

The New Writers Awards

Each year, Scottish Book Trust works with a carefully selected group of writers who have yet to publish a full-length work. Awardees receive a bursary, as well as a tailored package including mentoring, performance training, time at a writers' retreat and advice on promoting their work. We also work in partnership with the Gaelic Books Council to provide an additional two places on the programme to writers working in Gaelic.

We gratefully acknowledge Creative Scotland's continued financial support of this opportunity.

We are also hugely grateful to the family and friends of Callan Gordon, whose generous support has allowed an additional writer a place on our programme.

We'd particularly like to thank the Scottish Poetry Library for their continued involvement with this project.

Scottish Book Trust believes that books and reading have the power to change lives.

We work to inspire and support the people of Scotland to read and write for pleasure.

We give free books to every child in Scotland to ensure families of all backgrounds can share the joy of books at home.

We work with teachers to inspire children to develop a love of reading, creating innovative classrooms activities, book awards and author events programme.

We support Scotland's diverse writing community with our training, awards and writing opportunities.

We fund a range of author events for the public to enjoy and promote Scottish writing to people worldwide.

New Writing

From Scottish Book Trust's
Writer Development Programme



scottishbooktrust.com

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Foreword

Creative Scotland funds the New Writers Awards because they make such a tangible difference to emerging writers in Scotland.

The team at Scottish Book Trust are committed to nurturing new talent and through the New Writers Awards offer considerable support which enables the creative growth of the awardees.

Many writers seek 'time to write' but the package offered through the awards offers so much more - bespoke mentoring, retreat time and development training. Essentially the awards help writers acquire the range of skills required in the contemporary literary world by offering constructive critical advice on the craft and content of work, training so writers feel equipped to promote and speak about their work, and the time and space that are so essential to really focus on writing. Being part of a network of other new writers is another strength of the programme and offers an important opportunity for writers to connect with one another.

Throughout the history of the awards it has been exciting to see support translated into genuine creative development; thanks to the diligent efforts of SBT we have seen previous awardees flourish and grow. This book showcases the work of the talented writers who benefitted from the 2013 awards. Their work spans a range of styles but, without exception, all of the writing demonstrates a high degree of artistic excellence, creativity and skill. We look forward to reading the work they will produce in the future.

Emma Turnbull, Creative Scotland

Introduction

Each year, Scottish Book Trust has the privilege of working with some of Scotland's most exciting new talent through the New Writers Awards.

In 2014, we worked with panels of professional writers including Liz Lochhead, Jenni Fagan and Alan Bissett to select the most promising writers from hundreds of applicants. Each New Writer received a bursary, a week's retreat and mentoring from experienced writers such as Alan Warner, Beatrice Colin and Jacob Polley. The New Writers were trained in performing their work, press and PR. Scottish Book Trust continues to support the New Writers throughout their careers.

Many former New Writers have gone on to be published and in 2015, confirmed publishing deals include: Lucy Ribchester, *The Hourglass Factory* (Simon and Schuster); Kirstin Innes, *Fishnet* (Freight); Kirsty Logan, *The Gracekeepers* (Harvill Secker); Wayne Price, *Mercy Seat* (Freight), Pippa Goldschmidt, *The Need for Better Regulation of Outer Space* (Freight); Malachy Tallack, *Sixty Degrees North* (Polygon); and Catherine Simpson, *Truestory* (Sandstone Press).

We hope you enjoy getting to know the writers and their work as much as we have.

**Caitrin Armstrong, Head of Writer Development,
Scottish Book Trust**

**Fiction and narrative
non-fiction**

Gail Honeyman

Gail writes with a fluidity and assurance that immediately puts you at ease, knowing you are in the hands of an accomplished and skilled artist. Her prose is playfully dark, clever and compelling, with a richly textured sensuality that sets off little bombs of pleasure at regular intervals. Eleanor Oliphant leaps off the page as a fully formed character from the start and draws you into her world and you go with a delicious thrill of excited trepidation. Scottish Book Trust are to be commended for recognising a brilliant new voice in Scottish fiction.

Vicki Jarrett

Gail Honeyman's short fiction has been longlisted for BBC Radio 4's *Opening Lines*, shortlisted for the *Mslaxia* Short-Story Competition and the Bridport Prize, and published in *New Writing Scotland*. She is currently writing her first novel, the opening chapters of which were shortlisted for the 2014 Lucy Cavendish Fiction Prize. Gail received the Scottish Book Trust Next Chapter Award for an unpublished writer over the age of 40.

Eleanor Oliphant (extract)

I hadn't been expecting it to happen that night, not at all. It hit me all the harder because of that. I'm someone who likes to plan things properly, prepare in advance and be organised. This came out of nowhere; it felt like a slap in the face, a punch to the gut, a burning.

I'd asked Billy to come along with me, mainly because he was the youngest person in the office; for that reason, I assumed he'd like the music. I heard the others teasing him about it when they thought I was out at lunch, sniggering like schoolgirls. I suppose I could have gone alone. It's just that I'm very, very tired of always doing things alone. I knew nothing about the concert, hadn't heard of the band. I was going out of a sense of duty; I'd won the tickets in the charity raffle, and I knew people would ask about it when the email went round the office.

Billy had a pint and I was drinking sour white wine, warm and tainted by the plastic glasses they made us take into the hall. What savages they must think us! Billy had bought the round to thank me for inviting him. There was no question of it being a date - we looked like mother and son on an outing. I suspected he preferred boys anyway.

We got comfortable in our seats as the lights went down. Billy hadn't wanted to watch the support act, but I insisted. Everyone supported someone else at one time. You never know if you'll be bearing witness as a new star emerges; never know who's going to walk onto the stage and blow you away.

He walked onto the stage and blew me away.

Eleanor

When people ask me what I do - taxi drivers, hairdressers - I tell them I work in an office. In almost eight years, no one's ever asked what kind of office, what sort of job I do there. I can't decide whether that's because I fit perfectly with their idea of what an office worker looks like, or whether it's just that people hear the phrase *work in an office* and automatically fill in the blanks themselves - lady doing photocopying, man tapping at a keyboard. I'm not complaining. I'm delighted that I don't have to get into the fascinating intricacies of accounts receivable with them.

It's definitely a two-tier system in the office; the creatives are the A team, the rest of us merely supporting artists. You can tell just by looking at us which category we fall into. To be fair, part of that is salary related. The back office staff get paid a pittance, and so we can't afford much in the way of sharp haircuts and big nerdy glasses. Clothes, music, gadgets - although the designers are desperate to be seen as freethinkers with unique ideas, they adhere to a strict uniform - both the men and the women - with their skinny jeans, their artfully scuffed brogues.

I don't have much to do with them, really. I could be issuing invoices for anything, when I come to think about it, any old goods and services; exporting armaments, or selling Rohypnol in plain packaging. Graphic design and graphic designers are of no interest to me. I'm thirty-three years old now and I've been working here since I was twenty-five. Ken, the owner, took me on, not long after the office opened. I suppose he felt sorry for me. I had a first-class degree in Classics and no work experience to speak of, and turned up for the

interview with a black eye, a couple of missing teeth and a broken arm. I suppose he must have sensed, back then, that I would never aspire to anything more than a poorly paid office job, that I would be content to stay with the company and save him the bother of ever having to recruit a replacement. Perhaps he could also tell that I'd never need to take time off to go on honeymoon, or request maternity leave. I don't know.

I get an hour for lunch. I used to bring in my own sandwiches, but the food at home always went off before I could use it up, so now I alternate between Boots, M&S and Greggs. I sit in the staff room with my sandwich and read the newspaper from cover to cover, and then I do the crosswords. I take the *Daily Telegraph*, not because I like it, but because it has the best cryptic crossword. I go back to my desk and work till 5.30 p.m. The bus home takes half an hour.

I make supper, and after I've washed up I read a book, or sometimes I watch TV if there's a programme that the *Telegraph* has recommended. Mummy phones on a Wednesday evening, and I'll talk to her for quarter of an hour or so. Sometimes I have a bath, listening to the radio - there's almost always something interesting on, although I don't enjoy the programmes about personal finance or disability issues. I go to bed around ten, read for half an hour and then put the light out. I don't have trouble sleeping, as a rule.

On Friday evenings, I go to the Tesco Metro around the corner and buy a margherita pizza, some Chianti and two big bottles of vodka. When I get home, I eat the pizza and drink the wine. I have some vodka afterwards. I don't need much. I usually wake up on the sofa, always around 3 a.m., and stumble to bed. I drink the rest of the vodka

over the weekend, spread it over both days so that I'm neither drunk nor sober. Monday takes a long time to come around.

Everyone's so busy now, I do understand that. When my phone rings, it's always, without exception, either Mummy making her Wednesday call, or people asking if I've been mis-sold PPI. I talk to my Mummy. I whisper '*I know where you live*' to the PPI people, and hang up the phone very, very gently.

No one's been in my flat this year; I've not had another human being across the threshold. You'd think that would be impossible, wouldn't you? It's true, though. I do exist, don't I? It often feels like I'm not here, like I'm a figment of my own imagination. There are days when I feel so lightly connected to the earth, that the threads that tether me to the planet are gossamer thin, like spun sugar, so that a strong gust of wind could just dislodge me completely. I'd lift off and blow away, like one of those seeds in a dandelion clock.

The threads tighten from Monday to Friday. People phone me to discuss credit lines, send me emails about contracts. My colleagues would notice if I didn't turn up. After a few days (I've often wondered how many) they would worry, dig out my next-of-kin details, eventually manage to get in contact with Mummy via the relevant authorities. She'd tell them that I hadn't answered the phone on Wednesday. I suppose the police would come, wouldn't they? Find me on the sofa, their hands over their mouths, gagging at the smell? That would give them something to talk about back at the office. They hate me, but they don't actually wish me dead. I don't think so, anyway.

It was Friday. There was a palpable sense of joy in the office, everyone colluding with the lie that somehow the weekend would be amazing and that, next week, work would be different, better. They never learn. For me, though, everything had changed. I hadn't slept, but I was feeling good, better, best. That's love for you. People say that when you meet 'the one', you just know. Everything about this was right, even the fact that fate had brought us together on a Thursday night, and so now the weekend stretched ahead invitingly, full of time for new delights. One of the designers was leaving today - as usual, we'd be marking the occasion with cheap wine and expensive beer, crisps dumped in cereal bowls. Hopefully it would start early, so that I could show face and still leave on time. I had to get to the shops as a matter of urgency.

When I arrived this morning, Billy was holding court. He had his back to me, and the others were too engrossed to notice me come in.

'She's a nutter,' he said.

'That was never in doubt.' Janey shrugged. 'What's she done this time?'

Billy snorted. 'The support, right, was this guy Johnnie something. He wasn't bad, mostly played his own stuff, some covers too. She absolutely *hated* it. She just sat there frozen; didn't move, didn't clap, anything. At the interval she said she needed to go home - no explanation. So she didn't even get to see the band in the end, and I had to sit there on my own, like, literally, Billy No Mates.'

'That's a shame, Billy. I know you were wanting to take her for a drink afterwards, maybe go clubbing,' Loretta said, nudging him.

'You're so funny, Loretta. No, she was off like a shot. She'd have been tucked up in bed with a cup of cocoa and

a copy of *Take a Break* before the band had even finished their set.'

'Oh,' said Janey, 'I don't see her as a *Take a Break* reader, somehow. It'd be something much weirder, much more random. *Angling Times? What Caravan?*'

'*Gimp Monthly*,' said Billy firmly, 'and she's got a subscription.' They all sniggered.

I laughed myself at that one, actually.

I don't know much about technology, but I need to get my hands on some urgently. I suppose I could come into the office during the weekend and use one of the computers, but there's a high risk that someone else will be around and ask what I'm doing. It's not like I'd be breaking any rules but, frankly, it's no one else's business. Plus, I can do other things at home at the same time, like cook a trial menu for our first dinner together. Mummy told me, years ago, that men go absolutely crazy for sausage rolls. The way to a man's heart, she said, is a homemade sausage roll - hot flaky pastry, good quality meat. I've never made a sausage roll.

I'm so stressed about the computer problem that I end up in Greggs instead of M&S at lunchtime, even though it's the wrong day. There's a poster of a sausage roll in the window, and I wonder if that's what made me do it. I choose a macaroni pie. I eat it on a bench in the car park. Eating it in the street feels daring, and rather continental. No sandwich, no crossword. He's already changing my life in so many ways.

The leaving do starts at 4.30 p.m., and I leave at 4.59 p.m. and walk as fast as I can into town. I head straight into the first big department store I see, and take the lift to the electrical department. A young man with a name badge

is staring at the giant TV screens, and I tell him that I want to buy a computer. He looks scared. 'Desktop, laptop or tablet?' he asks. I tell him I have no idea what he is talking about.

'I haven't bought a computer before, Declan,' I explain. 'I'm a very inexperienced computer consumer.' He pulls at the collar of his shirt, as though trying to free his enormous Adam's apple from its constraints. He has the look of a gazelle or an impala, one of those boring beige animals with large, round eyes near the sides of its face - the kind of animal that always gets eaten by a leopard in the end.

We get off to a rocky start. What will I be using it for? he asks.

'None of your bloody business,' I snap, before I can stop myself. He looks like he might cry and then I feel bad. He's only young. I touch his arm, even though I hate touching, and tell him how sorry I am, that I'm a bit anxious because it's absolutely imperative that I get a computer and am able to go online this weekend. He still looks scared. Eventually, we agree that I need a laptop and a little gadget to allow me mobile internet access. I hand over my card.

When I get home, slightly giddy at how much money I've spent, I realise that there's nothing to eat. Friday is pizza day, of course, but my routine is being rewritten. I recall that I have a flyer somewhere, one that was put through my letter box a while ago. The prices are ridiculous, and I actually laugh out loud at them. The Piccolo pizza - six slices - is £9.99! In Tesco Metro, the pizza costs a quarter of that price.

But I'll go for it. Yes, it's extravagant, and indulgent, but why not? Life should be about trying new things, exploring boundaries. It's what He'd do. The pizza will

apparently be with me in fifteen minutes, and I brush my hair and put the kettle on in case the delivery man wants a cup of tea. They told me on the phone how much it would cost and I've looked out the money, put it in an envelope, written *Pizza Pronto* on the front. I wondered whether it was the done thing to tip, and wished I had someone to ask. Mummy wouldn't know. She doesn't get to decide what she eats.

The flaw with the pizza delivery plan was the wine. They didn't deliver it, the man on the phone said, actually sounded quite amused that I'd asked. Strange - what could be more normal than pizza and wine? I never go out alone in the hours of darkness, so I couldn't see how I was going to get anything to drink. I really needed something to drink.

In the end, the pizza experience was extremely disappointing. The man had simply thrust a box into my hand and taken the envelope, which he ripped open right in front of me. I heard him mutter '*fuck's sake*' under his breath as he counted the coins. I had been collecting 50-pence pieces in a little ceramic dish, and this had seemed the perfect opportunity to use them up. I'd popped an extra one in for him, but received no thanks for it. Rude.

The pizza was greasy, the dough flabby and tasteless. I will never eat delivered pizza again, and definitely not with Him. If we ever find ourselves in need of pizza and too far from a Tesco Metro, one of two things will happen. One: we will take a black cab into town and eat pizza at a lovely Italian restaurant. Two: He will make pizza for us both, from scratch. He will mix the dough, stretching and kneading it with those long, tapered fingers until it does what He wants. He'll stand at the

cooker, simmering tomatoes with fresh herbs, reducing them to a rich sauce, slick and slippery with a sheen of olive oil. He'll be wearing his oldest, most comfortable jeans, the ones that sit snugly on his slim hips, bare feet tapping as he sings softly to himself. When He's assembled the pizza, topped it with artichokes and fennel shavings, He'll come and find me, take me by the hand and lead me into the kitchen where He's set the table, a little dish of gardenias in the centre, tea lights flickering through coloured glass. He'll slowly ease the cork from a bottle of Barolo with a long, satisfying pop, then pull out my chair for me. Before I can sit, He'll take me in his arms and kiss me, His arms around my waist, pulling me so close that I can feel the pulse of blood in Him, smell the sweet spiciness of His skin and the warm sugar of his breath.

Synopsis

No one has been in Eleanor Oliphant's flat this year, not even the gas man. The things Eleanor loves include crosswords, *The Aeneid* and litre bottles of Smirnoff, especially if they're on special offer. Things Eleanor hates: teabags, touching, Mummy.

Eleanor is in love with Johnnie. She is certain that he's her soulmate; unfortunately, they've never actually met. Eleanor is a very strange person, but she's not a bad person... is she?

Martin MacInnes

I haven't read anything quite like Martin's fiction. He writes with verve, craft and intelligence, tackling ambitious themes - such as existence, identity and our perceptions of reality - with imagination and well-timed doses of humour. Without pretension, he leads his reader, and his characters, towards truths and answers that they hope exist, but perhaps don't. He is alert to the poetic, playful possibilities of fields such as microbiology, forensics and anthropology; the reader marvels at the strange details of the science he writes about, all the time wondering, with good reason, what is real and what has been made up.

Sarah Ream

Martin MacInnes is from Inverness and lives in Edinburgh. He received degrees from the University of Stirling and the University of York, winning the Edward and Thomas Lunt Prize for his thesis on Virginia Woolf, before working and travelling in West Africa. In 2013 he read at the Edinburgh Book Festival and was published in four magazines. In 2014 he wrote for nine print magazines, read at the Lake of Stars festival in Malawi, and won the £10,000 Manchester Fiction Prize. He is interested in natural history and modernism, and is close to completing his first novel and a collection of stories.

Forest (extracts)

Entering a space via one door and exiting another is considered provocative and potentially dangerous. Concealed doors strip witnesses of power. It is more orderly to advertise your exit, minimising the risk of confusion or misunderstanding. Stories grow around people who come in and never leave but who cannot be located. One tradition states that the missing person has stretched themselves hugely, covering the whole of the room, their tissue made into a texture so fine that it can't be seen. Those walls are never painted. People associated with the vanished are encouraged to visit and whisper secret pleas and promises in order to encourage the return to a human size. Men and women wail as the walls degrade. He should have come out of that door.

His anxiety, stress, happiness and depression were products manufactured by microscopic technology originating in his gut. Hormones were secreted and transferred to his brain by large numbers of protozoa. His swimming in electric fields of fear and despair was at the same time a rudimentary chemical process. All of the life-worn meaning of his troubles was reduced to the cool flat motion of infinitesimal creatures. He considered what the world was and what he was in it and was inevitably undermined by the fact he had been built. He wanted to get out but remained attendant at his desk. The day passed and the journeys resumed and he was lightened by the first feel of new air and the levity of energy spent. The extension of the lit sky in April and the accumulation of immensity. The buildings softer in new

light. The first real warmth of the year causing him to walk more slowly on the last part home.

His stress levels were directly related to the form of his bacteria and so as they alternated he did too. He could pour in a vial that would change them and he would become someone different.

Some days he lost himself progressively. Fitting into the architecture, the furnishings, the objects he had brought with him and the work that he was doing, he became harder to see. In an otherwise unpopulated room there is a mouth resting closed and occasionally opening, held weightless above a desk. Where the rest of him was is nothing. First the light moved through him and then slowly everything did and then he wasn't there.

We find prints of his finger upon the entire perimeter, every centimetre of the walls; we picture him running his hands along them, sceptical of the room's integrity, checking, obsessively, the fixity of the boards that maintained, for the moment, his private space. The lock installed on the inner door shows corruption of its steel parts - he yanked and pulled on it, unconsciously testing the surety of the enclosure, as if every time he turned away the door was liable to fall open behind him.

There are recurrent parallels between the various wall-like processes of his body and the places he lived. Our intrusion in his office space unpleasantly echoes the colonising of his gut by bacteria and the last rising and falling of his chest. The trauma indicated in the reconstructions of his body indicates loss of confidence in certain foundational structures or propositions, such as: the integrity of skin; the solidity of ground; the reliability of memory; the inflexibly core self; the predictability of weather and economics; the blood-brain

barrier; the universality of a compass; the idea that there is a definitive point at which the outermost cells on the eye surface end and the ambient environment begins.

Less than optimally functioning intercostal muscles, consistent with the pressures placed on the chest and abdominal regions, led to an inability to produce long sentences, stress final words or raise volume mid-speech. The movement of his ribs around his neck axis, as he breathed, was limited in its arc. Generally his stationing almost exclusively within the bounds of his office during the day, and in his home by evening and through the night, led to muscle atrophy more typically seen in the decreased muscle-mass of persons between sixty and seventy years of age. Muscle strength has lessened anywhere between thirty and forty per cent. By these and other means his atrophy was accelerated, the onset of his final disappearance beginning with his first day present in the office.

