, bouncing along the pavement, trainers hitting hard. It's faster and faster and there's sweat building on his lower back. He smoothly turns a corner. He collides.

The girl is one he kind-of knows. Muted apologies. Nervous laughter, a little too loud. His body folds, if not visibly.

"How are you?"

Invincible. Mortal.

"Fine."

She is all gentle, fluid movements, skin glowing in the sun. He cannot look. She is past and so is he. His body is heaving with exertion. His torso is soft with matchstick limbs. Sweat. His neck is tired.

He falls forth like a dying sunflower.

God loves her. Jesus loves her.

Life means nothing.

She is Juliet and this is the greatest of love stories. Picnics, 2 a.m. texts, perfumed notes, sunrises, butterfly kisses, candlelight, whispers, chocolate truffles, secrets, a shared patchwork quilt and bruised wrists. What's the use of wond'rin' if he's good or if he's bad?

Gallons of spirits, broken syringes, stains on the wallpaper, threats,

vomit, 2 a.m. texts, second chances, missed deadlines. Something made him the way that he is.

“Darling, I love you,” he says, “we’ll get through this together.” Bonnie and Clyde. But they take care of each other. This, this right here, this is who she is. Protagonist. Wild ardent feverish beautifultragic darkeyed heroine. Juliet is what he calls her. Juliet is who she is.

This is the affair that will define her everything.

This is an affair that will ultimately come to nothing. Ophelia is drowning in her own apathy. What does she need? What does she want? She needs nothing. Only wants out, out, out. But not enough to get out of bed in the mornings. Not enough to utter the phrase “We need to talk”. She doesn’t always wash her hair any more. Valentine’s Day cards are discarded with a thank you and a smile. She’s been waiting years to figure what the formalities are leading up to. What all the handshakes and nods and polite addresses get her in the end. It’s now that she realises: nothing.

Love is a brief flash of this kind of nothing. A sleepless night here and there. Kisses, romance, a tear or two. Nothing beyond the movies.

He clings to her arm as they take simultaneous steps, as though he knows his time is running out. She doesn’t look at him because she is more than him and because she doesn’t need him. She doesn’t need love. She doesn’t need its dark, heavy hide.

This is who she is. Independent, ferocious, driven, enlightened. In it for herself because she’s just like everybody else. So why is she drowning?

Diana, goddess, observes the ceiling in the dark. Her breathing is even. She is steady, static, smiling. Her life is mapped out. She has survived the earthquakes and their aftershocks. Nothing can be worse than it has been before. She knows this. She has seen it on the TV.

Beauty comes at the price of happiness. Diana isn’t beautiful, she is

lucky. She is alone, and so may now await her happy ending, her handsome prince. The sounds of cellos and violins as her world softens around the edges.

Nothing can change that she is alone. No distraction. No minor fascination. Not even other people because she knows they aren't going to be beside her, by her body as her consciousness slips from her grasp for the last time. Dolores, her sorrows are too many to count. She has had it. It is over. Her life is mapped out. She knows her future. There's nothing ahead but more of her own company. More of her own face. More of her own ugliness.

She is an anomaly, she knows. She can see it in the way other girls exchange their secrets. Alone. She is the only one who knows. This is how life works.

One day she – the real she – falls in love.

And Arielle, Silvee, Jane, Jim, Juliet, Ophelia, Diana and Dolores don't matter anymore, when they'd been all she'd had.

## SAMANTHA MCLAREN

Samantha McLaren is seventeen and lives in Arbroath. She volunteers as a radio presenter and writes school-related articles for the *Arbroath Herald* newspaper, but her passion is fiction writing. She has had short stories published in *Sugar* and *One* magazine. In 2010, she won the Uni-ball short story competition.

# Smile

“**H**ello darlin’”

Charlie froze. Her fingers clutched the phone so tightly it hurt, but she knew she’d drop it otherwise, and he wouldn’t like that. Hanging up on him would not be wise. Not wise at all.

“You there, sweetheart?”

His tone was light and teasing, but burning just below the surface, Charlie could hear something much darker. Colder.

“I’m here,” she whispered before he could ask again. She knew from experience that he didn’t like to repeat himself.

“Thought you’d gone soft on me, babes. Thought you’d got the coppers involved. That would be an interesting turn of events, wouldn’t it, babe?”

She didn’t say anything.

His gravelly laugh was cold and hard, without a morsel of humour now.

“I think we both know it’s too late for that. Huh, babe?”