He disintegrated slowly, over a period of many years and while in motion of a sort, his forearms bearing the weight of his hands on the keyboard, his head turning to each side, his back fixed more firmly to the chair. Occasionally he could be seen walking through the atrium and the corridors adjoining the cafeteria and the restrooms. Even near the end he walked out to the lake in all weather. Increasingly there was less of him.

A drawn-out process first of marbling, maceration and finally putrefaction took place while he maintained a low level of activity at his desk and in his essential domestic functions.

Skin cells and clothing fibre are detected across the topography of the building and the surrounding environment. Self-produced corrosive enzymes slowly digested the gastrointestinal tract. First the skin was

imbibed in water, then the blood vessels turned their colour and the whole body bloated via the accumulation of subcutaneous gas. The skin organ emerged as a loose sheet capable of slipping on or off. Inside was a set of deflated organs eating themselves and a system of billowing gas. He found it hard to meet deadlines. The process of getting up from his seat, opening the office door and moving towards the water cooler for a refreshment was as momentarily draining as a cross-continental voyage. He sweated back at his chair and the hours passed and then he was home and then he was here again, smaller, only held together by the loose shape cast in his clothes.

Significant floral and faunal interaction is established. He remains present in the trees, DNA matches recorded in traces of hair and skin in nineteen birds' nests of varying size, both by the edge of the forest on the far side of the lake and deeper in. He was partly consumed in the course of his walks. There is evidence of his de-fleshing in the trees and grasses and especially in the moulded fabric of the nests.

At this stage the figure may no longer appear three-dimensional. To all intents and purposes he is flat. There is no longer even the depth illusion caused by bloating, nor the spells of sudden movement performed by the writhing blowflies. He was more anonymous now at his desk. His absorption into the environment was almost complete. If the office had undertaken coffee-runs, bringing in outside beverages in Styrofoam trays for the men and women at their desks, then it's unlikely he would have been included. He'd been gone some time. Being the chamber below the neck and above the abdomen, containing the heart and lungs and acting with regards the latter as a bellows for air-filling, the

obliteration of the thorax definitely removes any lingering fantasies of reanimation.

You could barely rouse him from his desk. The work went on and on. The break-up of the thorax is the point at which movement ceases entirely. It would be futile to call him back. He entered as he exited, blindly. The bus journeys were a haze. The sound of the air filter low and the light bright. Watching briefly and without interest certain moments in his repeating workday. He slept and fit back into his chair and assumed his position. It was difficult to talk about it. Gastric pressures produced previously as a result of his bacterially inflamed abdomen led to unusual difficulties of breath. Simply from skin traces found on his keyboard we know he was unable to express monologue of any reasonable length or sing. Increases in utterance volume involved additional pressures on the diaphragm and abdomen, net expiratory muscle pressures leading to pains in the stomach area likely too much to bear.

He tried several times to measure air incoming and to gather it sufficiently to source speech. Occasionally noises were made inside the office, and not merely from the scuffing of his fingers against the black plastic keys. It would be difficult now, anyway, to excise the meaningful content in one continuous sound - a word - from the remainder, the words that follow. To splice that one long sound with splashes of breath and make words from it; a statement, a proposition, something meaningful and fit for presentation.

*

Something was happening to the inspector as he slept. He drifted in alternate bouts of light and heavy slumber.

At times he felt he had never been so far away; he was in the midst of such a great comfort that he never wanted to leave. Other times the sleep was shallow and he almost reached out, as if swimming just under the surface of a crystalline sea. In these latter spells he was aware of something ongoing in the room as he slept. People moving freely all around him - he can hear their footsteps, their words, even their breath - and he must finally see to it as soon as he is fully awake. He would just sleep a little more. Then he would stand up, discover what was going on, and banish the strangers from the room.

He lost something every time he woke. He determined repeatedly, all through his days and nights, to fix his suspicions in memory, to record everything around him, gather an increasing body of evidence so that finally he can present his case. But he wakes and everything is opaque again, and it is as if he must start anew, from the very beginning, each time.

He was dazzled sometimes, stopped completely in his tracks, by the sense that he was letting everything pass without apprehension, and it hurt him.

He showered cold in the morning, recorded extensive daily notes, but still he never seemed to get to the heart of the matter. He was tantalised by the desperately fading conviction that there was more - much more, everything - on the cusp of realisation, pushed just beyond his grasp. If only he could reach out further. He resorted to placing a Dictaphone on the cabinet by the left side of the bed, should he intuit something during the night and speak out, perhaps a knowledge possessed by the whole of him, including his subconscious, and that he was closer to in the night when he slept like other living things. But anything recorded, listened to in the cold light of day, was hollow, disappointing, and largely without meaning.

*

The sixth day they took him away. Carried him on a stretcher. They stopped after several hours to eat, and gave him water. They camped at night under a tarp and left again early. Soon he heard noises and realised they were nearing a village. They came on to a path that took them to a clearing. A big village, a town. There were tracks and vehicles, homes and stores selling goods. The emptiness of the space appeared wrong. The whole land stunned fresh. After all these years he had forgotten that some parts of the world were clear space. He wanted to put his arms out into it. They passed several pedestrians and no one exchanged any words. The land burned, exposed in the sun. They took him to a dark room and when he woke he could move. No one else in the room. This was all he had ever wanted; this was the end, the salvation. But it did not feel right yet. He left the room, part of a disused bar, and went out onto the main street, paraffin lamps in the storefronts the only light. He wasn't sure quite how to do it, how to begin it all, now that he was free. He went to stop on the roadside and greet people - that would make for a beginning - but for some reason no one would stop for him. Then he realised, and it was rather an easy mistake because it was quite dark and the features on the road were all similar, that he had not in fact stopped and that, further to this, he had not actually said anything yet. He smiled, nervously, told himself he was too anxious, he was overloaded - that was all, that was why he wasn't doing anything. He went to breathe slowly and deeply and told himself to concentrate. He repeated the single instruction *stop*, then *speak*, but it didn't work, nothing happened; he was apparently continuing to walk down the street side in his

new clothes, moving just like everybody else. He didn't understand. He had made himself get up and leave the room, he was certain of that, so why couldn't he follow even the simplest of instructions now? He realised he had stopped; that was a start, that was something. He stood at the end of the main street, intermittently illuminated. Beyond this everything was indistinct, a cloud of nothing.

He decided to turn back, and to his relief found he had in fact done so. Still he couldn't speak. He tried and tried but he couldn't seem to move his lips and tongue in the required way; he did not know what to do with his breath anymore, how to move it in the right way, how to send it through and make words. His mouth appeared nonchalant, resolute in doing its own thing, managing its own processes and having little to do with himself. He decided to inspect the street, the little he could see of it. The language displayed on chalkboards standing on the street side and on painted signs over storefronts and bars appeared unfamiliar. He went into a bar and then remembered he couldn't speak and that he had no money. The woman serving looked at him as if he were a nuisance, not important enough to be any trouble. Then he saw, on the counter, a pen. He took it and grabbed the newspaper laid on an empty table. Finally, he thought. Finally, in the midst of all this insanity, a way out, an opportunity, a chance to explain himself at last. He decided first to sit down, in order to properly begin. He should be comfortable, really. Then he looked for some blank space in the pages that he could write on with ease, an advertisement perhaps, largely pictorial, but there was nothing. He couldn't believe it - he had happened to pick the one newspaper with no free space! He would have to write over the printed text; a very

small type, he could barely read it - in fact he could not read it at all.

He thought of what to say. Keep it simple, brief. Block capitals, for effect. HELP, he would write. LOST. KIDNAPPING. Those were the things he would write. One word to a page - that would be effective. He looked up expecting the whole bar to be watching him, hanging on his every move, eager to see what he had to say. But no, the few lone people in booths were consumed with their own affairs, as was the stern-looking woman behind the bar, now drying glasses with a grey towel.

There was something wrong with the pen. Of course there would be no ink in the pen; that was inevitable, that was just his luck. But as he dropped it he realised the pen did in fact contain ink, that it appeared to be in perfect working order. Then why wasn't he writing anything? Sooner or later he had to ask himself the question. He couldn't get away from it really, in the end.

He found, first, that he couldn't grasp the pen properly. He tried with each hand and then tried with both hands together. The problem was that nothing felt right - nothing was comfortable or natural. He tried putting it between various fingers and then, after many abortive and farcical attempts at control, he found that he was able now, with this grip, just about to stab at the paper in strokes long enough to form continuous lines.

He had no recollection of what symbols to use. He was a man who had forgotten his code. He waited, told himself, again, to relax and it would just come, the language would all come naturally if he would just let it. But no, he had forgotten all the symbols, everything; he hadn't a clue, anymore, how to write. He thought about it, tried to strip everything back to the beginning, the first words and beyond that the first letters, the very

beginning of everything. OK, he thought, he would picture how the individual letters looked, and then he would be off. OK, he thought, how about, let's see...

Something had gone wrong. He wasn't sure what letter it was he was trying to represent. Momentarily, at least, he had forgotten it, the whole lot. And if he wasn't sure, any longer, what the letters looked like or the words, did that mean, he wondered, that he wasn't actually thinking at all? Then what was this, all of this, if not thinking - what was he doing? What on earth was he doing? Once more he tried to gather himself completely, everything into the one pot, and concentrate on the task: he tried to make himself loud inside himself. Tried to make the words heard, if only by himself. Tried to establish the thoughts and make them real. What was it he wanted to say? What thought could he form and witness? But nothing, nothing, just this buzz and cloud of absence, and he was lost - there was nothing he could do, he had nothing to hold onto, no words, no memories, nothing. There was no centre to any of this, no foundation, nothing - all he was was lost, and he did not know, now, what or where he was to start from.

Synopsis

A small leisure ship tours Antarctica, disrupted by surreal events; a team of forensic archaeologists fantastically charts the slender remains of a vacated office; and a missing persons investigator, working an especially bizarre case, begins to lose his mind. The three strands converge as the inspector pursues the missing into the heart of the forest, determined to arrive at an answer. Populated by obsessives and imposters, equally surreal and scientifically rigorous, *Forest* combines fantasy and documentary forms in a gripping and playful exploration of identity and the natural world.

Orla Broderick

It is the rhythmic, rumbustious quality of Orla Broderick's language that does much to make her a distinctive and original writer. Her sentences froth and bubble; words streaming with an extraordinary buoyancy that another, less-skilled hand might just allow to sink and flounder. Her unusual voice is matched too by other aspects of her writing - each element coming together to create a perspective that is created partly by her sexuality but also through the way she has chosen to live and write in Skye, a place she sees without the romantic veil of mist through which so many incoming poets and authors have viewed it in the past. Her island is one of council estates and dead-end jobs, made mythic by the vibrancy and energy of her gift for storytelling.

Celebrate it.

Donald S. Murray

Orla Broderick is a single mother living with her daughter and dog on the beautiful Highlands of Scotland. She is Irish, originally from Co. Donegal but was raised in Co. Wicklow. She went to an all-girls Irish Catholic boarding school, but was always in trouble with the nuns, so she learned to write as one way to escape.

Orla was first published in *The Irish Times*. She won the *Hot Press* short-story competition. She has been published in *Chroma* and *Pen Pusher*, and has read her work on BBC Radio Scotland.

Green and Blue Things (extract)

I am an all-day shake. From 4 a.m. to sometime drop of sleep. I nod at dearest doctor's diagnosis. Say 'yes, maybe anxiety, yes'. I take the little pills. Swallow them. I do. Say 'thank you, Doctor dear'. And I go again, to do day-to-day things. But it never ends. It is nervous knees sitting standing walking. Is not depression. Is electric fingertips touching - shocking - me. Stays all day. It is a deep-in-my-head, right-between-my-brows fear. The fear of her attack creeps round every tick tock. She will never stop and I will never thole it. She says her inner child is hurt, is upset, needs comfort. I say there's no excuse, there cannot be. There are no real and true words ever uttered that can justify harming another Earthling.

The woman I live with is sick. She is an anorexic. She purges her body with handfuls of laxatives. She shits out, hits out, kicks off. She makes a whip of her tongue to target me. Every breath I breathe is anathema. I cannot leave her. I have some awful loyalty to her. My doctor knows us. Knows her condition, has treated her wounds as best he can, has stitched my eyes many times.

I see the cramps hit her belly when twenty Bisacodyl and twelve Senokot find stomach juice. Her face pales first, then her hands. That is the moment the air in her alters.

This morning, as I rose from our bed, she began a protest. I had said I was going to the Quack, then on to my parents'.

'You are not happy,' she cried. 'I cannot make you happy. You are angry. You are angry. You are too quiet and angry and unhappy. Everyone can see how unhappy and angry you are. Why are you punishing me?'

I was born to be blamed. My mother believes I am the root cause of all her suffering. I tried to please her. I made bread and played with my brothers. I did dishes and bought her wee things. She thinks I am a fool. I listen to my wife tell how I am to blame for all her woes. She cries and points and so it seems I married my mother.

Sit sipping tea with Mum. She talks of illness. My brother's wife's aunt is in hospital with something terribly terminal. Haven't seen my brother in a decade. He went back to the old country. Abstract brother with unknown-to-me family in some romantic country cottage doing marvellously well. Red gladioli bloom on her table. We have tiny glasses of mint tea. I think of the spoons in her drawers. I know they sit side by perfect side. Tiny shiny rows.

'The flowers are very lovely,' I say.

'The worst thing is that she has been such a witch to them. No one can handle her at all. She yells and screams at them all the time. They can't wait till she's dead. So Frank tells me.'

'Frank is a bitch,' I say.

Frank Frank Frank. Only ever Frank. Never me. Look at me, Mum, your eldest daughter, what about me? Hello! I could tell you about my life, if you like. If you'd listen. I do not speak the words. Keep the box locked in my throat. My mother has cancer. She fell in love with death one time when I was still a child. My father was building the business and so it fell to me to mind the babies and care for Mum. Mum was ill and afraid. I hid in the wardrobe. She would come after me and yell. I ran away many times, making her laugh. Everything I was was stupid and weird. She must see the memory rise in my eyes. Maybe she senses my now.

‘We all suffer when we have sinned,’ she says. ‘We are all sinners. We must repent before we die.’

Heard this line so many times. Know the refrain in every cell.

‘Offer it up to God.’

I look at her. She has hard nut-brown eyes. I do not know what she means. I do not know my sin. I guess at hers. I hear that line said time after time on the telly. Offer it up for your sins. That is what the nuns said to the pregnant girls in Ireland. Old women searching for lost children say it. Church and parents rid themselves of babies to atone for crimes unmentionable. They offered up their flesh and bones in repentance; now they yearn to fill that gaping need. I liken my mother to those bereft ones. I wonder if she gave up a child, before me.

I try to ask. Feel it rise. Begin to say. But nothing comes.

‘Frank sent me the flowers.’

Of course he did.

‘He’s so good to think of his mother,’ I reply. ‘They are truly gorgeous. Such a deep red.’

Life hurts, Mum. Hold me, hug me, help me, tell me it will all be fine. Kiss me and tell me you love me. Forget Frank and the others for just one moment. I am the one who sits here twice a week, not them. See me, hear me, adore the flowers I brought.

In my heart I live on a black boggy bit of land not far from the sea. I have always dreamed of it. I feel sure I belong to the Isle of Skye, off the north-west coast of Scotland. But I live in a city thousands of miles away. I have now visited Skye. The sense, the connection grows. But I do not know how to survive there.

My life was drawn twenty years or more ago. I stomp to work happy happy with it, most days. I do all day

pleasant smiling, gritting teeth. Budgets tighten purses. Cutbacks cutbacks. Who to fire today? My breasts are harnessed by a push-up bra. My hair is blown by expert hands. I love my home, my business, my wife. To keep it I sacrifice my staff. We'll have beers together after work; toast the newest departure. We'll laugh and cry it out, all in it together. We are waiting for the end of the easy life. We fear together but we know it is coming. None of it can remain. The banks have ruined us. Most of us. I listen to colleagues complain. Hear their counselling tales. Some are sick, in mind, in body. Tired of everyday everything. No raging weather to go mad in here, at home. No deserted beach to sing on. We have other ways to keep us sane, keep us useful, keep us working well. Doctor's pills.

I see me in free places. I see me meet freedom. I do not belong in this office. Not this click click tap tap computer living. Not these strangled meetings. Head down, marching on through streets and streets of noise I go to work. I go home. I go out. We drink beers with little bites. Smile and kiss cheeks. Greet all, never show hearts. See me smile, flick hair, soothe egos. See me shake hands, make deals, make contracts, make money. Protect myself with pretty things. Buy art and shoes to show we are happy and well. I help run the family firm. It is dying.

But the real problem is the wife. And all the paedophiles in her memory. All the time for years and years she tells me about the paedophiles. I know the worst we can be to each other. She is angry. For thirty years or more. It's allowed, I say. It's OK. Do it, I say. Hit me, punch me, I don't care. Scream it all out, I tell her, I can take it. But I crawl to Mother with tears, maybe a bruise sometimes. I love her I love her I love her, I cry.

'Get out, Ellie,' says my mum. 'Quit. Leave her. Go!'

It was my mother's idea and my own impetuous notion.

A holiday, she said, would do me good - escape the stress, find an adventure. I did it. I finally flew to the Scottish Highlands, last bastion of the basic life. I drove to the Isle of Skye. I had an adventure. I found an escape. I found me.

Somehow, who knows how, I found an ancient cathedral in the middle of the River Snizort.

I wandered through Scottish weather. I let the cold rain wash me. Let the wind dry me. Sat on a low stone wall on St Columba's island, ran hands over flowers. Wept and shook and cried in the weather. I pleaded with trees to supply self healing. I looked at it all. All my life. Lay in snowdrops, watched the river churn. I cried and I laughed at nothing at all. Thinking, not thinking. Brown cows, staring and mooing. I ran away to the islands to be safe, to be sane.

Just up from the island is a community hall, lights brightening the night. I saw it from the holy island. I came up from the graves and went in. My hair was wild. My eyes were mad. But I smiled and I grinned at the people inside. I bought soup. I puddled the place. My coat was taken to a hook in the hall. I was put in a chair, a gas fire lit. I was given a bowl with a meal. Steaming meat in liquid, peppery hot. I supped at it. I listened to them. They spoke of the treasures found in the loch.

A woman read from a book she'd just published. A grey man squeezed tunes from a box. Tales of times drifted over my ears. I listened to her story about a boy from Starvation Point who found a gold chalice dumped in the water. She was stout, with silver hair. Her book is called *Treasure Islands*.

'Legends say St Columba arrived here in Skeabost,' she tells everyone. 'His monks rowed up the river in coracles. They were met by clan chief Artbrannan and his tribe of warriors. The chief wished to be blessed before he died.'

St Columba baptised him and he died immediately. The first church on the small island in the middle of the river was built in memory of the chief. In times of famine gold spoons would float down the river from that first little church, so the story says.'

'Where is Starvation Point?' asks a woman in a lilac jacket.

Wife troubles had left me - they just vanished. I sat there drying. She stood questioning the author. There was no guile in her face. She looked like she was simply picturing the scene on the screen behind her eyes. I thought she was rude. But the author did not seem to mind being questioned.

'Starvation Point is out on the very tip of Glen Bernisdale,' she said. 'During the famine there were too many people on the smallholdings. Many starved. That's how it got its name.'

The author has the air of a schoolteacher. She has small bright eyes and a hooked nose. She has a belly that looks like it would ripple if taken by laughter.

'I did not know that,' says she. 'And I thought I knew this area pretty well.'

'You can never know everything,' says the author.

I watched her. She was motionless, completely at ease and with no embarrassment whatsoever. She didn't apologise for her interruption, but proceeded to ask more silly questions.

'Did the monks come from Iona? Was the cathedral here in Skeabost linked to Iona? Has anyone ever dug the island for archaeology?'

'I think you will have to read the book yourself,' says the author.

'I will,' she says. 'I think we should get a metal detector and hunt for more gold spoons.'

There was a titter among the group at this. Someone suggested this would be an opportune moment for a break for a cup of tea and maybe cake. I sat where I had been put, not wanting to seem so presumptuous that I felt I could join the group. She came over to me. And that's when it happened.

I put my eyes into hers and found another world.

She sits, speaks. Greets me warmly but stranger-like. She flirts. I see her heat.

'It's a wicked night,' she says. 'Did you travel far?'

She is flushed of face. There is a faint tickle of a smile.

'I come from Canada.' I am stone. 'Here on holiday. A tourist.'

I am falling into her warm brown soul. My emotions are rising. I feel a well of weeping coming.

She touches my arm.

'I have never been there. Is it beautiful like here?'

Thunder smashes through rains, quiets the speakings in the hall. Lightning takes the lights away. Leaves us dark. Sex-starved me feels the moisture underneath. I dampen in the dark hall.

'Do I know you?' she asks. No guile, no agenda, no history of hurting between us. Just a fresh question.

'No. You don't know me. I have never been here, you have never been there - how could we know each other?'

'My name is Mary. What's yours?'

'Call me Ellie.'

The lights return. Spoil the shared moment in the dark, but my heart whispers my dreams to her. I see her hear something she cannot comprehend. See her try to make sense, watch her struggle. I smile the chameleon smile - the one for work when home is bad.

'What's the matter? You look so troubled,' she asks.

She is ill mannered and intrusive. I do not like her. I especially do not like the effect she is having on me.

I rose then in the hope of encouraging her to go. So we stood, face to face, body to body. All the images surfaced. Lightning cracked outside the hall. The shock of it opened the sensible me, the one who tried to be good. Poured myself into her space. Peered into her face, touched cheek, ran finger from freckle to mole. Sun kisses. Fallen stars etched forever. I remember or imagine. The realness of the paint on our skins. Wounded and golden.

Clearly I have lost my mind. What am I imagining? What do I think I see now? Something deep and very terrible is happening. I know the markings she wears, I know the eyes she fixes onto mine. I have traced gold mud from the top to the bottom of her. In another life.

I need to go. I need to run. I need to get out of this place. There's obviously some logical explanation, I just need to find it.

I could burden her with it, with it all; bleed it out for her to clear. I shake my head and turn to go.

'Tell it to nature.' She turns again, into me. 'All of it comes from nature. Give it all back. Take all the energy you do not need and cry it to winds. The earth will use it again.'

My own words. The ones I use. The stuff I say when wife hits. Go to nature, focus on green. Heal. Dear God I forgot about the wife, so immersed am I in this woman.

'Will you come for a drink with me?' she asks.

I run. Straight out into the Scottish storm. Wind whips. Hard little lumps of ice sting skin, bite hard. On my hands, my face. Take it all, I tell my bad bad self. Take the cold blows - you deserve nothing more. Let the wind beat the badness out of me. I would have kissed her, kissed every piece of her. There in the country hall with the

women chatting, I would have torn the clothes from her, just to see the something in my muddled mind.

I have images in my mind of her freckles, sun or beauty spots. They ran all over her face, across her cheeks, down her neck onto her bare chest.

I have images in my mind of yellow paint on hands, on fingers, dipping in, decorating, drawing the path from freckle to freckle.

I see circles of ochre ore all over her body.

Raging winds free trees from earth tether. Take me too, I cry, take all my mortal knowing. This is my madness. Seeing the things that do not exist. Spaces inside my brain fill with fantastical nonsense. Seeing dreams of other dimensions is my curse. Parents paid well for private psych. My brothers told tales of golden angels; fairy stories flew from their mouths, nectar for my mother's ears. I spoke of ghosts. The ghosts in my head, in the room. Once I told of a fire in the local hotel, before it happened. They said then I must have started it. They call me weird. They say I am too different. This is why. I see the things that are not there.

'Ellie. Ellie. Come back in. Come on.'

She is calling from the door of the hall. I want to go and crawl under a bush or jump into a rabbit hole but I can't. I can't. I have to go back and face her.

She says nothing. Just holds me. People are leaving the hall for the evening. A strange woman offers to drive me back to my hotel. I am handed my coat. Mary just watches me. The people say that it was nice to meet me and I should come again. They tell me to enjoy my stay in Scotland. Back in my hotel I find Mary's business card in my jacket pocket. It says she is a cleaner and a personal carer. I Google her name. I find out that she is a single gay woman with a child and she is looking for love.

Synopsis

‘O unworn world enrapture me, encapture me in a web
Of fabulous grass and eternal voices by a beech,
Feed the gaping need of my senses, give me ad lib
To pray unselfconsciously with overflowing speech
For this soul needs to be honoured with a new dress
woven
From green and blue things and arguments that cannot
be proven.’

excerpt from *Canal Bank Walk* by Patrick Kavanagh.

Ellie is consumed by self-loathing. Her marriage is over. She finds comfort in her imagination. She dreams of running away from the city to a Scottish island and living out her life as a gardener.

On holiday on the Isle of Skye she meets Mary, a single mother looking for love. Ellie senses and then fosters a deep connection with Mary. Mary invites Ellie to live with her but before she can go, Ellie has to relieve herself of the burden of her wife. Mary, meanwhile, raises her tweenage daughter unaware of the legacy Ellie will bring with her.

Phil Murnin

Beautiful, insightful, tense and quirky.

Zoë Strachan (on *Phoenixland*)

Philip Murnin is from Pollokshields, Glasgow. He runs a welfare rights project for a charity in north Glasgow and in his spare time writes prose. His short stories have appeared in publications such as *Gutter*, *The Scotsman* and *New Writing Scotland* and he is now editing a draft of his first novel, *Phoenixland*. He is a member of G2 Writers who run a Wednesday night writers' workshop at Glasgow Art Club.

Phoenixland (extract)

Maw

Maw telt me tae beat it and tae take that bloody baby. Greetin and girnin so it was, and doin everybody's box in. It wasnae oor baby. Maw's pal had drapped it roon on Friday night for lookin efter and hadnae been back for it. Maw was pure radge. Get the wean, get yir brother and get tae!

Nae point arguin wi Maw when she lost the rag.

The new fella was comin roon - the ugly yin wi yella teeth. They were wantin peace and quiet for the evenin, and that meant nae baby, nae Davie and nae me.

It was greetin because of its teeth, so Maw said, but when its mooth was open - screamin murder murder - I seen it didnae have any teeth. It was gumsy.

And ginger.

And toty-teeny. No fat, like babies were meant tae be. This yin was a smout, and gommy-lookin and all. It was a shitey baby really, but better than nae baby at aw.

It came wi this ginormous green pram that took up the whole hall. It was big enough tae put Davie in it too, if ye wanted. He had tae tiptoe for a peek in. The pram squeaked when we gied it a shoogle tae stop the baby greetin. It worked. The quiet in the flat was brilliant. I was great at lookin efter it. 'See ye later, Maw!' We wheeled the pram oot the door tae the landin.

We stayed near the top flair of Phoenix Street. Me and Davie ayeways used the stairs but the pram was bigger than the two of us put the gether so we pressed the button for the lift wi a 2p. There was chewin gum on the button, ye see. When the door rattled open, the lift

breathed oot its pish reek. The lights flickered. Nae chance, says Davie because he was feart. He was right - I'd rather jump aff the side. 'Ye're such a wee lassie,' I telt him.

Davie took the front end and we lugged the pram doon the stairs, wi the baby stottin up and down, laughin away in the pram. Aw, when ye heard it laugh! It made ye feel bad ye calt it shitey.

Davie was moanin I was pushin too fast and he was gonnæ deck it if I didnae slow doon. I telt him I'd batter him if he drapped the baby.

Jiggered, so we were, and we'd only reached flair eleven. We stapped tae get oor breaths. 'Here, I know!' I pressed the button again. Doon the lift rattled and the doors shook open and let the honk oot. Pure boggin so it was.

'Ah'm no goin in there!'

'Calm yer kecks, Davina. Ye don't have tae. Watch.' I pushed the pram in, pressed the G button and jump oot before the doors trundled shut.

'Haha! Gallus!' said Davie. 'Catch ye at the bottom, baby! Maybe.'

We tore doon the stairs and waited at the bottom. It hadnae arrived. We stared at the door. 'Tracey,' whispered Davie.

The doors pinged opened like a microwave and there was the baby ready to go.

'Ha! Shat yerself there, Davie.'

There was naebody at aw in the court to show aff the baby tae. Just concrete and broken glass. 'Right, I'm the maw, you're the da.'

'What does the da do?'

'He does what he's telt.'

We took a keek at the baby in the pram. It loved bein outside and kicked its legs in its wee blue suit, and waved

its airms. Toty-teeny so it was in that empty pram. Maybe babies were bigger in the days when the pram was made. It grabbed ma pinkie wi its wee haund and didnae want tae let go.

We didnae have its blanket. It was baltic oot. ‘Ye’ll need tae gie him yer trackie top.’

‘Nuh.’

So Davie had tae get a deid airm. ‘You’ll be getting jellyfished, if ye’re no careful!’ He grat a bit but took aff his trackie top and I wrapped up the baby. We put its wee pea-heid in the hood and zipped it up and folded the arms over it to keep it warm. It was a lime green baby.

Baby sponsored by Nike. Just fuckin do it.

‘Tracey, noo I’m cold!’

‘Well, you’re just the da so it doesnae matter. It only matters that the baby’s cold.’

I gied the baby’s belly a wee shake. I put on the voice Maw used. ‘Keekaboo! Wid babby like a wee guddle! Wid he? Wid he? Keekaboo!’ The baby squeaked.

‘Huh. Nae wonder Maw cannae be arsed.’

The pram was like wan of they shoppin trolleys that only wants tae go left. Sometimes we had tae go roon in a circle just tae get where we wanted. We were goin tae chap Tina oot. She lived roon at Waddell Court just wan flair up.

‘Tina!’ I shouted at her balcony. ‘Tina! TINA!’ I shouted loud enough tae wake the deif. Tina’s name stotted off the building until it sounded like I was giein it laldy on every flair of the court. The balcony door wheeched open. It wasnae Tina that came oot but. Her maw stood there in a big pink dressin goon. She was fat, beelin and her hair looked like a burst couch. ‘Tracey Healy! Ye’ve tae stay away fae Tina! She’s still got bruises.’ She leant right over the railins and jabbed her finger at me.

‘Was I shoutin for you? Tina, I says, din’t I! Are ye deaf or somethin? TINATINATINA!’

Tina’s fat maw turned roon tae look back inside. She squawked and disappeared and then a door slammed. Feet pitter-pattered doon the stairs and Tina ran oot the close and there was her maw, back on the balcony, havin a flakey. ‘TIIINAAA! Get back here now! Ya wee nyaff!’

HAHA! Ya dancer! We’d nicked Tina and were runnin away. I gied her maw the finger as we pure bolted, but because of the stupid pram we had tae go roon in a circle once and it looked like we were runnin back tae her. There was nae rush but. Nae chance of a chase fae that bun. She ate all the pies.

Tina hated runnin. She got her fatness fae her maw and her body jiggled underneath her claes. She was the only yin in the class wi tits yet and they stotted up and doon when she ran. She had to haud them. When we stopped, she was rid and sweaty. She couldnae speak hardly. ‘The baby... the wee baby! How come?’

I telt her Maw said I was tae mind it.

‘Ye’re no old enough.’

‘Am so. I’m two months older than you. If ye don’t want to play, ye can fuck off back to yer maw.’

Tina peeped into the pram. ‘Aaaaaaw. Whit’s he called?’

I had a think. I didnae know. I couldnae mind. I shrugged. ‘It doesnae have one.’

‘He’s gottae have a name! When Jamie was born, we got this book oot the library and picked a name fae that.’

So that’s how we ended up goin tae the library.

The pram was good for ridin when there was a hill. Davie rided on the bottom part and I leant on top. Tina ran beside us, haunds on her paps, sayin careful careful careful. Faster faster faster we went, peltin doon the hill. We didnae mind the pram wanted to go left and we

skited intae the stank and Davie fell oot wi a dunt. Me and Davie laughed - so did the baby. Tina didnae. 'Yous are pure shady! Yous have got tae look efter the baby! Ye're gonnae hurt him!'

But the baby wasnae bothered. He thought it was a great laugh. 'See! He pure loves it. He wants tae dae it again.'

The baby gurgled and put its hands in its mouth. It looked up at me. It was definetley skelly that wean.

Tina was getting wide. 'Babies are needin looked efter properly! Gie me him!' She tried tae push me oot the way. I shoved her.

'Bolt you!' I gied her a belter of a push and she fell fat arse first intae the stank. 'It's oor baby, no yours. It loves me - it hates you. Ye're tryin tae take it away from its family!'

'Ye're no his family.' Tina sat in the stank and glowered up at me. 'But I won't touch. Let's walk and no ride the pram.'

'Fine.'

We took a shortcut after that - across the empty space. Until no long ago, it was Hope Court - high flats like oors, but then they were all emptied wan by wan, and wan day everybody came tae watch them gettin blown up, and some wummin got hit by a brick and died. Then there was just mountains of concrete and wires. Then there was nothing much but mud and wee bits of Hope Court, and one time I found a Barbie doll buried in the mud, but mainly it was just empty space.

The library was on the other side. The pram tyres kept on gettin stuck in the mud and we had tae lug it oot and it ended up takin longer than the long way.

The library was this old buildin wi pillars. Inside was a swirly orange carpet and hunners of books and some

computers in the middle. Everybody gied us growlers when we went in just because I telt Davie tae hold the fuckin door open. Tut tut tut tut.

Some wummin in a long skirt swished oot fae behind the counter.

‘You must be a bit quieter and mind your language please.’

‘Sorry,’ whispered Tina because she’s a sook. ‘We’re just in tae find a name book tae pick wan for the baby.’

‘Where’s your mum?’

‘She’s parkin the motor.’

The wummin stuck her big neb in the pram. ‘The baby must have a name by now!’

‘Aye, but we’re playin a game,’ said Tina. The wummin let out a big sigh, huffin and puffin, tryin tae blow us away. She went over tae a shelf and came back wi a book for us. Ye’d think she only had wan book the way she gied it us. She telt us to be careful and tae look at it over on the table. Quietly. The book was full of all the names in the world. So Tina said. She did the lookin up because she knew how it worked. Tina was tryin tae say every name had a meaning.

‘How? Mine’s doesnae.’

‘Aye, it does and keep yer voice doon. The librarian doesnae like gobby folk.’

‘Who ye callin gobby? And it’s ma name. I should know. Mines doesnae mean anythin except me, and neithers does Davie.’

The wummin came oot fae the counter wi a glower all over her coupon. ‘Wheesht, you lot. What’s the matter?’

Tina went and telt her whit was the matter, and she said of course names had meanings. She took the book and asked ma name. And I says Julie for some reason. I’d ayeways liked the name Julie. Tina and Davie gied me

a look. The wummin held the book away fae her and looked doon her nose tae read it.

‘Julie - of Latin origin from the noble Roman name Julius, originally meaning short-bearded.’

Tina and Davie burst oot laughin and that got the wummin wheesht wheesht wheeshtin us. ‘Well, ma name isnae Julie! It’s Tracey.’

‘Well, why did you say it was Julie?’

I shrugged. Wheeshtie-face huffed and puffed and fucked off back behind the counter. Tina looked up the rest of oor names. Tina meant follower of Chris.

‘Who’s Chris?’ said Davie.

Davie’s was the best. Davie meant beloved. I laughed at him and had tae cover ma mooth in case Wheeshtie-features chucked us oot. ‘Beloved!’ I whispered. ‘I telt ye ye were a lassie!’

‘Beloved?’ He couldnae believe it. ‘Maw cannae know names have meanings either.’

Tina went tae look up Tracey. ‘Naw,’ I said and grabbed it aff her. ‘Names are a pile of shite.’ I didnae want tae know because Tracey might mean somethin stupid. Gobby or somethin. There’d be nae goin back. Before we got tae choose a name for the baby, it started greetin again. I shoogled the pram but it wouldnae stop. It cried and cried and the pram squeaked and squeaked as I rocked harder and harder, and Wheeshtie-pus comes swishin over.

‘Where’s your mum got to? The baby must be hungry. Is he being breast fed?’ She poked her big snout in the pram and sniffed. ‘The boy needs his nappy changed. What a pong!’

‘No, he doesnae. It’s yer library that smells of jobby. Naw, actually it’s your arse.’ I sniffed. ‘Boggin. Aye, you’re needin yer nappy changed.’

‘Haw haw haw!’

That gied us a right laugh and the whole library was lookin at us. ‘Whit?’

‘Your mum’s not coming at all, is she? Why on Earth are you in charge of this infant? He’s not being looked after properly.’

I slammed the book on the table. ‘He fuckin is so.’

She swished over tae the phone on the counter. ‘Wait there.’

Nae chance. The woman dropped the phone and tried to stop us boltin. She grabbed Davie’s arm. ‘Paedo!’ Davie shouted and she let go.

We bolted doon the street and the wummin shouted, ‘But the baby!’

‘Wheesht!’ I shouted back and we ran laughin doon the street.

We were in the swing park - the wan wi the red and yella fort. The sky had wispy clouds across it, like fag smoke, and the sun and moon were both oot at the same time. I’d put Davie’s cap on the baby. It was too big but it was well funny seein him in the trackie top wi a cap on. ‘Here, watch this,’ I said and I picked up this empty bottle of Buckie fae next tae the bin and put it in the baby’s arm.

‘Haw haw,’ Davie laughed. ‘He’s in the Young Team!’

‘Aye, he thinks he’s mental!’

‘Yous are shady!’ said Tina but even she’d a wee smile. Tae tap it aff, I found this dout on the ground and put it in the baby’s mooth so it’d look like he was havin a smoke. Davie nearly ended himself.

‘Light the fag! Light the fag!’ But the baby wouldnae keep it in its mooth.

‘Stop it!’ screeched Tina. ‘Stop it!’

‘Calm yer kecks! We’re just havin a laugh.’ The baby started its fuckin greetin again. ‘See what ye’ve done noo.’

I took the baby's bottle of Buckie oot the pram and lobbed it at the fort and it smashed intae bits. The cryin didnae stop this time. Greet greet greet! The baby's eyes screwed shut, its face rid and wrinkly like an old party balloon. Tina wanted tae pick it up but I wouldnae let her. I lifted it oot the pram and rested it on ma shoulder, its slevvers soakin ma top. But still it wouldnae stop. Cryin so hard it was like I'd hurt it. As if I'd skelped it wan. I wanted tae. 'Shhh... Shhh... SHUSH!'

Tina started greetin and all. 'It needs its real mammy.' 'Shut up you! She doesnae want it! We look after it. How won't it shut up? SHUT UP!' Ma heid was nippin. I gied it a shoogle but it wouldnae shush. I gied it a shake but it wouldnae be quiet. And the thing was hummin. There was a brown patch on the green trackie top. 'BAD BABY! STOP BEING BAD! BAD HONKIN BABY! SHUT THE FUCK UP!'

'Don't shout! Don't shout at the baby! It's needin looked efter. It's needin fed and changed. It's needin somebody who knows its name!' Tina's big baw face was rid and wet wi tears. I was gonnae belt her wan.

'Ya boot!'

'Let's go get the baby some milk then,' said Davie. 'Let's go get some milk then he'll be quiet.'

'Fine!' We wheeled it back tae Phoenix Street wi that noise in oor ears and the hum up oor noses. We couldnae aw go up tae the flat. Maw'd be ragin. Tina stayed in the court wi the greetin wee smout. She crossed her heart and hoped to die'd that she wouldnae lift him. Me and Davie ran up the stairs two at a time. I put the key into the lock as quietly as ye could. Door don't squeak, door don't creak, I telt it in ma heid. I keeked ma heid roon and listened. The flat was deid quiet. Naebody was in. Maw'd gone oot. 'Mon, Davie.'

We went intae the kitchen tae get the baby's bottle. We took the baby's blanket and its dummy. We got some milk fae the carton in the fridge and heated it up in the microwave for thirty seconds. We got a clean nappy. 'We're gonnae look efter the baby properly,' said Davie. 'Like a real maw and da.'

That made me feel warm inside like the baby's bottle I was holdin in both haunds. I felt bad for shoutin. 'Come on, Da. Let's go fix the wee yin.'

Back on the landin, I couldnae hear the baby greet in the court below anymair. Tina must've got him quiet. She better no have lifted him oot the pram. I looked over the side of the landin tae shout tae her. She wasnae there. I clocked her hurrying across the empty space back towards the library. She'd fuckin nabbed the baby! I howled. 'TINA! TINA! Come back! I'm gonnae fuckin batter ye! I'm gonnae fuckin kill ye, Tina!' I froze her tae the spot. She turned and saw me up on flair fourteen. I saw her mooth sorry. Then she started tae run again. She was too far away tae chase. We just stood there like a pair of fannies and watched. Davie asked what we should do. Fuck knows, Davie. Fuck knows.