Yes, she agreed silently, closing her eyes and swallowing back tears. She didn’t want him to hear her crying.

Down the line, she heard the distinctive rustling of papers. Then his sigh. It was... appreciative. *Satisfied*. The sigh one makes when viewing a timeless piece of art, or after experiencing a fine wine. He was savouring the taste.

“Bit blurry though, ain’t they? Trying to hide something, babes? You don’t need to be afraid to show me anything. I can see it personally if I want to...”

She shuddered. She felt suddenly faint. “I... I’m sorry,” she breathed. Hot bile rose in her throat, bitter and putrid. The thought of him sitting there, wherever he was, just looking at her, touching, *stroking*...

“No matter,” he murmured distractedly, and she heard him lick his lips and sigh deeply once more. His heavy breathing filtered thickly down the line.

“Just don’t be shy next time. You and I both know that, of all your frailties, shyness is certainly not one of them.”

His words knocked the breath out of her. Her knees gave way. She sprawled ungainly on the floor, the phone still jammed against her ear.

“*Next time*,” she croaked. Hysteria threatened to overwhelm her. “You... You promised that was it. You said it was *just that one time*, and then you’d leave me alone!”

His soft, icy laughter clawed at her.

“You didn’t fulfil your end of the bargain,” he hissed. His throaty voice was devoid of all compassion. “Besides, you forget what I know. What if I should let slip to the police about your filthy little secrets? Do you want to go to prison, Charlie?”

If she’d thought his laugh was cold before, the noise he made now was frozen solid.

“What can you do to stop me?”

And as much as she hated to admit it, he was right. She was helpless. She was his.

Charlie stared at the maths exam. The maths exam stared back. Just as impenetrable as it had been last time she'd glanced at it; just as hopeless as when she'd entered the room.

Martin leaned towards to her desk, conspicuously glancing at the teacher first, and whispered: "Need a hand?"

Charlie shook her head slowly. Tears welled in her eyes. Crying in a maths exam. That was a new low, she thought. But every time she thought of those photos, and of the blood and the fire and the shovel and... Every fraction of the subject trickled away. The exam didn't matter anyway, she figured. Her life was already over. What good would pi do her now?

"You okay, Charlie?"

She glanced up into his concerned face. She'd known him only a month since he'd appeared one day in the seat neighbouring hers in maths, but she couldn't help but smile whenever he was around. Not to mention the fact that he had a seemingly fathomless supply of cannabis, and that he quite clearly worshiped the ground she walked on. He was not conventionally good-looking, what with the massive round eyes which seemed to take up most of his face, the dimples, and the tight golden curls which gave the impression of an overgrown cherub. But he was kind of cute, in a weird way. And he was so lovely. And so fun. So trusting, and trustworthy. She wished she could trust him with this secret, but there were things she didn't want even her most trustworthy of friends to know. Lots of things, these days.

"Martin Stevenson, are you cheating?"

Martin was back in his seat so fast he could have outrun a speeding bullet. His guilty innocence was amusing even to Charlie, numb as she was.

"No, miss."

"Then Charlotte was cheating?"

Martin didn't even hesitate. "No, it was me. I was stuck."

The teacher pursed her lips. "This is a test, Mr Stevenson, and it is

designed to see how well you are doing. Not how much you can copy from Miss Foster's paper. See me after class."

"Yes, miss."

When she was sure the teacher's nose was thoroughly burrowed in the crossword section of *The Times* again, Charlie turned to Martin and mouthed sorry. He winked. *No problem.*

She waited for him after class. Fifteen minutes after the bell, when the shouting had faded to a soft but savage snarl, Martin strolled from the room and met her with a broad grin. They ambled down the deserted corridor, content in each other's silence. Finally, Charlie asked:

"How bad was it?"

Martin chuckled. "I'll be spending the next month on the rack by the sound of it."

She whistled. "Sorry 'bout that."

"I think it's kinda kinky. Gotta say, I'm not completely dreading it."

She punched him playfully. It was so easy to be around Martin. Being in his company was like being dosed slowly with a potent sedative. The knowledge of the bad thing which she had done, and the sickening lengths she was going to protect that knowledge, were tucked away neatly in a little locked drawer when she was with Martin. If only she could keep herself from ever finding the key.

"You okay?" he asked quietly, for the second time that day. His angelic face was creased with worry. She wanted to cry and confess to him; to let him tell her it would all be okay. But she couldn't.

"Fine," she mumbled.

"You're not fine," he pointed out softly. "Let me help."

"I'm fine," she said, a little more forcefully. "See you tomorrow."

And with that she walked away, aware of him watching her every move.

Her mother wasn't home. She was both relieved and dismayed. Her

mother would not be able to walk in on her, to see what she was doing and stop her. And that was both necessary and regrettable.

She locked the door behind her and slipped up the stairs. She showered for a long time, standing under the scorching water until her skin was raw and red. When she finally turned off the water and stared at her naked form in the mirror, the dirt of her sin still clung to her.

She left her hair wet and her make-up smudged around her eyes. She wasn't going to dress up for him like a whore. Every move felt sluggish as she wrapped herself in her bathrobe and picked up her camera. She longed for the blissful tranquillity Martin induced in her. A sudden impulse told her to call him. She picked up the phone. She put it down again.

She was careful not to blur the photos this time. She broke down in tears at one point and had to spend a few minutes pulling herself back together. If she tried hard enough, she could almost convince herself that she was like a model. All models did shoots they weren't proud of, right?

But models were given substantial sums of money for prancing and posing and showing things that needn't be shown. All she got was a sleepless night of choking sobs, and a terrifying urge to kill herself.

It was dark when she finished. She dressed quickly in tracksuit bottoms and a baggy sweatshirt, desperate to cover up her body. It was over, she told herself firmly as she loaded the photos onto her computer, turning away in disgust and horror as she saw her frigid, hesitant body twisted and pale and unnatural. She couldn't understand why anybody would want to touch themselves over such pictures. But then, maybe she just didn't want to understand.

The phone rang.

Her stomach churned in fear, but she snatched up the phone defiantly and answered before it could ring twice.

"Hello." It was not a question.

“Charlie...” His voice was velvet, caught in the tangles of barbed wire.  
 “How are you, beautiful?”

“I’m just about to send them. You don’t need to check up on me.”

He chuckled. “I’m not checking up on you. I just wanted to see you.”

Horror clutched at her. See her. Not hear her. *See her.*

“Look out of your window, Charlie.”

With trembling fingers, she reached up and twitched back the curtain. For a moment, all she could see was a wash of darkness, blotted and blurred in places with the distant lights of houses and streetlights and the pinpricks of stars.

But then her eyes began to adjust, and she could just make out the silhouette of a man peeling out of the black.

He was standing in front of her house. And he was waving.

“Go away,” she breathed, strangled. “Please. Leave me alone. I’ll send the photos. I’ll do anything. Just leave me alone!”

His laughter was like broken glass.

“No.”

“I’m calling the police!” she screamed down the phone, the anger and horror she’d bottled up for nearly a fortnight finally overflowing. “I don’t care if I get into trouble anymore!”

“Oh, but you do,” he said slowly, rationally, with the eternal patience of a man who knows he has won unconditionally. “If they found out you killed that man, you’d spend the next twenty years in prison. And we wouldn’t want that, would we?”

Hearing him say the words felt like a knife in her back. For a long moment, she was completely paralysed. Then the dreadful memories overwhelmed her, and the agony of what she had done was far, far worse.

She’d been driving illegally. She was taking lessons and was perfectly capable... But she’d been smoking pot and was high as a kite when she borrowed her mother’s car while the woman worked the nightshift.

The memories of that night tangled into a drug-addled snare which she could barely decipher until...

Until she'd hit the man.

She didn't know who he was or why he was there on that dark country road when she'd so stupidly... But when she'd realised he was dead, she hadn't cared about him at all. Her only decipherable thoughts had been of handcuffs and prison and...

Still high, hysterical, she'd buried him in a shallow grave in the dense woodland behind her lonely house. She remembered the shovel and the sweat and the long, long night of digging and crying and... The car with its smashed windscreen had wound up on fire on the outskirts of town. She didn't remember driving it there, but she must have. *Bloody kids joyriding*, the police had told her mother. Nobody suspected. Nobody knew...

But then the calls started.

It wasn't just that he knew about the... the murder. He knew *everything*. He knew who she was. He knew what the man had looked like. He even knew *exactly* where the body was buried.

And all he'd asked in return for his heavenly silence was just a few meagre photos.

"Please," she choked, sobbing uncontrollably. "Please. Just go away."

Outside, her stalker smiled slowly. Dimples dented his cherubic face. He brushed his golden curls away from his eyes, and began to walk up her garden path. He couldn't believe she didn't remember his lips on the joint, his hands on the shovel... He couldn't believe his luck. His beautiful, precious *Charlie*...

Gently, caressingly, he removed the knife from his belt.

"No."

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