'She's away wi ma trackie top.' And then these sirens started up. Mee-maw! Mee-maw! Mee-maw! Tina looked in their direction. So did we.

'Aye, that's right! They're comin for ye! We're comin for ye!' But it wasnae true. The sirens went a different way and the night got quiet again and Tina was nearly disappeared. Naebody was comin. Ever. And then just when it was gettin too dark tae see the pram, it came tae me. 'Davie.'

'Whit?'

'I've minded the baby's name, Davie.'

Synopsis

The short story published here - with a few changes - has become the first chapter of my novel, *Phoenixland*. The story continues from the point where the girl and her brother lose the baby. The siblings narrate the stories of life in their flat on Phoenix Street - it's about to get very eventful. *Phoenixland* is about family. Why you love them. Why you hate them. Why you need them. Why family is dangerous. It's about a girl who discovers the only thing worse in the world than having a family is not having one at all.

Alison Gray

Alison Gray was born and brought up in Kilsyth outside Glasgow, where she still lives. She left home to study Philosophy and Religious Studies in London and Lancaster Universities. Later she studied TEFL and taught in Germany and in Japan, where she stayed for eleven years teaching English and yoga while being a mum and writing for local magazines.

In 2011 she returned to Kilsyth with her son. She is working on her first novel, *There Are Five Flavours*, which is set in present-day Japan. She had her first short story published in *Msllexia* magazine in December 2013.

There Are Five Flavours (extract)

February *hatsuhana-zuki* First Flowers Month

‘Out of the blue’ is what you would say in English. When I hear it, I see a winter sky with a bird or an arrow or a stone coming out of nothing, coming straight for me. My little brother had phoned me ‘out of the blue’ to invite me to visit him and meet Vicky, his new British girlfriend.

‘I want to introduce her to you, Hiromi,’ he said, his voice too high. ‘We can all speak together in English, like old times. And you know,’ he added, ‘she might have a job for you.’

‘I have a job, Ren.’ I looked down at my cafeteria tray, at the soup bowl scarred by the chopsticks of generations of office workers.

‘No, a job you want, Hiromi. She might have some translation she wants you to do.’

‘I don’t need to do that stuff anymore,’ I said, ‘I’m fine where I am.’

My story starts with that cold phone call. Ren persisted and exactly one year ago, I took the train from Tokyo to Kamakura. I had just celebrated *risshun*, the beginning of spring and, in the tea calendar, the beginning of the year. The day before mother had hosted an *akatsuki no chaji*, the tea ceremony to celebrate the cold and the dawn. The beginning of the ceremony is lit by candles; the end by the dawn. For Mother *risshun* is a time to tote up how the world has failed her that year. For me, I hope in that dawn there will be some sign that this year will be better. And last year, that day after *risshun*, as I got on the Tōkaidō-Line train, I felt I had something to hope with.

Tokyo station, when I see it in my head, gleams. The high platforms straddle the Marunouchi financial area. White Shinkansen flash their reflections off glass-banked buildings, pulled in and out, clean and soundless, on invisible wires. But on that day Marunouchi was in grey fog, like the marsh it had been in Bashō's time. I bought a bottle of hot tea and held it to my cheeks. Tokyo to Kamakura is one-and-a-half hours of suburbs broken by the bridge over the Tamagawa River, the natural border between Tokyo and Yokohama where, out of respect for change, the train slows and the metal sound of the rail bridge pipes up before we rush on through Yokohama, not looking. Then, at Ōfuna, we turn to the sea and Kamakura.

A young woman got on at Ōfuna, guiding a small boy with one hand, her other protecting the baby strapped to her front. They settled into the seat across from me, the boy at the window shushing a train along the ledge, the woman sweating in the carriage heat, unclipping the baby and pulling off her coat. It looked to be the same size as Mari's baby. Mari and I had worked beside each other for seven years, but after she had left to get married, I had only seen her twice; once, just after the wedding, to see her apartment, then two weeks ago to see the baby. Her chubby boy had been soft and round and too big to have come out of her narrow hips. She looked fragile and big breasted. She had talked about yoga and mother's meetings and the happiness of wide apartments, but she hadn't teased me the way she usually did, hadn't laughed, her fingers over her mouth, that I would be the next to leave, that I should tell her about any new young men in my life. She hadn't joked much at all. Maybe she didn't have the energy; maybe she no longer wished a young man on me.

Mother and Mrs Mori still wished a young man on me. As certain a part of the New Year ceremony as bowing or placing or stepping or admiring was the discussion, once all the tea things had been cleared away, of how I had conducted myself during the year. The conclusion stayed the same; they really could not understand why I couldn't get a husband.

'Obviously we don't need him to be rich, just to be from a good family.'

'And to be well educated...'

'Serious...'

'Well employed...'

But this year uneasiness, like dust in the corners, had been stirred gently into the air.

'She is getting old,' Mrs Mori said sternly to Mother. 'Twenty-six? Twenty-seven?'

'Twenty-seven,' my mother sighed.

'And so skilled in the way of tea...'

'Maybe that's not what the young men want in a wife anymore,' Mrs Yamamoto, our other tea guest, whispered.

'It's what a young man from a good family would want,' Mother said, with the sharp voice she reserved for the young and the kind. Mrs Yamamoto shifted and bowed.

'Yamada Sensei's course will bring her to the notice of families that matter. I am sure of it,' said Mrs Mori.

Mother, Mrs Mori at her shoulder, had signed me up for the course. It was her idea of a last resort. The more our family's fortunes were rocked by storms, the more our mother focused on creating the perfect tea ceremony. The more the rules that determined who would flourish appeared fixed against us, the more our mother would study, teach and practice tea. This sinking ship had rules, rules clearly delineated by Sen no Rikyū in the sixteenth century, rules involving how to cross a tatami mat, how

to fold a napkin, which utensil to use. The observance of the rules of tea would keep us afloat; there was no need to learn how to swim or fix leaks. And Keiko Yamada's cookery course for tea was lifebelt, flare and emergency food supply. It would save us all.

'Such a pretty girl,' Mrs Mori lied, shaking her head sadly at my round, blushing face.

Ren's head bobbed over the others waiting at the ticket gate at Kamakura station. Before all the trouble, Mother had referred to him as her tall, handsome son, but in truth he is just tall. Now he looked broad too.

'You've changed, Ren-chan,' I said. 'Have you been going to a gym?'

'It's the surfing,' he said.

Right, the surfing. Since he had left home five years ago, Ren and I had met once, two years ago, to see the blossoms in Ueno Park. It had been his idea that we meet, even though he knew Mother had forbidden our communication. He had wanted to tell me of his success, that he had found his place in the world, that he was living the dream. The dream turned out to be a job in a surfing shop, giving him good discounts, and a cheap one-room apartment in Chigasaki, close to the bay. I had congratulated him. But it was hard to see it as success, when he could have gone to Keio.

'I didn't realise surfing made you so muscly.' I looked out to the grey sky and sea. 'Where's your flat?'

'It's over that way,' he pointed. 'Follow the bay for thirty minutes and - boom - you're there. It's pretty basic, but I've been trying to make it nicer with Vicky visiting.' He blushed. 'She's in Starbucks, waiting,' he said, pulling me through the loose crowd, away from the sea, towards the shops and temples.

That was the first time I met Vicky. Her face looked pale in off-season Kamakura, but it was her smell that I remember. It was the smell of new things, of expensive, just-bought things folded in tissue paper.

‘Ren told me you are a Kentish maid like me,’ she said, her accent pulling me back twenty years.

‘Yes, Sevenoaks. You?’

‘Broadstairs, near Margate.’ She turned to Ren and handed him a 10,000-yen note. ‘Darling, get the coffees would you? Hiromi, what will you have? My treat,’ she said, pushing my purse away.

‘A coffee and a sandwich,’ I said, as Ren walked off.

‘Did you enjoy living in Kent?’ Vicky asked, pulling her chair to face me. ‘I found it hard to believe when Ren told me. Such a strange place for a Japanese family to settle.’

‘It was Father’s idea. He wanted us away from other Japanese families and other foreigners. He wanted us all to be properly English. He even spoke to us in English.’

‘I can still hear a slight Kentish twang.’

‘We were there till I was twelve, so I would hope to keep it a bit.’ Father would not have approved. He had wanted me to speak like the Queen.

‘It must have been a shock, when he died. Ren said it was sudden.’

I moved my head in a nod and looked towards the window. ‘If he had lived we would have stayed there, maybe forever. But as soon as he died Mother brought us back here. She didn’t like England or living abroad.’ I paused. It was strange feeling the English words in my mouth again, as if they no longer belonged to me - as if I was playing at speaking them. I needed her to speak. ‘Do you like Japan?’ I asked, blushing. ‘I suppose all Japanese people ask you that.’

‘They do,’ she smiled. ‘And I am always able to say that I love it. I can’t imagine living anywhere else.’

Ren interrupted us with the first of his trays.

‘Got you this one, Hi-chan,’ he said, putting a sandwich in front of me. ‘Hard to choose for someone who eats smoked mackerel and *goma* sauce all the time.’

‘Sorry to make you come here, Hiromi,’ Vicky said. ‘I know Kamakura has some great eating places, but in the morning I need a large milky coffee.’ She lifted a large mug and a croissant towards her.

‘Did you ask her about the course?’ Ren enquired, his sandwich looking small and pale in his hands.

‘We just met, darling. I was getting the low-down on you.’ She smiled, leaning into him, then began to pull her croissant apart. ‘He makes such a big thing of it,’ she said brightly, arranging the food on her plate. ‘It’s just a notion really at the moment, but I was thinking... Well, Ren told me you were a tea-ceremony expert and would be studying Japanese traditional cookery with that famous TV cook.’

‘Yamada Sensei?’

‘She does the fish cookery show, right?’

‘Yes, that’s her,’ I said.

‘Well I wanted to know more than Ren’—she looked over at him indulgently—‘could tell me.’

‘The course I am doing is for cooking food for the tea ceremony, you know, *chanoyu*, so it’s not exactly like her TV programmes. The focus is the seasonality of the food, the use of certain themes, so not just regular Japanese cookery...’

‘Tea is a big thing in your family, right?’

‘Mother thinks *chanoyu* will solve everything, but this course, she hopes, will help to marry me off, preferably before I reach thirty.’

‘So it’s for your marriage CV?’ She smiled.

‘Yes.’ I paused. ‘But I want to do it too. I am interested in her approach...’ I watched her as I spoke, ready for the disdain to appear. Foreigners, even those who had been in Japan for a while, even those who had studied one of the martial arts or ikebana, looked glazed and polite when I spoke of the practice and cookery of *chanoyu*. ‘She brings something special to cooking that’s unique to Japanese cooking... something spiritual.’ I breathed the word out, expecting it to hang there and be dissected and misunderstood, but it didn’t. Vicky was already moving on.

‘Ren told me it’s about cooking fish. You see, it’s the fish cookery I’m interested in. Her show was so amazing. I mean it was every kind of fish.’

‘We cook fish, of course, but that’s not the focus. The focus is seasonality. That is what *chanoyu* is about.’

‘Which fish do you learn about?’

‘The main ones of each season: tuna, cod, sea bream, mackerel, *aji* - I don’t know what that is in English - and others too...’

‘What about slicing raw fish?’

‘Yes, we will do raw fish. The cutting of them is very important. There are rules...’

‘You’ll do all the raw fish - the salmon, the tuna, the prawns?’

‘A lot of them.’

Ren made a scraping noise with his chair as he settled into his sandwich. ‘But not *fugu*, right? We saw Yamada do it on her programme. I told Vicky that normal people aren’t allowed to cook it. Too dangerous, right?’

Vicky and I were poised over our uneaten food. I took a conscious bite of my sandwich and watched as Vicky placed the white flesh of the croissant in her mouth.

‘Actually, we do do *fugu*,’ I said. ‘It is one of our winter

fishes. We are not allowed to... what is the word... gut it. We would not be allowed to handle the fish if the poisonous organs were still in it. That wouldn't be legal. But we can use the fillets.”

‘Because it can kill you, right?’ Ren said.

‘And there’s no cure,’ Vicky said.

I sipped my coffee. ‘It’s not something I know much about,’ I said. ‘I’ve read in the papers about people dying from *fugu*, but it is very rare. It is being included because it looks beautiful. It will be part of our winter seasonal dishes.’

Vicky pulled the horn off the other end of the croissant. ‘Do you think I could join the course with you?’ she asked, placing it delicately into her mouth.

Synopsis

There Are Five Flavours is set in present-day Japan, and dwells on its seasons and the culture of the Japanese tea ceremony, *chanoyu*. It tells the story of two women who, through cookery, fish, tea, love, language and maybe a little bit of murder, hope to escape the restrictions their lives impose on them.

The main character Hiromi Matsumoto lives with her mother and works as an OL - an office lady. Her brother introduces her to Vicky Stewart, a rich, married expatriate woman who he is having an affair with. Vicky offers Hiromi an opportunity to step away from the life that her mother has circumscribed for her - a life of tea, wifeliness and motherhood - by proposing that she develop her cherished English-language skills by working as Vicky’s interpreter and translator on a fish cookery course that Vicky is desperate to join. Hiromi

would get payment and translating experience. But what would Vicky get?

The course, taught by Keiko Yamada, is one year long and focuses on teaching the intricate cookery of *kaiseki*, which is served at *chanoyu*. Starting in the first spring month of February, the course, like the novel, lasts one year. The women's dark motivations and desperate desires play out against the background of Zen philosophy that the solemn skill of *chanoyu* so beautifully expresses, pulling them through the moons, tides, droughts, rains and flowers of the year from bitter spring, through sweet summer and sour, stormy autumn, to finish in winter, the season of salt and death.

Malachy Tallack

Malachy Tallack's book, *Sixty Degrees North*, is a sensitive, personal account of his journeys to northern lands, along the line of latitude of sixty degrees.

Malachy brings to his narrative, and to his travels in Greenland, Canada, Alaska, Russia, Finland and Scandinavia, both an original viewpoint and a distinct, northern sensibility in his careful analyses of the places in which he spends time, and in his feeling for Shetland, the fixed point of the narrative, central to Malachy's thinking and his life.

It is a book of lovely writing and profound thought, full of fascinating, illuminating detail and research, one which seems entirely a part of that which it describes, with a sense of the darkness and light which characterizes both northern topography and the life of its inhabitants.

Esther Woolfson

Malachy Tallack is a writer, editor and singer-songwriter from Shetland, currently living in Glasgow. He has released four albums and an EP, and has played support for acts such as King Creosote, Karine Polwart and Runrig. He is the editor of the online magazine *The Island Review*, and was previously editor of *Shetland Life*. Since receiving the New Writers Award, he has completed his book *Sixty Degrees North*, due to be published by Polygon in July 2015. He has also finished another, about islands that don't exist, and is currently working on a novel. He is represented by Jenny Brown Associates.

Sixty Degrees North (extract)

The helicopter lifted itself calmly from the tarmac then thundered away from Qaqortoq, up and over the fjord, flying low above bare valleys and hillsides, over tundra, lakes, rocks and snow. Below, the land stretched out in a patchwork of brown and green, studded with scraps of white and grey and blue. And then, suddenly, the sea.

In the weeks I had spent travelling south along the coast I had seen a lot of ice. In the town of Narsaq, I had walked across beaches strewn with stranded bergs, slowly decomposing in the warm, spring sunshine. They were a thousand forms: some pointed, with sharp fingers and shards, others smooth, like the curves of muscle and flesh on an animal. Some were as large as cars or caravans, others I could lift and hold in the palm of my hand: tiny fragments, faded almost to nothing. I wandered among these shapes, watching their quiet disappearance, and I felt a peculiar kind of grief. Here was a difficult presence, almost alive and almost unreal, like shadows made solid, or crystalline astonishment.

Out in the water beyond, the icebergs were bigger, but still somehow precarious. They seemed out of place in the sunshine, beside the colour of the town, beneath the blackness of the mountains. Bright, blue-white against the vitreous shiver of the water, the ice took form, like clouds, in the imagination. Reclining bathers, ships, mushrooms, whales and kayakers. They seemed caught in constant imbalance, between two worlds; theirs was a transient stillness.

But now, from the window of the brash Air Greenland helicopter, I saw something else entirely. Stretched out beneath us, reaching away to the horizon and beyond,

was an immense carpet of sea ice, a dense mosaic of flat white plates, like crazy paving on the dark water. I felt immersed. As far as I could see, the fractured ice lay tightly packed. Great slabs, the size of tennis courts or football pitches, perhaps bigger, were crammed together, and between them smaller pieces in every possible shape. This was *storis* – big ice: a multi-year pack formed in the Arctic Ocean. Each winter, a dense band of this ice drifts southwards on the East Greenland current, rounding Cape Farewell in the first months of the year, then moving slowly up the south-west coast, where I now was, gradually disintegrating as it travelled.

The whole scene was unfathomable. There was nothing for the eye to hold on to; all sense of scale was lost. Here and there an iceberg protruded, but it was impossible to know how large they were. When we buzzed low over a solitary cargo ship, trudging a path through the solid ocean, it looked far too small, like a toy, dwarfed by the cracked expanse of white and glacial blue all around it. I took the camera from my bag and held it up to the window.

That picture now hangs above my desk as I write. A blanket of shattered ice leads out to the horizon, swollen by a blue-black bruise, reflecting the clear water beyond. I return to the image over and over, as if searching for something that I know is there but cannot seem to focus upon. Framed within that photograph is the very thing I came to Greenland to see. It is an image of the North: bright and brittle, terrifying and intensely beautiful. Looking over my shoulder now, out of the window, to the heathered hill that rises steeply behind my house, I see another north. The distance between myself and that ice-laden image stretches out and becomes an unimaginable gulf. I have tried to forge a connection, a

bridge between, but the picture remains shocking, many months after I framed and hung it there.

The helicopter came to rest on the rough landing strip at Nanortalik, the southernmost of Greenland's main settlements. The village is decked out in northern Scandinavian uniform, its wooden houses coloured red, yellow, purple, green, even pink - some pastel pale, others vivid as children's paint. Nanortalik is home to around 1,500 people, with a few smaller hamlets scattered through the surrounding fjords. The village itself sits on one of the many islands that pepper this south-west coast, but it is no more isolated for that. Communities here are linked by sea and by air; there are no connecting roads.

The cabin where I was to stay was located on the other side of town from the heliport. Beyond the houses and the main street, with its two supermarkets, was the tidy old harbour, complete with white wooden church and quaint timber cottages. Most of the buildings there were occupied by the town museum, but one little red bungalow served as a hostel, in which I was the only guest.

I threw my bag into the living room, where two bunk beds huddled around a furious gas fire, and went back outside to sit on the front step. The morning had cleared and warmed a little, though there was still a bitter breeze lifting off the sea. The bay in front of the hostel was loosely cluttered with ice, just clear enough for boats to make their way in and out of the harbour. There was a slow shifting of everything, almost perceptible as I sat watching, and now and then a booming crack and splash as an iceberg split and collapsed into the water.

The view from the doorway was westward, out to sea, but took in the hunched bulk of Qaqqarsuasik, Nanortalik Island's highest point. From the step I watched ravens

swoop and wheel around the dark slopes, silhouetted as they rose above the peaks, then almost hidden against the blackness of the rock. Their caws, clicks and splutters echoed around the bay, puncturing the silence, as they punctured the air with their flight. A flurry of sounds - manic gulps and underwater barks - rained down on me as I sat, listening, watching, until hunger persuaded me to move.

At the other harbour, in the centre of town, old men sat outside a little shack that served as meat and fish market, smoking, laughing and talking. Some held their walking sticks in front of them, palms clasped around the handles, quietly watching the afternoon pass by. Others leaned in close towards each other, their stories told in whispers. In Qaqortoq I had seen this, too: a gathering of people near the water, as if this place, where seals and fish were brought to be cut up and sold, were the social hub of the town. I imagined the men had once been hunters themselves, and now the closest they could get was to come and watch the day's catch being brought in. But the stories they were telling would connect them to those who today were wielding knives. Those stories, and the memories they contained, would connect them, too, to their fathers, and their grandfathers, whose own knives carved into the meat, the seals, taken from the ice. These men were witnesses to a silent inheritance, a deep flash of blade and blood.

Hunting in Greenland is an issue of identity. It is an issue of culture. And it is an issue of controversy. There is an understandable belief among many Greenlanders that their traditional way of life is under constant threat from the ignorant views of people from outside. A kind of moral imperialism is suspected - the imposition of alien values onto a people for whom those values do not make

sense. Individuals such as Finn Lynge, a politician who in 1985 negotiated Greenland's tactical exit from the European Community, have worked hard to convince the world that the traditional Inuit culture is entirely compatible with environmental sustainability. Others have argued that the increasing European and American focus on 'animal rights' is borne not from an increased empathy and understanding for the natural world, but entirely the opposite. The Canadian activist Alan Herscovici has written that 'the animal-rights philosophy [is] widening rather than healing the rift between man and nature ... [it] may be more of a symptom of our disease than a cure'. Lynge would agree. For him, the focus on *individual* animals' rights demonstrates a failure to understand nature, or to recognise our own place within it.

What the Inuit see in the European and American attitudes to Arctic hunting is the gaping distance between our people and our environment. They see a hypocritical culture that frets and recoils over the deaths of individual wild animals elsewhere, yet which engages in industrial farming, 'pest control' on an immense scale, widespread pollution and the devastating destruction of natural habitats. As individuals, we consciously distance ourselves from killing - we close our eyes to it - yet our culture is, Lynge claims, 'characterized by its propensity for cruelty and death'.

One evening, over dinner, a young Greenlandic couple asked me whether we ate seals at home. When I replied that there were many seals in Shetland, but that islanders had never really eaten them, the couple seemed confused. 'Why wouldn't you eat them?' they enquired. I did not have a good answer. I thought, perhaps, that an abundance of fish might have made seal meat superfluous in the

past. But that didn't seem plausible enough. I wondered also whether superstition might have played a part. Stories of selkie folk – seal people – were widespread in Shetland, as elsewhere in Scotland, and perhaps this notion – that seals were somehow too *human* to eat, that they might have *souls* – was the real problem. I wasn't sure, and I am still not sure. The couple seemed dissatisfied with my answer. The idea that a seal might have a soul did not seem, to them, a good reason for it not to be eaten.

A shaman once explained to the explorer and anthropologist Knud Rasmussen that 'the greatest peril lies in the fact that to kill and eat, all that we strike down and destroy ... have souls as we have, souls that do not perish with the body, and therefore must be propitiated lest they revenge themselves'. For the traditional Inuit, souls are not the exclusive property of human beings; they are widespread, taking many forms. Propitiation is achieved by following certain cultural traditions, and, at all times, by showing respect towards the animal that is killed. It is both atonement and thanksgiving. In our own culture, meat has been increasingly divorced, for most of its consumers, from the death that makes it possible, and from the life that it once held. Because of this, I think, there is a kind of grace that we no longer recognise, and a grace, too, that we have forgotten how to say.

*

In the grey light of morning, fat clouds tumbled heavily around the mountains, punctured and crushed between the peaks, rolling, blowing and inflating, from slate to black, turning over the wind. There was rain there, on the slopes. It had not reached the town yet, but it was coming.

I was stranded inside the cabin. A severe cold had struck me on my second day in Nanortalik, and had gradually worsened until I felt unable to leave the warmth of the building. I was hot and shivering; my nose blocked and sinuses throbbing; my throat was raw and my muscles ached. I felt dreadful, and sat on the sofa next to the fire, gazing out of the window. Hours passed slowly. I read, but found it hard to concentrate for long; I turned on the television, but switched it off again when I saw what was there.

Outside, the ice shifted, clearing then clotting the dark water again, as the wind dragged from east to south to south-westerly. I watched its steady migration, back and forth across the bay, and something inside me moved as it moved. My thoughts drifted from the island where I sat to my own island 1,500 miles to the east. I thought about the people in that town; I thought about the great space that lay between their lives and my own. And I thought, too, about my father, who seemed as close to me then as the ice outside, or the warmth within the room, but as distant and unreachable as the ravens across the bay - their black lives pinpricked against the sky.

Above the water, glaucous Iceland gulls bustled their way between the bergs, camouflaged on the ice. As they lifted up to shift themselves now and then, they shone, bright white in the air. Rain wrapped itself firmly around the town, and I opened the window a little to listen to it falling. Inland, a thick black fog was slumped heavily around the mountains, but out to sea, from where the breeze was blowing, the sky was bright. It was an illusion, of course - the reflection of the sea ice on the clouds above - but it was welcome, and added to the ever-present promise of change.

Gretel Ehrlich has written that 'Arctic beauty resides in

its gestures of transience. Up here, planes of light and darkness are swords that cut away illusions of permanence'. In Greenland, that transience is impossible to ignore; it permeates each moment of each day. It is there in the melting icebergs on the shore, and in the meat on the market counters; it is there in the rushing clouds, and the changing climate. It is there in the air itself. There is the sense here that, at any moment, all certainty could be undermined - that the land could reach out in an instant and wipe people away, as the Norse settlers were once wiped from this place. There is terror in that thought, but there is comfort, too.

When my father died I learned that loss is with us always. It is not a punctuating mark in our lives; it is not a momentary pause or ending. Loss is a constant force - a spirit - that moves both within and without us. It is a process - an unceasing extinguishment that we may choose, if we wish, to bear witness to. And if we do make that choice then we commit ourselves not to a lifetime of grief and melancholy. Instead, we offer ourselves the opportunity of a firmer sense of joy and of beauty. It is no surprise and certainly no coincidence that we experience our greatest appreciation of life in those things that are fragile and fleeting. We find it in the song of a bird, in the touch of a lover, or in the shimmering memory of a moment long lost. So it should be no surprise that by attuning ourselves closer to the process of loss and transience, we may in turn be brought nearer to beauty and to joy. It is in loss - in the *anticipation* of loss - that we find our most profound pleasures, and it is there also that we may find a sense of true permanence.

In traditional Inuit society, permanence was to be found in the concept of *sila*, a kind of life force or spirit, which is sometimes translated as air, wind or weather

- or, more widely still, as 'everything that is outside'. *Sila* was the essential ingredient of life - it was breath itself - and it held the inner and outer worlds together. When a person or animal died, their life, their *breath*, returned to the world and became one with it again, or it found form in another's body. But *silá* was not a predictable permanence; it was not certainty. *Sila* encompasses both weather and climate. It is changeable, surprising and sometimes malign. Death is part of its process and part of its force, and the Inuit understanding of the world was shaped by this belief. Or perhaps it would be more true to say that the world in which the Inuit lived shaped this understanding. For natural philosophies do not spring from empty space; they are born from the land. And this seems to me a particularly *northern* view of life and death. Here, where the seasons turn heavily, emphatically, and where impermanence cannot be disguised, *silá* makes sense.

Death is at once an ending and a continuation. A breath is given back to the wind, just as ice returns to the sea; it finds new shape. But a life, too, lives on through stories and through memories, joyful in their retelling and their fleeting recollection. Loss shapes us like a sculptor, carving out our form, and we feel each nick of its blade. But without it, we cannot *be*.

Of the many absences that I carry with me - for we all, I think, are filled with holes - the absence of my father is the one that has taught me the most. It is the space through which I have come to see myself most clearly. I thought of him then, as an ice-laden wind pawed at the cabin window.

Synopsis

The sixtieth parallel marks a borderland between the northern and southern worlds. It wraps itself around the lower reaches of Scandinavia, of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Greenland; it skirts the southern coast of the Alaskan peninsula and divides the great spaces of Russia and Canada in half. The parallel also passes through the author's home, Shetland, at the far north of the British Isles.

Sixty Degrees North explores some of the places that share this latitude. In particular, it focuses on the landscapes and natural environments of the parallel, and the ways that people have interacted with those landscapes. How has human history been influenced by the climate and by natural resources? How have people shaped and changed the land? What is the relationship between culture and place?

Based around a travelogue of the author's journeys along the parallel, the book follows threads of connection between each place: shared histories of exploration and exploitation. It also considers personal feelings of longing and belonging, and through them addresses the question of what it means to be *at home*.

Poetry

Em Strang

Em Strang's practice is both rigorous and, like her woodpigeon, 'open and [moving] towards openness'. Now her project reaches a thrilling point of emergence... her poems have begun to flutter with immediacy, and to demonstrate the kind of fluency that brings to the poet fortuitous likenings and idiom. Her curiosity and honesty are unsettling, just as they should be. She is speaking of animals and humans, and the animal in our humanness, about appetite and responsibility; and about freedom, and what happens to us when we're denied it. Head and heart and husk all have their say in this thoroughly embodied poetry.

Jen Hadfield

Em has recently completed a PhD in Creative Writing (ecological poetry) at the University of Glasgow, and is now seeking a publisher for a first collection of poems, *Habitude*. She teaches Creative Writing at HMP Shotts and HMP Dumfries, and is poetry editor for *Dark Mountain*. She has published widely in anthologies and journals including *Poetry Scotland*, *EarthLines*, *New Writing Scotland*, *Entanglements: New Ecopoetry* and the *Glasgow Herald*. Two of her poems were shortlisted in the 2014 Bridport Prize. Her writing preoccupations are with 'nature' (birds feature in almost all her poems) and the relationship between the human and nonhuman. She is interested in 'embodied practice', in particular how breath, movement and voice inform and engage both writer and audience.

Brown Bear Walt Whitman

Oh fish I eat you! Oh berries I eat you! Sex nipples on bushes and fish so quicksilver, they flick through the water like shooting stars. I eat them ravenously. I am of berries. Also, I am of fish. I hunker in the water to catch miraculous dinner. My paws are tremendous. My belly is tremendous with hunger, a shipping container with no cargo, a night sky with no moon. When the hunger is here, fish are goners and berries are goners. I splosh the length of the river for the best harvest. The water chases me timelessly. Sometimes the filth comes downriver. I keep eating because I do, I must, and I keep loving the eating. Watch the strange fish jump, watch the berries twerk in the wind!

I Took God With Me To The Prison

After Kerry Hardie

I said, 'Look, there's Ben and Lewis. There's Brian and Mark. They've been here a while. They've got matching sweatshirts. Their faces are hatching things. This is the length of a corridor and these are the walls, bricks painted white, cement painted white even though everyone knows it's the colour of dead teeth, the colour of the space where dreams used to be. See that man over there and that woman with belts big enough to hold the world up - they're the keys. They're more awake when the keys jangle, more awake when the keys slot into the locks and the metal rattle-clanks against metal. They're more awake when the keys fit and the keys turn and the keys jostle in their pockets like animal bones. That light up there, that's artificial. That ground is just a cover, a false statement hiding real earth.' I asked God to look outside and pointed out the barbed-wire fences, the perimeter walls beyond perimeter walls. 'Outside there's sky,' I said. 'If you crane your neck far enough back.' God looked at the sky - bright blue (it was a clear day) - and looked at me and said nothing. 'Some of the men are here for a reason. Some of the men have done things other men don't do. Come through here and I'll show you their artwork. I'll show you pencils and pens, the squashed tubes of paint, the poems they write. Nobody believes this is the men's work, not the same men, not the bad men. Look, here's a picture of sunlight and a woman sitting. And this is where scissors are locked and pallet knives and staple guns. This is where fingers slip.' I don't know why but I showed God the toilets - one for staff,

one for prisoners. In the staff toilet there's a Gauguin poster from the time he spent in Tahiti. The women in the painting are sitting in a forest, surrounded by lush vegetation. All those leaves and trees and flowers.

Paris Hotel

'There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all' - Michel Foucault

When the maid
comes in
with
breakfast
astonishment
spills over the bed
like sunlight
over our young flesh.

The maid smiles
at
the pains au chocolat

and all the times

she's quietly
combed her hair

are in the room
with us then.

We are trapeze artists -

that's what

comes to mind

as she stands waiting,
unsure.

From where I'm lying

I can see

your pants
on the bathroom floor.

When we look at each other

the doors and windows
expand,

warp

fairground like
mirrors

and your cock is a baguette.

After a while,
she sets down the tray -

there is jam, there is hot tea

in spotless cups
like milky moons.

O

You have only one lung and a tube
to outside air, an open gill.
Your body is cut up like this, like that.
And every time you breathe
a bird sings a terrible song,
It won't be long, it won't be long.

Oars

I cross the sand barefoot
to my man and his small row boat.

The sea shocks my feet as he hands me a jacket
and together we push out and climb in.

On the water everything
is colder and stray bits of kelp nuzzle at the boat.

We find the sheltered bay
and wait all morning for fish.

Come on, you row a bit, he says,
diesel engine for a throat.

I row and row
out to nowhere, to the big grey

that keeps changing places
with itself.

I row because I can.
I row because I want to.

Summary Of Work

My writing has recently undergone a noticeable shift towards the poetic 'I' and towards material that isn't exclusively 'of the natural world'. I'm now writing about human relationships with other humans (instead of predominantly human-nonhuman interrelationship).

A preoccupation with animals (and in particular, birds) hasn't gone away though. I still find the imagery associated with fields, woodland and seascapes pulls me time and again. I can't help but write *towards it* (as Kathleen Jamie would say). I think I was a bird in a previous life.

I've recently begun writing prose poems, something I've never been drawn to before. One morning I woke up and realised that's what I wanted to write. Over the space of a couple of months, all the poems I wrote were prose poems. I was attracted to the freedom of the form (lessness) of prose poetry and there was something else about it that seduced me, too - a penchant for narrative, perhaps - but it was an unconscious development in my writing. It took me by surprise. And then, as soon as I began writing prose poems, I kept coming across them everywhere. I discovered Stephen Dunn's *Riffs & Reciprocities* (1998) and went back and re-read Tomas Tranströmer's prose poems, which I love.

Meanwhile, I've been inordinately lucky to be mentored by Jen Hadfield. I'm grateful for her poetic insight, groundedness and generous spirit.

Where next?

Bridget Khursheed

Bridget Khursheed's clear-sighted poetry observes and maps the (mostly rural) spaces she inhabits and travels through with sensory immediacy and a quiet, sure energy. It's an energy that originates, in part, from the tension between her lean, well-weighted, rhythmic language and a magpie eye for detail – from the pink belly of a swallow to the reflections on a computer screen. In her unsentimental yet deeply felt renderings of landscape, history, love and daily life, Bridget creates dynamic poems that eschew prettiness but achieve beauty.

Sarah Ream

Bridget Khursheed is a poet and geek. Published extensively in anthologies and magazines including *New Writing Scotland*, *The Rialto*, *The London Magazine*, *Poetry Scotland*, *The Eildon Tree*, *Gutter*, *Stravaig* and *Southlight*, she blogs at www.poetandgeek.com, and has published two chapbooks, *Lovers Farm* and *Roads to Yair*. She was shortlisted for the inaugural Dr Gavin Wallace Fellowship in 2013.

She has spoken on everything from the Brontës (she is also one of five sisters and grew up in a vicarage), new Scottish poets, John Leyden and knitting with dog hair. The geek part is easy: Bridget has a day job in software, having pioneered intranets in the UK and developed the first online course at the University of Oxford.
@khursheb @poetandgeek

Climbing Above Kinlochleven

Forget forecasts. Let's aim up,
ignorant. The small grey town,
wedged into Loch Leven,
drops like blood to the heart.

Grabbing a pinch of blue sky,
we climb into Na Gruagaichean.
Up here, the loch becomes sea,
the path ice. And a few flakes come.

Spare socks for gloves, and the snow
sweeps us up. Like monkeys, we run
for the lee, where lazy whorls push damp
white into sandwiches and faces.

Rock beneath our waterproofs
beats against yours and mine.
Warm limbs. Snow falls. Wait.
Is there a way down?

Investigating, blanketed steps
until the sky is ours again.
Dive into the circulation of the valley.
We are the road home.

The Walk to School

Our path's geometry through the purple-headed grass
is mappable strong lines and blunt angles
a point of divergence when the stream is dry
or if we are in a hurry
an irregular quadrangle coinciding at the entry
to the rugby field

Its four corners marked by
fox's territorial dropping
the nailed-shut gate of Bessie Reid's field
a dead hedgehog
a sign prohibiting canine fouling

Within this structure are the dandelions
whose stems we can only kick free to convert
after the clocks have ticked away
swallows' pink bellies just above them
that I always mark as martins
falcon pellets in the dried-up burn bed
or wet all-terrain sandals
and a plank bridge that does not fit the water

It doesn't connect
a balanced spring dislodges
the wren's nest
the kestrel and one fieldfare
pine cones and the worn-out path
the council try to discourage
salvageable litter on Abbotsford Road's pavement

The weather we have learnt always and never perfect
in the scheme the nature of things

Peak Oil

Around the steading dairy's abraded foundations
the green shadow of dusty hazel uncoppiced
radiating warblers on the edge of the clearing
inside the rig still pumps amongst the ivy its ranch
men posture in a prefab kept right after so many
years their company logos worn smooth on overalls
that they both appear to wear all night all day

while the space gets smaller an owl pocket
now as the long grass around the machinery harder
to manage vole tunnels the kestrel ceiling
the sky that once seemed so big
at night sleepy hands must nurse webbed gauges
blockages in the system more frequent pneumatic
suckle the output at most one pail of rank milk.

Commute

the water on the road
the leaves in beaten hedgerow
the beat-up car leaves
the water on the car
is flicked off by the wipers
there onto Burnside road
the brown water in the burn
the hill it scours and turns
water stronger than the rock
the water on the road
never stops culvert hedgerow
beaten back and lochans
stand in fields can't stop
the rain the beaten-up car
bites through on its way
the water leaves and hay
steams in stacks
at ploughed field edge
the tractor chews the herbiage
brown water on the road
the hedge sinks into the dark
the light leaves a beat-up sky
I go this way just to get home
the water on the road

Waxwings

It doesn't hurt. They've flown away.

The times I don't go down Winston Road:
days flutter past into supermarket, mill, garage.
Below its suicide-bridge horizon, Winston Road is a fall
thing.

And winter. All the ice from town was dumped
here in the dogging park-up to pock and slide
sodium grit into sticky river past the sewage farm.
Midway the gaswork tank still half full toads
beside Winston Road, an ancient monument
held up by B&Q stacking-shelf Meccano scaffolding.

Facing down floral Black Path signposts, bisecting,
once and future railway, shortcuts back the way to town
via bushes
and sex attacks. There are pavements both sides
of Winston Road and a 40-mph limit but no pedestrians.
Winston Road is where early I have the best chance
of waxwings, redwings, fieldfare, blackbird, wren, siskin,
heron.

I am. All the birds.

In autumn after thrush fall, the speed limit is easy to
break
driving slowly; a tank girl in a soldered hatch,
erratic struts of red Ford Ka aching on tarmac.
It is very easy to be overtaken. Birds are hard to see.

At the far end of Winston Road, five cherries grow bigger
by the flats,
shed their leaves, bloom depending on the time of year.

Sometimes they are vandalised,
Sometimes not.
Everything drops out of the sky this year in circles.
By the practice pitches, an acre of overgrown dog-shit-
bag hedges
edge the depot, refrigerated lorry park and workshops.
A triangle of access thick with rowan, crap and
hedgefruit

empty nature and odd moments;
mostly on Winston Road you are on your own.
But it is all mine without shopping lists, targets or
visitors,

not even children to be picked up.
A waxing space to grow and throw
open every gate, pitch, track, post, black path and bridge

wings that could slice the air, be seen
until you fall to earth again
until the beaten roundabout becomes the ambulance
back home.

The Mews House

The door at the back is the one I prefer.
Its viscous handle still damp at midday
sited where no breeze can dry or use.
A green skin shines uneven bricks.

Chewing the air, I've forgotten the bright sun
of the front square, its carriageable sweep,
thin-gated garden all breasted with bloom
like a girl in a balcony bra. I don't want

an easy ride. I want your thin blankets.
The back bedroom's lack of light so thick
I cannot write a word
unless I look hard. Unless, my love, I think.

walking the lime tree drive that time
with the sky all swinging blue
around our fingers and you
masquerading as the wealthy industrialist
all this is mine. I almost believed
you would give it up for me.

Or we're older and I'm back in town
with you attentive in a softly carpeted hall.
This time I imagine a government job:
a desirable unobtrusive place.

Later I suppose we might go out
not overdressed
to a dinner slightly spoiled
by respective middle-aged appetites

but for now our eyes meet
before you take my coat or scarf
and comment on country weather.
The mirror is gold and quiet.

Jonathan Durie

Jonathan's a poet of great promise and thoughtfulness, and his poems are full of life and striking ways of seeing. I can't wait to see what he does next.

Jacob Polley

Jonathan Durie was born in Kirkcaldy, Fife and currently lives alone in Edinburgh without cats. He studied International Relations at St Andrews University before winning the Robert Tyre Jones Memorial Scholarship to Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Whilst at Emory Jonathan was shortlisted for the Agnes Nixon and Kiki McCabe Prize for Screenwriting.

Jonathan's writing has featured in workshops by the Byre Theatre's Playwrights lab and Stage to Page at the Glasgow CCA. Jonathan was recently shortlisted for the Jane Martin Poetry Prize. He currently works as a script consultant for Berserk Films and is represented by Independent Talent Group. Jonathan received the Scottish Book Trust Callan Gordon Award for a short story writer or poet between the ages of 18 and 35. Jonathan tweets as @jfdurie.

SPUME

A brewed tsunami
Out the keg under Tyne Bridge
Beer swills over my wrecked boots.
Spigot about splits the pub window
In this heat
Beer curdles into brown sauce
As it laps the kerb
Mud spume crusts are half-baked.
We're exhausted by this last incident
On our way home
My hazards flick the yellow finger
At the blocked mob in the bus shelter.
The barman's out to meet me,
He's laughing at one big Jock.

Stripling

The nursery is frugal,
This is the sparse planting
Of a single spineless shoot.
A slip of green for the Forester
Alone to preen, to foster
This tended escape over bare earth.
Overhead rippling evergreens sigh,
Full boughs sing
You cannot sit in a stripling.
Nor shelter
Nor affect a fire from the outgrown hazard roots.
The straggling bears no fruits.
Yet
A magnificent climb will
Ring in her renewal.

Missus Windsor

She's aw' on her ain
Wi' yon wanderin' hubby
In the big hoose doon Holyrood Park.
The wan wi' the streaky windaes,
Nae blinds, aw' tatty crino;
Dusters fir net curtains, honestly.
Cannae dae it aw' hersel'.
Dinnae see her grandson helpin', eh no?
Him wi' the chin and the helicopter.
Doesnae even tak the bairn tae see her.
And she, shiverin', hauf deid in her palace,
Murder to heat they wans, ay?
Burn up yer winter fuel allowance; wi' the high ceilin's,
ken?
Cannae get auld folk oot they hoosies, ay?
Memories, that's aw' it is.
They get attached; it's a wee shame
Would she no be better aff in a hame?

No Hardness like an Open Hand

This dim silver pin
Proclaims
Great, great granddad was
Hurt for country and for King.
A pocket-top bulletin
Like a hand against four feathers.
Still hecklers pass white feathers down
Like a second prize given by a new widow.
Great, great grandma
Struck that woman so hard
She lost teeth.

Overheard

Undergraduate: philosophy
The thing it is
Is
We are
Going out, right?
Not *atavistically*
Naturally,
I started to wonder.
I just thought in an unconnected way
Maybe,
Even though I'm certain
You think the same
The *qualia*
(It just means something immeasurably unique in the
souls of sentient beings).
Don't shake your head.
I'm not surprised
No
I get it;
Like, existentialist silence,
It's so very you.

Ann MacKinnon

Ann MacKinnon's poems in Fife Scots have a wonderful range of vocabulary and imagery. They dip and flow. The richness of 'the berries broozled' ('Ablaw the Elder'), 'a bleeze gawn in the hearth' ('Chaff'), or 'the poet's hidlins laid bare' ('Dead Poet') is irresistible. Reading Ann's work is a delight to the senses. Her poems sit in the mouth, chewy and satisfying, on subjects as diverse as exile, emigration, first love, reminiscence, contemporary Scotland, family life, landscapes and longings and many more. She finds so many ways of looking at the human condition, of what matters, what is at the true heart of everything. I totally recommend reading this new voice in contemporary Scots poetry.

Sheila Templeton

Ann MacKinnon was born in Fife but now lives in Balloch with her husband. She studied English at Edinburgh University and then completed an MLitt in Creative Writing at Glasgow/Strathclyde. She writes in both Scots and English.

She has appeared in the Scottish Federation of Writers anthology *Making Waves*, The Helensburgh Writers' Workshop anthology and the *Northern Renewal - Borders* magazine. As a result of receiving the New Writers Award Ann has decided to try and get out there and perform. With that in mind she is a regular at Last Monday at Rio, an open mic night in Glasgow, and has performed her work in the Scottish Writers' Centre.

Her ambition is to produce a collection of poems in Scots and she is currently seeking a publisher.

Faslane and Ayont

Oor veesitors win tae the hoose.
We tak the road wi them.
A smirren spittle saftens the air.

Through Glen Fruin a squinty wee road
slews and jinks its way intae ma heid
as I tour guide through auld battles.

Nooadays a firing range,
forbidding signs dinnae pit aff the gleds
that soar abin us.

They're dumfoonert at the brawness
but stammygastered at Faslane
clartin the shore.

At the heicht we gowp at
the loch where a kraken lurks
surroondit bi its navy o metal cranes.

Razor wire glints, offerin
a howf fur the grey reaper.
The smirr has turnt tae blatter.

Haunds

In a daurk room in GOMA
the monitors spew oot licht,
videos playin and replayin.

His werk drew me in
fir a kent the artist as a laddie.
He lood wirds then.

But noo its aw in the seein
You could spend hoors lookin
and makin yir ain stories.

The constantly movin haunds
are reachin oot tae ithers,
stretchin oot, reemagin
fir summat tae haud.

After seeing an exhibition by Douglas Gordon

Smeddum's Their Heirskip

I luiked in a picture book,
saw mony a freend's face
fu o jeest and cheer.

Thocht on them
nae longer here
and minded.

We're bit a spirll that faws
and then is champit
ablow the grund.

Haud yir wheesht and ye mizzle.
Those wi a jag nicht nip
and thirl longer.

We should spake up
and mak oor sooths snell
afore the quait o the grave.

There's nae pynt haudin in
wi folk fur the sake o it.
Leave a steug.

Hebridean Funeral

Black-clad they traik
ahint the semple pine kist
heids doon, een oan the grund
schaulin wi him tae the grave.

The watter skelps this dreich
shore and seamaws
greet fur mair, fur mair
abin the wave's rair.

Anither age caws them, bit
they haud oan tae custom
and cairry him tae the
heidland o his cauf kintra.

Nae greetin, nae wirds, stiff
moos howkit fae this dreichness
as they lower the kist
Inch by inch intae the daurk.

The wind sears them
an they haund back the boady
tae its hame. The grund
pulls him intae her waim

The Dead Poet – Philip Larkin

Like ony ither hoose fur reddin oot
the poet's hidlins are laid bare,
a hunner creeshie ties,
boxes o pencils, keys.

Whit taen me
wis the champagne corks -
a sign o celebrations, dates
screived oan them.

Despite his genie at scrievin
he hid the selfsame clamjamfrie
that hauds us aw tae life.

Nae hidden scribblins or wise wirds,
jist a tim manuscript book,
a gaitherin o auld claes
and a midden o dust.

On the wird o his lover,
diaries were burnt.

He kept aw thon yissless taigle
but his heirskip
wis eaten by the flames,
turnt tae ashes.

The Director

She peers through net curtains
as the fowk breenge past.
The street's her theatre.

She gies them a pairt
in her play, lattin them
dress as they want.

The lawyer charcoaled
in and the punk like
a parrot, plumage bricht.

She spaks their lines,
maks up lives
o brief encoonters.

When aw is quait she
rocks awa the hours planning
the morn's performance.

Her actors hae nae inklin
o the shadowy figure
gien them their lifelines.

Receiving the Scottish Book Trust New Writers Award has given me the confidence to concentrate on my work in Scots and to try to write poems with relevance to the modern world, as well as looking back at the past. In *Screeving at Stones* I discuss the fact that writing in Scots is very natural to me.

My subject matter is varied as it roams back into history with *The Battle of Glenfruin* and comes right up to date with poems on the referendum and comments on the Faslane nuclear base. My subject matter is often taken from places I have been or people I have met but I also scour the newspapers for little gems with which to work.

I experiment with form and have written sonnets, villanelles and triolets but free verse tends to be my preferred form where I often adopt a three-line stanza. I like to make use of my senses and try to relay my feelings by using unusual imagery.

I often see my poems - it is like looking at a picture and describing it, a snapshot of a moment. Sometimes the poems, in fact, come from pictures. I hope that the reader gets a glimpse of something but is left with a question at the end.

I have self-published four pamphlets of poems in both Scots and English but this year I have worked exclusively on Scots poetry and have a collection of about sixty poems with themes of landscape and longings or 'Scarps and Scrapes'.

Children's and young adult fiction

Juliette Forrest

Juliette is a compelling storyteller and it has been a privilege to read this emerging new talent. In *Twister*, she has created a wonderfully engaging children's story and a young firecracker of a heroine, a lovably poignant three-dimensional character who jumps off the page and into your heart. Most of all, for me, it is *Twister's* voice and her way of seeing the world that makes this a standout read. Original, oddball and extraordinary, it's a voice to capture young readers from the very first lines and take them on a fabulous journey.

Julie Bertagna

Juliette was born in Ayr and currently lives in the West End of Glasgow. Since 1990 she has enjoyed working as both an art director and a copywriter for some of the top advertising agencies in the UK. Along the way, Juliette picked up several industry awards for her TV, radio, press, posters and ambient media campaigns.

In 1995 she put her career on hold to travel round the world for a year. This allowed her to take leave of her senses and it wasn't long before she was throwing herself out of planes, diving with sharks on the Great Barrier Reef and haring across America by Greyhound bus, in the company of newly released prisoners.

In 2011 she was shortlisted for *The Guardian* readers' travel-writing competition. This prompted her to join Glasgow University's Words in Progress class where she loved the creative freedom of writing her own stories.

Juliette is busy working on *Twister*, her first children's novel.

Twister (extract)

Chapter One

When I appeared the sky glowed green and lightning made the windows look all cracked. Aunt Honey swears that she ain't never seen no storm like it. Ma said she worked out the time between each of her contractions by counting the roof tiles that flew past the window. And that when she cussed with the pain, the wind carried her colourful words far away to another land.

She screamed and the wind howled and the lightning flashed and when the tips of the trees touched the ground, I waah-waahed.

Pa didn't make it back in time. Waves the size of mountains crashed down on the boat. It went up and down and up and down on the black and blue water. Two months passed before he held me in his arms. I wriggled around so much he called me Twister. It were a twister that had blown the colour out of his hair. I must have scared him bad too. We never seen him again after that.

Ma don't talk much 'bout Pa. But I can always tell when he's in her thoughts. She's here but she's somewhere else too. Aunt Honey says it ain't possible for a person to be in two different places at the same time. But I think she's wrong 'bout that.

You should see how Ma dusts Pa's picture. All gentle. She's afraid he'll disappear if she rubs it too hard. I adore that picture of Pa. He's smiling in it. Betcha there ain't many people who can say their pa's always smiling.

Aunt Honey says I'm the spit of him. Except my hair ain't white, it's raspberry blonde. I have his blue, bluer-

than-blue eyes. But he don't have a gap between his front teeth to whistle through. I got that from Ma.

Ma says I learned to walk quicky-quick. When I could run, she and Aunt Honey and Point the dog chased me round the farm. I made the chickens fly and the horses fly. I even made the pigs fly. If Aunt Honey caughted me, she'd throw me up into the air so I could touch the Big Blue.

Ma decided it'd be a fine idea to sit me down for lessons. I had the attention span of a buzzy-fly. The goings-on outside the window happened to be way more interesting than spelling or numbers. I'd watch the black rooster on the barn roof twirling in the wind and the clouds playing chasey-catchy with each other in the Big Blue.

I think clouds is great. You can see faces in them. And sometimes they turn into mermaids or fancy shoes or skulls or scaredy-crows. I love how clouds is all sensitive. They change colour when they is sad and then they cry. They must see things on the ground that upsets them. Some day, me and Point is going to spend the whole day on one. They is so soft and fluffy, I betcha we can bounce around on them for hours. And when we is tired from doing that, we'll sit down and watch the land beneath us float by.

One morning, when Ma and Aunt Honey went to sow the seeds, Point and me snuck out. We angered the ants with a stick and I caught butterflies with my hands. I found three-lined skinks under rocks. It's fun finding three-lined skinks under rocks. They sure is quick.

Point took me to where the bunny rabbits lived in the field. They dug lots of holes and left small round dottles all over the grass. They sure do poop a lot.

The sun shone so fierce we headed for the stream. Its brown water sang over green, furry stones. Point showed me how to cool down by rolling in the mud.

When we got back home, Ma's eyes was red and Aunt Honey frowned. She said to Ma that the whole of Culleroy would think I were being raised by a family of mudskippers. Then she telt Ma that the time had come to let me go.

Thing is, she weren't holding onto me in the first place.
Bang! Slam!

Ma closed the doors in the house real loud, and her sighs was so big they spun the black rooster on the barn round and round and round.

Chapter Two

When the white strawberries peeped out from underneath their scratchy leaves, Ma took me to the school in Culleroy. Inside it smelt of wood and old paper and roses and chalk dust and sweetie breath and scuffed boots.

Ma squeezed my arm before she left.

Everybody gawped at me. Just as I thought it'd be a good idea to leave too, Miss Ida asked me to introduce myself to the class.

The girls was all prissy. And the boys scowled.

When I told them my name they laughed. My face changed its colour.

Miss Ida shush-shushity-shushed them and asked me to tell everyone 'bout myself. I wanted to say that I'm crazy 'bout going on adventures with Point and hunting for snickerbugs and watching butter slide off hot pancakes. Boy, do I love that. But I seen them faces in front of me and muttered that I liked fishing instead. And shooglepapple candy. Everybody likes shooglepapple candy. Even prissy girls and scowling boys like shooglepapple candy.

Miss Ida put me next to Cherry Bonnwell. She gave me a look, as if I'd a catchy-disease and moved her chair away. I decided not to growl at her. There was faded pink ribbons in her blonde curly hair - the sign of a fainter if ever I seen one.

When Miss Ida started talking, I plain forgot to watch the clouds tippy-toe across the Big Blue. Even Point gave up snuffling at the bottom of the school door to see if I'd come out to play.

Miss Ida telt us stories 'bout the people who lived on the globe. There was men made of china and upside-down girls who followed the stars and boys who slept in houses built of ice.

Miss Ida has a globe on her desk. It reminds me of a pink and yellow and blue and green and purple gobstopper. I ain't licked it yet but I betcha the sea tastes of blueberry. You can spin it round and round and round. I didn't know the globe were so enormous. What an uh-oh disaster! How would I ever find Pa now?

Miss Ida spoke to us 'bout new things everyday. I'd be so amazed she'd have to close my mouth with her hand.

I telt anybody who'd listen what I learned.

I whispered to Point that there was cats in Africa so huge that they'd chase *him*. He thump-thumpety-thumped his tail in the dust.

The orange mountains that breathe fire astonished Aunt Honey so much she burnt the toast.

I sat the spring peeper frogs down and explained that they used to be tadpoles. They wasn't too happy 'bout that. It made them gulp.

Ma dropped the washing basket in a puddle when she heard me counting out all the chickens in the yard.

I even shouted to Turrety Knocks that if he seen a rainbow there'd be a pot of gold at the end of it. And if he

found it, he could buy some new clothes and live in a proper house. If he hadn't been so drunk, he'd have hurled his leather boot at me.

When the branches waved and the leaves chattered, I'd sit in the apple tree and tell the hot wind everything. And I hoped it'd take my words straight to Pa's ears.

Chapter Three

Clem Hussable hates me. He says my brain is the size of a crumb. Clem sits at the back of the class. He has dirty hair and scabs and fallen-down socks. There's always something yucky-yuck-yuck coming out of his nose. And his mouth.

'You don't have a pa!'

'Yes I do! He's at sea, not that it's any of your business.'

'He's been away a mighty long time.'

'That's 'cause he's searching for treasure on the other side of the globe!'

That shut him up. But I could feel Clem's spider-brown eyes following me around. They is deep-set as if someone pushed them hard into his skull. His pa has two homes. One in Culleroy and one in Gravelswitch Jail.

Clem's smart 'cause he's friends with the stupidest boys. They think he's hee-hoo funny. If someone cries at break time, you can bet your life Clem's behind it. Hair pulling and head slapping and arm twisting and stomach punching and wrist burning and stick poking and candy stealing. He does it all. And there ain't no use in telling tales to Miss Ida. Parker Harp did and look what happened to him. His leg got broke in two places. He telt everyone that he tripped down by Raging River but Dunk Torn says he seen Clem pushing Parker out of a tree.

I won a prize for building a boat that didn't go belly up in the bucket. I made it from a rusty can and paper and string and a twig. Miss Ida said it were a remarkable feat of engineering.

I'd never won a prize before. Miss Ida gave me a yellow kite. It had a long tail of bright bows. They was lots of different colours. Rainbow bows. It took my breath away. Point would go loopy-loo when he seen it flying in the air.

Chapter Four

After school they took me by surprise. Clem and the boys stopped breathing behind the grey crooked stones with the names on them. They whole scared me to death when they jumped out. Clem stamped on my boat. The others used sticks to change the colour of my skin.

'Your pa's Turrety Knocks.'

'No he ain't!'

'Yes he is! Everybody says he is. You stink like him too.'

Clem grabbed my kite and snapped its frame. I kept my face still as walls. I would not give him the satisfaction of my tears - not even when he ripped off its tail.

Every day after that I lost something: a button, an apple, a clump of hair, a tooth. And when I thought he couldn't take nothing else from me, Clem whispered he'd cut out my tongue.

I stopped telling Point and Aunt Honey and the frogs and Ma and Turrety Knocks what I learned. And I stopped winning stupid prizes too.

Miss Ida kept me behind after class. She wears a lot of blue. It's the same colour of blue that's on the back of a lady duck's wing. She smells of that fancy talc at the pharmacy. It honks of roses. I don't know how they done

that 'cause there ain't any in it. And I should know, I took the lid off and rummaged around inside it to see if I could find some.

Her eyes is grey as rocks. I ain't seen the ones on the back of her head yet but she keeps on telling us that she's got them. I think it's true. When she's writing on the board, she'll always know when Cherry Bonnell is chewing on her hair or when Bing Hardy is pulling faces.

'Twister,' she said. 'What's wrong?'

'Nothing.'

Miss Ida brushed some chalk off her skirt.

'You never put your hand up in class anymore,' she said. 'And your grades are slipping.'

I fixed my eyes on a picture of a cabin in the woods that hanged squinty on the wall. I wished I were there instead.

Miss Ida shifted in her seat. 'I can't help you if you don't tell me what the matter is. So spit it out, I'm listening.'

'There ain't nothing to tell,' I said with a shrug.

'I see,' she said, taking her glasses off to rub her eyes. The way people do when they is too tired to think in a straight line. She put her glasses back on and sighed.

'Twister, if you fall behind in class any more, I'll have to let your ma know and I'll give you extra homework every night. Do you understand what I'm saying?'

'Yes, Miss Ida.'

'Off you go then,' she said.

I walked fast towards the door.

'Twister?'

'Miss Ida?'

'Could you bring some snickerbugs in on Monday? I'm doing a lesson on nocturnal creatures. It would be much appreciated.'

'Uh-huh.'

‘It’s “yes, Miss Ida”.’

‘Yes, Miss Ida.’

She started to tidy her desk. I took this as a sign I could leave. I felt real sorry that I couldn’t tell her ’bout Clem and all. But I valued the use of my legs way more.

Chapter Five

Outside the sun shone and the wind played with the trees. Trees is the best. Not just ’cause you can climb them but ’cause they talk to each other. They wave their branches and shake their leaves like they is laughing. Or they’ve just heard some oh-my-golly-gosh gossip. And they is clever too. Aunt Honey says their roots grow deeper in a storm.

Clem and the boys stood waiting for me on the path. Their heads snapped up and they walked towards me the same way a pack of dogs advances on something they is itching to tear apart.

Clem stepped forward. He had mud on his face.

‘Did you squeal to Miss Ida, Twister? Did you?’

I shook my head.

There was five of them and one of me. The other boys came closer with their fists balled up. The air suddenly felt thick and heavy.

Quick as a flash, a cold knife scratched at my throat.

‘Old oily Ollie oils old oily autos,’ hissed Clem.

The boys glanced at each other.

‘That’s a tongue twister... and here’s Twister’s tongue.’

One of Clem’s hands gripped the back of my neck. I felt his nails dig into my skin. I shivered as they cut through my flesh. His other hand forced its way into my mouth. I closed my eyes and bit down as hard as I could.

Crunch! Crack!

I tasted grit and salt and metal. Clem made the same noise as a baby bunny rabbit caught in a dog's jaws.

He let me go and the boys stepped back.

My legs blurred and the grass blurred and the trees blurred. When I finally stopped running, I had no breath left. I found myself under the bridge where Turrety Knocks lives. He built a shack out of bottles and wood and straw and barrels and crates and fencing.

I picked up a rock and threw it. It smashed Turrety Knocks's bottle-window. I chucked another one and it knocked over a pail. The third one hit him square on the head.

'I'll leave your guts out for the dogs to chew on when I'm done with you!' he roared. As soon as he seen me, his eyebrows moved up his head.

I started to shake and my heart tried to climb out from behind my ribs.

'You ain't my pa!' I shouted. My voice went away, came back, went away and came back again. A crow flapped up to the bridge to see what all the fuss were 'bout.

Turrety Knocks's hair stuck up as if he'd just been hit by lightning. He coughed, which upset the crow. It flapped away.

'Those boys got to you, didn't they?' he said.

Things was hard to see 'cause my eyes went swimming. Turrety Knocks set the pail back upright.

'Don't go getting yourself worked up. I've got something for you.'

Turrety Knocks disappeared into his shack. He left the door open. I wiped my sleeve across my face and walked right on in.

Synopsis

Twister is determined to find her pa, who vanished into thin air when she was a baby. After being viciously attacked by the school bully, she is comforted by the town drunk, Turrety Knocks. He hands Twister a letter written by her pa before he disappeared. Filled with hope, Twister and her beloved dog, Point, start the search for him, which takes them deep into Holler Woods. Here she encounters the mysterious Maymay who has an ancient necklace that can help Twister, but it comes with a terrible catch. If she chooses to tap into its special powers a healer by the name of White Eye will hunt her down and kill her for it. Frightened of causing her ma and Aunt Honey further grief, Twister leaves empty-handed. A shocking turn of events soon forces Twister to take the necklace but can she find her pa before White Eye slays her in cold blood?

This is a tale of love, loss and magic set in a small farming community in Culleroy, Kentucky. Twister takes us on a heart-stopping adventure where we discover there is a whole lot more floating around in the air than we ever could have imagined. Filled with colourful characters both alive and dead, her world is one where the ordinary does not exist.

Lindsay McKrell

I love Lindsay's Gothic take on the British seaside, and the darkly funny adventures that this makes possible for her determined, plait-twirling heroine Lily Wicked. Lindsay's writing style conjures up vivid pictures of Lily's surroundings, particularly the gently decaying once-grand hotel that is her home, and she has created, in *Bartholomew Wicked* and *Miss Sharp*, two splendidly awful villains whose plots Lily must try to thwart. *Lily Wicked* is an adventure story with a difference, told by an author with a very distinctive writing voice.

Gill Arbuthnott

Lindsay McKrell studied languages at university, visiting France and Bulgaria and working in Brussels before returning to Scotland to train as a librarian. Her career has ranged from nursing college to teenage libraries to her current post as a Community Liaison Librarian in Stirling. As a student, Lindsay had poetry published and wrote short historical plays for the Living History summer programme in Stirling and Ayr. She took a break from writing to have children and complete a PhD. Then she began writing for children.

Her first novel, *Crow*, was shortlisted for the Kelpies Prize for new Scottish fiction in 2008. That year, she was also awarded an apprenticeship in the Adventures in Fiction mentoring scheme. She has since written *High Tide* and *Lily Wicked* and is working on a further novel set in Waverley train station, called *Lost*. *Lily Wicked* was shortlisted in literary agency Cornerstone's Wowfactor competition and made it to the final three.

Lily Wicked (extract)

Chapter One

Lily White leans out to check the weather. She is the first to know if rain is on the way – her attic bedroom peeps from the roof of the hotel. Looking out is tricky. To get a good view of the clouds, you need to scramble up onto the windowsill and peer out past the rusty gutters, swinging on the curtain rail. One slip would mean a quick trip skating over slates to the precipice beyond and the waves that boil beneath. That does not stop Lily.

Today the sea is calm, the sky bright, but a chill wind moans. Lily climbs back down and shuts the window. It is just as cold inside. The room is always draughty – the heating doesn't work and the taps up here are dry. Lots of things in this hotel are broken. In grander days this was the servants' quarters and no one fixed the plumbing just for them. She takes the jug and fills her china bowl.

'Holy macaroni, it's freezing!' she splutters, as a scoop of water splashes her. Soap slips between her fingers and a moment later she reaches for a towel. 'There, that covers the essentials.'

Lily slips on her neat black dress, pulls thick tights over her skinny legs, takes her favourite bright white apron and ties the strings around her waist. She sits at her dressing table, fingers whizzing as she binds her long hair into plaits. She checks her reflection, practises her waitress smile and leaves.

Four flights of stairs lead from her attic bedroom to the entrance hall below. They curl in a spiral like the inside of a shell. She dreams of sliding down the helter-skelter

bannister from her bedroom to the bottom but that would be childish and Lily is almost thirteen.

She lives with her mother in this large hotel clinging to a cliff top. It has forty rooms on three floors with two pillars either side of the big front door, like a small stately home. It is a bit run-down, but it's the only home she's ever known.

The dining room is empty when she gets there: these days there are not so many guests. The tables are set neatly but the room seems bare. She pushes through the double doors to the kitchen and they close behind her with a rubbery squelch.

'It's like a cemetery in there,' she mutters.

Antonio turns round. He is standing at the servery, a large spatula in his hand, a frown creasing his forehead. 'You have some dead people?'

'No, it's just one of those things you say.'

Antonio puts a hand to his chest and breathes out in relief. 'Fantastico. Because the dead people, they would not help the hotel.'

'You're right there, they'd never pay their bills.'

Lily looks sideways at Antonio, the Italian orphan they took in some years ago. She never knows when he is joking. He is tall and skinny with crazy curly hair that he ties back in a ponytail. As the day goes on more and more hair sticks out at the side and when cooking under stress his hair escapes its tie completely. Lily can tell how his day is going just by looking at him. He makes perfect spaghetti, just the right consistency to stick to the ceiling. She knows this from experience and she knows it tastes good too.

Not that he makes pasta very often. Cook is most particular about who dabbles with her saucepans. He is in charge of breakfast, washing pots and chopping carrots;

she does all the rest. As a result most of the food is brown, like chops and mince, grey like Brussels sprouts or white like mashed potato. Something about Cook reminds Lily of mash. Maybe it's her apron, large and round as a passing cloud. She sees it now, approaching fast to crush her in a cuddle.

'Morning, Lily! How are you today?'

'Just dandy.' Lily smooths her own apron when Cook puts her down.

'No guests yet, dear?'

Lily looks up at the kitchen clock, down at her wrist. She can predict the future. 'Any minute now...' The minute hand is sitting just before twelve and the hour hand at seven.

She pushes through the doors to see Mr Sims taking a seat at his usual table.

'A little late, my dear?' he asks as she goes by.

'I don't think so, Mr Sims. Shall we synchronise our watches?' Mr Sims produces a fine gold pocket watch from inside his waistcoat. The second that he opens it, the minute hand hits twelve and a melodious chime begins. Lily shows her own rather plain watch to the guest. It has just turned seven too. Mr Sims nods his approval. 'Can't be too careful.'

'I agree. The usual? Toast and egg?'

'That will be splendid, thank you.'

Many miles to the north, someone else is waiting for the dawn. He does not feel rested or at peace.

Mr Wicked finds it hard to sleep. He has seen things best forgotten but cannot forget them. The dark is not a friend to him; his dreams are never sweet. Little sounds disturb him. The walls of his room are tissue thin and every snore and snuffle, every poo and pee, every little

belch of humanity is agony. A cough next door and he springs up in bed with racing heart and clammy forehead, reaching for a gun that isn't there. His nerves spark, his eyes are chased by shadows - he has stayed here far too long. Freedom is calling him.

He lies in bed watching the sun come sluggish to the sky and thinks of better sounds. A rusty key scraping in the lock, the creaking door that opens to let light flood in and people trickle out. And, oh, the coins that clink as eager fingers count them! The crisp rustle of banknotes, a spring breeze through the trees - inexpressibly delicious! These sounds echo round the cell through twenty years of longing, twenty sad years lived inside a box.

At last it shrills! The morning call alarm, and then the joyous opera of curses, bedsprings pinging and feet shuffling as unshaven neighbours mutter into life.

Bartholemew was born a Wart and changed his name to Wicked. The officers call him Bartholemew W, so as not to draw attention to this rather boastful surname, but everyone knows what the W stands for. Wickedness will out - it cannot be denied. Bartholemew prefers his new name and he likes to think it suits him.

'Wicked is as wicked does,' he says to anyone who wonders why he chose it.

'So are you really baad?' they ask occasionally, smirking and scoffing if they haven't been there long.

'Try me,' he replies, one eyebrow raised and a cold smile on his lips. They do not ask again.

In ones and twos, other guests drift in for breakfast. The regulars sit at the same tables every time and order the same food.

'Kippers, Miss Liverish?' asks Lily.

‘Yes, dear, I will try a morsel, but my stomach is so delicate this morning...’

It is the same every morning but still she eats like a Velociraptor. Miss Liverish has many minor ailments and doesn’t like to keep them to herself.

‘Coming up!’ says Lily, with her best waitress smile. She doesn’t mind. If she sighs, going to get the hot breakfasts and returning to serve them, it is only a small sigh. She has worked there all her life and seen things change.

Even with breakfast in full flow the dining room looks bare. The tables are clean and neat and tidy but somehow... dull. Lily can remember when her mum put fresh flowers on the tables every day. Now she doesn’t seem to care. Lily’s father died seven years ago and since then her mother Rose has folded up like an umbrella. Lily has to look after herself.

She can sort the rooms and bookings on her own. She does it well and she is happy, really. She likes the beach in Broadsea Bay, and helping out the staff in the hotel. She likes the guests, who see her as a friend. Lily White sleeps deeply and her dreams are sweet.

But sometimes as she posts toast and delivers kippers, she wonders what is out there, just beyond the hotel walls. Her fingers prick with anticipation. She can feel the tide about to turn and she waits for the change, uneasy, wondering what the next wave will bring.

Bartholemew folds up his rough grey blanket one last time. He lays it on the patched sheet that conceals a lumpy horsehair mattress. He is done with that.

His suit still fits him, though the jacket is tighter than before. He gives his well-shined shoes a final polish. Everything is ready. Mr Wicked looks into the mirror and is pleased by what he sees - barely a wrinkle on his skin,

no stray grey hairs. His dark eyes flash as he twirls the ends of his moustache and carefully oils them. He really is devilishly handsome.

Not that anyone in this place would notice. He has to wait patiently, take his place among the sundry ruffians eager to be off. They line up behind the huge oak door, six inches thick with metal studs, like castle gates. Funny then, how a tiny door opens in the bigger one and sunlight filters in, a sight more beautiful than even he imagined.

Wormwood Scrubs, jewel in the crown of prisons, spews forth a ragtag group of guests. They have one thing in common: they are glad to go. One minute the men rub shoulders, laughing, edgy, all thieves together jostling at the gate. Then, quick as a card trick, slicker than sin, they are gone.

The prison warders turn away, glad to see the back of them. Only Bartholemew lingers in the shadows. He comes forward with his dazzling smile, shakes hands with his jailers. He bows deeply as he leaves them, charming to the end.

‘Don’t do anything wicked!’ one of them shouts after him, and the wardens snigger.

‘Don’t be playing any tricks!’ says another.

All eyes follow the dark figure to a waiting car. They peer at the driver.

‘Friends reunited?’ the senior officer asks.

‘Unfinished business, perhaps.’

‘Think we’ll see our man back again?’ asks a younger warden.

‘Not alive,’ answers his companion.

‘Not alone,’ offers another.

‘Not likely,’ says a third.

They place their bets and shiver as he goes.

Mr Wicked has a driver, like old times. There is one stop on the journey: the Cherry Blossom Haven for the Criminally Insane. Peter keeps the engine running while he pops inside. Visitors are always welcome at Cherry Blossom, a break from the routine, and this is *such* a charming man, they all agree. Only when he leaves do they notice something wrong. They count the inmates, scratch their heads and count them once again. A final count is made but there can be no doubt. Their most precious lady guest has checked out

She slips into the back seat. 'It's been a while, my dears.'

How time has flown! Three friends talk about the past on their long trip back to the sea. There is much to be discussed and, as they drive, the clouds above them thicken.

All is well at Broadsea Bay Hotel. Lily draws the curtains and puts out the lights. She climbs the curving stairs to her attic bedroom four floors up. When she opens the window there to lean out and check the weather, sea spray hits her face. She stands back in surprise. This is not a night to trifle with the gutter. She comes in quickly and shuts the window tight.

No one sane would venture out tonight. The storm is wild and wicked, its dark heart seeking easy victims. Only the desperate with nothing left to lose would try their luck outside... but such people do exist.

The night is full of knives. A mean and twisted wind stalks sleepy streets. It whips up waves along the empty beach, though no one sees them. It rages through a seaside town closed down, past shops all boarded up and windows broken. The few souls living here are safe in bed. The wind goes howling through their dreams. The

ghosts of times past shiver and they are not alone - someone else is out there in the storm.

Hartness Pier dips its bony finger in the inky sea. Bartholemew Wicked sets his face against the wind, strides to the very end and leans over the railing. He hasn't breathed fresh air in years. The icy slap of water wakes something inside him, the sea spray stings his roughened skin. He licks his lips and finds the taste of freedom salty.

Something drew him to the battered heart of this old town - he knows it well, he lived here as a boy. He liked the town but the town did not like him. Time has not been easy on either one of them. The funfair is still standing, a creaking skeleton: a helter-skelter rusts and the ghost train runs no more. Still, where the candyfloss dried up and rides have stuttered to a stop, he feels a slow heart beating. All he needs is half a chance. This place could live again.

He turns to his companion. 'It's been a long time, Peter.'

'Not long enough, if you ask me. I don't plan to stick around. There's a good woman waiting for me not too far away.'

'A cook, you said, or some such thing? What was her name?'

'A good woman with a kind heart, that's all you need to know. We fell in love and I promised to return. True love. You wouldn't understand.'

'You cut me to the quick. I hope she's been careful with our things, while we were all... unavoidably detained.'

'You can count on it. Not that she knows where our valuables came from, I made sure of that. But the stuff is tucked away, quite safe.'

'Broadsea Bay, you said. A seaside hotel - now that is charming. Not many of those left.'

‘Not much of anything, you’re right. But this sits on a cliff top, with a view.’

‘Good enough for me.’

The shot is close range, muffled by the wind. Peter’s face creases in confusion. He reaches out a hand but no help is forthcoming. He staggers back against a railing that is old and frail and cannot hold him. His arms jerk like a puppet’s as he falls further and further still, his coat spread out like wings in the night sky. The waves waiting below swirl in fury and swallow him whole.

Mr Wicked looks down at the empty sea. ‘Goodbye, old friend, I’m sure it’s for the best.’ He sniffs the air and the ends of his carefully oiled moustache twitch like whiskers. He looks down the coast and there is indeed a cliff that seems ideal – even now a light there seems to beckon. He slips the gun inside his cloak and turns back to the car.

The driver has checked her hair and lipstick in the rear-view mirror, several times. She drums her perfect nails on the steering wheel. They are polished and each one is sharpened to a point. Finally, she leans on the horn. It blares mutely into the storm and no one hears a thing.

Bartholemew Wicked strides towards the car, all unpleasantness forgotten. After all, with every ending comes a new beginning. He sings a seaside ditty as he strolls along. He does like to be beside the seaside. Yes indeed.

Not far along the coast in Broadsea Bay, Lily White sleeps deeply and her dreams are sweet. When she leans out to check the weather from her attic room, it is almost always fair. Broadsea Bay is sheltered. Whatever weather rages in Hartness, Lily and her hotel home are safe from any storm. Or so she thinks – all that is set to change. As

she sleeps an ill wind blows to spite her. Something wild and wicked heads her way...

Synopsis

Lily White is almost thirteen. She runs a tumbledown cliff-top hotel with no help from her mother. These days there are not too many guests, but Lily is happy, really, living at the seaside and chatting with the regulars, who see her as a friend. She is a dab hand with difficult guests, until Bartholemew Wicked turns up demanding their finest room.

Mr Wicked is a dashing conjuror. Lily suspects he has something to hide, but has no idea he is fresh out of jail for a bank raid. His partner in crime stashed the proceeds at a cliff-top hotel twenty years ago, and Mr Wicked has come to find the loot.

He sets out to charm and flatter Lily's widowed mother Rose so he can stay and search every inch of the hotel. Cliff-top walks and candlelit dinners follow and one dreadful day, Lily White turns into Lily Wicked.

Mr Wicked fires the staff, leaving Lily and kitchen boy Antonio with all the work. When he hires fierce housekeeper Miss Sharp, things go from bad to worse.

Lily won't give up without a fight and is helped by a magical recipe book left by the cook and some rather eccentric guests.

How can Lily prove the charming magician is up to something? And when she works out what he is looking for, how can she find it before him? Can Lily get her mother back and save the hotel with some magic of her own?

Gaelic

Tha Comhairle nan Leabhraichean a' cur fàilte bhlàth air Calum MacLeòid agus Steaphan MacRisnidh, an dà sgrìobhadair a tha a' gabhail pàirt ann an Duaisean nan Sgrìobhadairean Ùra am-bliadhna. 'S ann air ficsean a tha na dithis air a bhith ag obair, ach le cuspairean gu math eadar-dhealaichte air an inntinnean: Calum a' fosgladh sùilean an leughadair ri saoghal mionaideach, a tha gu ìre sìmplidh ach aig an aon àm dorcha is troimh-a-chèile. Tha Steaphan, air an làimh eile, a' togail air an imcheist is an strì a dh'fhaodas a bhith eadar math is dona ann an inntinn neach, ach le boillsgean aotrom, ait a tha a' cumail an sgeòil bho bhith buileach dubhach. Sgrìobhadh inntinneach, ùr gun teagamh!

Màiri NicCumhais

**Oifigear Litreachais is Foillseachaidh,
Comhairle nan Leabhraichean**

The Gaelic Books Council is delighted that Calum MacLeod and Steven Ritchie are taking part in this year's Gaelic New Writers Awards. Both are writers of fiction, with an interest in exploring the psychological turmoil of their main characters, however, their subjects take different directions. While Calum draws on darkly gothic influences, Steven introduces glimpses of black humour to his tale of a man's mental struggle to make the right choices. Fresh, thought-provoking writing from two new voices in Gaelic fiction.

Mairi MacCuish

**Literature and Publishing Officer,
The Gaelic Books Council**

Calum MacLeòid

Thòisich Calum MacLeòid a' sgrìobhadh anns a' Ghàidhlig nuair a bha e aig Oilthigh Ghlaschu, far an do rinn e ceum sa chànan. Tha e air a chuid bhàrdachd a leughadh aig tachartasan ann an Glaschu, Inbhir Nis agus Baile Átha Cliath. Ann an 2014, b' e Bàrd Urramach Comunn Oiseanach Oilthigh Ghlaschu. An-dràsta, tha e ag obair air a' chiad nobhail aige. Bidh e ag obair airson Ball Pàrlamaid na h-Alba ann an Comar nan Allt agus tha e a' fuireach ann am Partaig.

Calum MacLeod

Calum MacLeod began writing in Gaelic while studying for a degree in the language at the University of Glasgow. He has performed his poetry in Glasgow, Inverness and Dublin, and in 2014 was Honorary Poet of Glasgow University's Ossianic Society. He is currently working on his first novel. He works for an MSP in Cumbernauld and lives in Partick.

A' Togail an t-Srùbain (extract)

A contemporary novel. Early one morning, down the *tràigh* picking cockles, Daibhidh finds a corpse. He faints and when he comes to, can't find any sign of it. Between island, mainland and the continent, Daibhidh pursues answers and the corpse.

Caibideil 1

Bu lìonmhor na gallsichean air an Eilean an samhradh ud. Feachdan dhiubh, nan ruith às gach toll is gach beàrn; a' feitheamh anns gach pìos fiodha groide, sluagh a' toirt ionnsaighean ann an còmhlain ghuerilla air gach nì; bannalan dhiubh, nam màilleach ghleansach bheò. Cha robh clach no cùil ann nach robh fo smachd am meanbh-ìmpireachd. Cho luath 's a chaidh gach rud neo-thogte, neo-chleachdte, neo-chuimhnichte a thogail, a chleachdadh, a chuimhneachadh, b' ann an sin far an rachadh an lorg.

Agus, anns an t-seagh sin, cha robh eadar-dhealachadh sam bith eadar an saoghal sin agus taobh a-staigh a' charabhain far an robh Daibhidh air cola-deug a chur seachad a-nis. Far an robh greadhan dhiubh ris a' ghnìomhachas chèine gu h-oscarach air a' chunntair ri taobh a chinn, is esan na shuain anns a' chamhanaich.

Theich a' mhisneach sin sa bhad nuair a thòisich an t-Seann Bhreice a' cur a-mach loidhne 'Ice Mambo' agus dh'fhalbh gach biastag às an t-sealladh gun làraichean fhàgail, mar sradagan air cruadhtan. Cha robh sgeul orra nuair a lorg làmh chadalach am putan agus a thulg casan a-steach chun chaolais bhig eadar am bobhstair agus am

preas. Sheall sgrion an *Nokia 3060* 5.30m, agus air cùl nam figearan bha ìomhaigh eilein thropaigich eadar cuan agus iarmailt dheàlrach ghorm. Choimhead Daibhidh mun cuairt a' charabhan airson a bhriogais.

Ghabh e srùbag, bobhla *Wheaty Bricks* le *UHT*, is nigh e na b' urrainn dha fhèin anns an taigh-bheag bìodach. Leis gu robh *AC* gann on a ghluais e chun a' charabhain, bha an *iPhone 4* air a dhreuchd a chall; an *Sony Walkman* fhathast a' faireachdainn trom, mar shoitheach ann am pòcaid a dhinichean, a' bocadaich 's a' leum mun cuairt. Chuirte innte seann CDs a rinn e bho bhith a' cnuasachadh air *LimeWire* bliadhnaichean air ais. Ghabh Martin Grech à òran neònach. Ghlas Daibhidh doras tana a' charabhain, thog e an ràcan agus a' bhucaid is thog e air chun na Tràghad Bhàin. Cha do thog e a shùilean, a' caismeachd seachad air taigh a mhàthar aig ceann na cruite, na cùirtearan gun tarraing fhathast.

Bha Tom Waits a' gabhail 'Swordfishtrombones' nuair a ràinig Daibhidh an cladach, far an robh trì pocannan nan tàmh, reamhar is lìonte le srùbain. Cha robh duine no a' mhuir air beantainn riutha on a dh'fhàg e an sin iad feasgar an-dè. Shìn e an fheamainn air ais tharta is chaidh e a shealg.

'S ann dùinte agus tiugh le taisead a bha an fhailbhe ghlas an latha ud, agus an ceann beagan ùine bha an teas a' snàigeadh mun cuairt a bhodhaig agus am fallas a' steigeadh càballan na headphones ri uchd agus a lèine-t ris a dhruim. Crùibte mar a bu ghnàth dha ach a' gabhail fois bhon ghnìomhachas, dh'fhan e mionaid, uileannan dìreach tuath air a ghlùintean, an ràcan na làimh rèidh ris an tràigh agus a' bhucaid tiotan bhuaithe.

B' e dail ghainmhich bheannaichte rèidh a bh' anns an Tràigh Bhàn, fàsach bogach air iomall fìor-fhàsach na

mara. Bha a' mhuir air i fhèin abachadh trì uairean roimhe is an tràigh aig an àm sin eadar dà phòla.

Chrath e an ràcan, a' leigeil làdach às dèidh làdaich de bhoinneagan sàile bho fhiaclan mheirgeach, a' toirt air druim beag thuraidean èirigh às an uisge. Iad a' traoghadh sa bhad, an lùths air a sgaoileadh ann an cearcallan grinne co-mheadhanach. Gach cearcall ag eadar-ghearradh a nàbaidh, ginealach às dèidh ghinealaich, a' toirt gu crìoch saoghal foirfe nan cearcall agus a' dealbhachadh na àite bùrach de lionsaichean, corrain is lùban.

Fad an t-siubhail, air uachdar na glainne bheò, bha gathan-grèine a' lùbadh 's a' leumadaich nan dealain tana òir. Agus fon an sin chìte làraich a dh'fhàg na tonnan air an tràigh, mar tìr shlèibhteach alltanach eile, lorg na gealaich, agus an aon làmh a dh'fhàg e a' sguabadh às obair a-rithist.

Fon ùpraid bhalbh seo bha na srùbain a' feitheamh. B' iad na cridheachan beaga fuara, craiceann adhairce; sin na bha e a' sireadh an Dihaoine ud.

Ged nach robh fhèithean cho sgìth sa mhadainn an coimeas ri mìos air ais, bha cleachdadh an togail mar a bha e a-riamh. Chuirte fiaclan an ràcain a-steach gus an ruigeadh a' ghainmheach chun a' chàirein agus tharraingte gu h-obann a-nìos is air ais air, a' cur charan dheth na bha fodha, a' spionadh gach srùban às an leapannan, a' toirt orra roiligidh na ionnsaigh. Mar sin, sgrìobadh e leth-chearcallan mun cuairt air a chasan sa ghainmheach bhog, an uair sin a' gabhail ceum air adhart, a' tòiseachadh leth-chearcall ùr, a' fàgail clais air gach taobh às a dhèidh. Ged nach robh srùbain anns gach sgrìob, nuair a bha bhiodh fios aig cnàmhan a ghàirdeanan gun robh, fada mus dearbhadh a shùilean. Cuideachd, 's ann san dòigh seo a dh'aithnicheadh a

chnàmhan glìce caochag nuair nach fhaiceadh e fhèin ach srùbain.

Eadar srùbain is caochagan thogadh ùpraid a ràcan duilleagan beaga feamainn, teudan fada feamainn dubh-uaine, criomagan sligean cnàmhach shrùban, sligean brisg mhuirsgian is coltas bainne reòhte orra, sligean fhaochagan dalma agus, bho àm gu àm, trealaich eile. Às a' bhrochan seo bhiodh an obair togail a' tòiseachadh, gan cruinneachadh suas ann an làmhan goirt le fuachd an t-sàil agus garbhachd na gaineimh. Bhon ghainmheach chun bhucaid, bhon bhucaid chun phoca, agus Didòmhnaich thilgeadh Daibhidh gach poca ann an seataichean-cùil agus boot a' *Honda Civic* is dhèanadh e air an fhactaraidh airson a sheic fhaighinn.

Bha e air deagh shreath a lorg is mar sin lean e air, a' ràcadh gun sgar airson beagan na b' fhaide na bhiodh san àbhaist. Cha do mhothaich e ealt bheag de dh'èoin neònach a' tighinn gu talamh ri a thaobh: creutairean beaga geala le sùilean dearga is goban pinc, a' coimhead mun cuairt is air càch a chèile nam pàrlamaid bhalbh.

Sheall Daibhidh air ais eadar a chasan, is e fhathast crùibte, air tràigh bun os cionn, anail air tilleadh. Deagh làrach dha-rìribh. Thog e a shùilean dìreach ann an àm gus na h-èoin fhaicinn a' teicheadh air ais chun cheàrnadh às an tàinig iad. Thall air an rathad bha Eachann agus a bhan-èisg, ann an lèirsinn Dhaibhidh cho beag ri cairt-SIM, is e a' dèanamh air Taigh a' Ghruiffalò. Rinn e gàire beag, mar a dhèanadh gach uair a chitheadh e a' bhan ud, a' cuimhneachadh air tè Sheathaich a choisinn am far-ainm Fishvan dhi fhèin san àrd-sgoil. Chuir e a cheann sìos is lean e air, is Martin Grech a' gabhail òran a-rithist.

Nuair a thòisich Taking Back Sunday ag èigheach 'Timberwolves at New Jersey' airson ceathramh triop na

maidne, cha mhòr nach robh leth bhaga lìonnte aige. Air an taobh tuath bha na tuinn air cnap farsaing feamad fhàgail faisg air làimh. Air iomall na maoise shuidh cnomhagan mòra bàna is gainmheach ga bhreacadh. Bha cùisean taghta gus an do mhothaich Daibhidh gun robh ìnean air an t-slige neònach seo. Ghreimich a mhionach nuair a thàinig e a-steach air dè dìreach a bha ann.

Chunnaic e an corp na shìneadh aghaidh sìos air an tràigh, bàrr a' chinn ri taigh Iain Alasdair a' Ròbot, casan a' dol a-mach gu muir. Cha robh mòran ri fhaicinn, leis cho lìonmhor 's a bha an fheamainn, seacaid is briogais ghleansach dubh-ghorm. Bha falt fada drilseach bàn air is feamainn odhar an sàs ann, is an dà rud gan sgaoiladh fhèin a-mach agus a' falach aodann. Chìte cluas bheag gheal, air a lìonadh le gainmheach ghlas, coltach ri inneal-claisneachd.

Fhòn gun chrìomag shìoghal, sheall Daibhidh mun cuairt air, sìos chun na tràghad is suas an rathad, far am faca e Taigh Iain Alasdair a' Ròbot thall agus na taighean-samhraidh mun cuairt nam beanntan beaga a bha a' cuairteachadh na tràghad, nan tobhtaichean, an t-seann thogalach sgoile agus an cladh. Cha robh duine anns a' chuairt-shealladh ach e fhèin agus e fhèin.

Bhuail rudeigin air stamag Dhaibhidh. Ghreimich e air a ràcan, a-nis na bata dha, agus chaidh e glan rag, sùilean fosgailte a' coimhead sìos air na srùbain air a bheulaibh. Dh'fhàs a shùilean goirt is tioram. Cha robh e airson rànaich. Chrìochnaich an t-òran, agus leis an CD, is thàinig abhsadh air an t-saoghal. Thòisich anail a' ruith agus teas ag èirigh ann am meadhan corp Dhaibhidh, ga bhlàthachadh le gach anail gus an robh tonn às dèidh tuinn den teas a' briseadh thairis air. Uair agus a-rithist dh'fheuch e ri gluasad, ri teicheadh, ri èigheach airson cuideachadh, ach gach uair bhuail an teas seo air mar

leac. A lèine-t bog leis an fhallas agus an cadal-deilgneach a lionadh a chorragan. Le spàirn nach robh gann, sheall e suas uair eile air an ablach nach robh air gluasad.

Nuair nach robh teagamh air fhàgail aige gun robh e gus cuir a-mach, dhìrich e a dhruim. A' sealltainn mun cuairt airson cuideachadh, rinn e oidhirp gus anailean fada cùramach a ghabhail ach cha do rinn sin diofar air an teas a bha ag èirigh tro a mheadhan. Bha an làn a-nis air teicheadh beagan ach, dìreach tro bhith na sheasamh san aon làrach airson greiseag, bha a' ghainmheach bog mar-thà, ag acrachadh a chasan, gun chead ach fo cuideam bodhaig Dhaibhidh.

Chlaon e bho thaobh gu taobh a' feuchainn ri shaoradh fhèin bhon bhogach ghlas. Bha buillean a chridhe nan torman na chluasan nuair a fhuair e na bòtannan às. Chunnaic e na h-eòin a-rithist anns an iarmailt dìreach mus tàinig sgleò air a lèirsinn, agus dh'fhalbh e far na meidh. Dhubhaich a shaoghal às agus air a shlighe a-nuas thuir e, 'Fan mionaid ...'

Steaphan MacRisnidh

Rugadh Steaphan an Dùn Dèagh agus thogadh e ann am Broughty Ferry. Dh'fhalbh e a-null a dh'Iapan tràth an dèidh an oilthighe. Fad deich bliadhna is còrr, bha e thuige is bhuaithe eadar Iapan agus Alba - Sruighlea, Osaka 's Ostaig, Slèite 's Saitama, an Teanga 's Tokyo agus eadhon ann an Glaschu airson mu dhà bhliadhna. 'S ann a bha e a' togail na Gàidhlig fad na h-ùine sin. Ann an 2009 lorg e obair san Eilean Sgitheanach agus thill e a dh'Alba.

Tha e a' fuireach agus ag obair an-dràsta air a cheann fhèin ann an Dùn Dèagh a' teagasg, ag eadar-theangachadh agus a' sgrìobhadh.

Steven Ritchie

Steven was born in Dundee and brought up in Broughty Ferry. He left for Japan soon after graduating from Stirling University. For more than ten years, he was back and forth between Japan and Scotland - Stirling, Osaka and Ostaig, Sleat and Saitama, Teangue and Tokyo, and even in Glasgow for about two years. All that time, he was learning and using the Gaelic language.

In 2009 he decided it was time, before it was too late, to return to Scotland and found a job on the Isle of Skye in translation. He now lives in Dundee and works freelance teaching Gaelic and English to adults, translating and writing.

Dòmhnall na Dachaigh (extract)

Dòmhnall na Dachaigh is a novel about a man living in an island community who is God-fearing, often anxious and tied to his mother's apron strings. Yet, he is still very much someone who contributes and is involved in many aspects of community life. He has his foibles but these are more to do with his own anxieties than any real wrong-doing, and this is what the story focuses on.

*

Nam b' ann de theaghlach nan eun a bha Dòmhnall na Dachaigh, theireadh tu nach ann tric a bhiodh e air sgèith, agus nach ann de na feannagan a bhiodh e. Cha rachadh e air seachran oir cha rachadh e air turas bhon a b' fheàrr leis cumail a' dol mar a bha e. Eun-fuirich a bh' ann, ma-tà. An seòrsa a chuireadh fàilte air na h-eòin-choigrich ach a bhiodh a' seachnadh nan dàimheach - agus cha b' iongnadh sin ... Seall, fear de na dàimhich a' tighinn sa chàr, agus Dòmhnall a' coiseachd an rathaid mhòir. Dhlùthaich an càr ris gu mall, làmh fhèitheach an dràibheir na laighe air uinneag fhosgailte taobh a' phasaideir.

'Hoigh!' dh'èigh Iain Fìobha ris gu sunndach. 'Nach bu tu an srainnsear na làithean sa!'

B' e Iain Maol a chanadh cuid eile ris, 's cha bhuineadh e do dh'Fhìobha ann.

Rinn Dòmhnall, mac piuthar bean Iain Mhaoil, spleuchdadh ri mullach a' chàir bhig phurpaidh, le toit fhliuch shlaopta steigte ris a smiogaid. Chrom e a cheann ach am faiceadh e cò bh' ann.

'Ò, Uncail. 'S fhada bhon uair sin,' thuir e.

‘Cà bheil thu dol?’ fhreagair Iain Maol Fìobha.

‘Dhachaigh.’

‘Tha agus sinne. Tha mi a’ togail piuthar do mhàthar, ’s gheibh sinn am bàta ann an leth-uair a thìde.’

‘Turas math leibh,’ ghuidh Dòmhnall dha fhad ’s a bha e ag èirigh dìreach a-rithist.

Chan fhaiceadh Dòmhnall am bus a bh’ air tighinn air uncail. Coma co-dhiù, chuala e brunndail ceart gu leòr nuair a chuireadh an càr gu gluasad a-rithist.

‘S fhada a chithinn thu ...’

Ghnog Dòmhnall a bhonaid ri mullach a’ chàir agus chùm e air. Dh’fhalbh uncail às an t-sealladh thar bruthaich, fhad ’s a bha Dòmhnall a’ coimhead air cùlaibh purpaidh a’ chàir ’s a’ gabhail iongnadh air an dath. Cha robh a bheag de smùid air a fàgail às a dhèidh. Iongnadh eile dha. Spùt e a-mach an toit.

’S e Dòmhnall na Dachaigh a bh’ aig a charaidean air. Nuair a bha e san sgoil, cha togadh e cheann ach ainneamh aig na pàrtaidhean dìomhair a chuireadh nighean air dòigh nuair a bhiodh a pàrantan air falbh. Cha robh aon fhor aice nach robh dad ann ach tighinn chun nam pàrtaidhean aicese. Cò ach ise? Bha a teaghlach air ùr thighinn don sgìre. ’S ann a bha na pàrtaidhean a’ tàladh nan deichean de dh’òganaich na sgoile. B’ e siud a bha i ag ràdh ris an fheadhainn nach gabhadh ris a’ chuireadh, no nach robh math air leisgeulan a thoirt do am pàrantan. Am bite ag èisteachd rithe? Cha bhiodh no Dòmhnall.

Agus, bha e a’ coiseachd an rathaid mhòir an-dràsta, Latha na Sàbaid, còig bliadhn’ deug ach beag air a dhol seachad bhon a bha e anns an sgoil. Bha e a’ falbh dhachaigh bhon eaglais. Tè de na h-eaglaisean ùra aig nach robh buntanas ri eaglais stèidhichte sam bith. Chanadh an t-seann fheadhainn nach b’ i eaglais cheart.

Gum b' e 'creideas ùr' a bh' ann. Nach robh iadsan ag iarraidh gnothach ris an 'happy-clappy' 's an t-siùdadh bho thaobh gu taobh, 's ris a' ghàirdeachas ud. Bha na h-eaglaisean acasan a' crìonadh.

B' àbhaist do Dhòmhnall a bhith san Eaglais Bhaisteach ach ghluais e. Bhiodh e a-nis a' deasachadh brot no coiridh do mu dheich no fhichead duine bho àm gu àm. Air neo, bhiodh e a' toirt làmh air na cunntasan oir bha e math air ionmhas 's margaidheachd 's a leithid. Dh'fheumadh e a speuclairean airson sin.

'Ò, a Dhòmhnail. Nam b' ann an-diugh an-dè e ...' chanadh boireannach bàn, a bha a' frithealadh a h-uile rud a bha a' dol aca. 'Bhithinn air sùil a thoirt orra. Ach bha mi ro thrang an-dè, agus feumaidh mi falbh tràth an-diugh.'

Bha e a' còrdadh rithe an gleus aice fhèin a chur air na gnàth-fhaclan.

'Ceart gu leòr, Ealasaid,' fhreagradh Dòmhnall. 'Cha mhòr nach eil mi ullamh co-dhiù. Thug na tabhartasan sinn suas gu ...' agus bhiodh an t-airgead a' dol an àird gach seachdain, beag air bheag.

Ràinig Dòmhnall gobhal san rathad mhòr agus bha dà thaghadh ann dha a-nis. A bhith a' gabhail an dà mhìle chun an taighe ghil a bha na dhachaigh dha fhèin 's do a mhàthair is a bha e a' faicinn air astar, air neo, an rathad eile a ghabhail chun an taigh-òsta. Aon mhìle gu ruige an taigh-òsta. Dà thaghadh - ach dè an roghainn?

Chuir e a làmh dheis na phòcaid agus bha gliongadaich ann. B' e siud iuchraichean na h-eaglaise. Nochd deur beag fallais air a bhathais. Gu socair, ghluais a làmh chli chun na pòcaid eile, agus dh'fhan i aig a beul tiota mar chlamhan a' faire-itealaich os cionn toll rabaide. Bha coilear a sheacaid a' plabataich anns a' ghaoith.

‘Siud na sgillinnean mu dheireadh a bha mi a’ cunntadh san eaglais,’ thuirt Dòmhnall ris fhèin. ‘A Thì, thig orm an tilleadh a-màireach.’

Thog e air chun an taigh-òsta, ’s ràinig e an ceann greis. Ghabh e a-steach gun smaoineachadh cus air na bha e a’ dèanamh. Rinn e suidhe aig a’ chunntair.

‘Gabhaidh mi pinnt den leann a tha siud.’

Shìn Fergie, fear a’ chunntair, a làmh chun a’ ghoca airson an real ale.

‘Actually, fuirich mionaid. Am faigh mi blasad dheth an toiseach?’

‘Gheibh. Eil thu airson am fear eile seo fheuchainn cuideachd?’

‘Tha.’

‘Ràinig am fear seo an t-seachdain sa chaidh.’ Shìn Fergie am fear eile thuige.

Rinn Dòmhnall blaiseagraich.

‘Ò, tha siud math. Gabhaidh mi na dhà dhiubh.’

‘Dà phinnt, ma-tà?’ fhreagair Fergie.

‘Ceart,’ thuirt Dòmhnall. ‘Tha gu leòr agam nam phòcaid airson dà phinnt, agus cha mhair a’ chiad fhear fada; mar sin, thoir dhomh an dà phinnt an-dràsta!’

‘S tu tha pàiteach, eh!’

‘Tha, air spongadh le pathadh!’

‘Uill, math d’ fhaicinn an seo. Bu tu an srainnsear na làithean sa. Chuala mi gun do leig a’ chompanaidh air falbh thu. Tha siud duilich.’

Thug Dòmhnall a-mach a sporan bhon t-seacaid aige. ‘Dè na tha sin?’

‘Seachd not airson an dà phinnt.’

A Thì, seachd not! Thug e sùil air Fergie, agus rinn e sporghail na phòcaid chli airson nam bonn-airgid bhon choitheanail a bh’ aige le mearachd. Agus smaoinich e, dè

dhiubh as miosa dhomh - breug innse lem bheul no lem shùil no lem làimh?

Chuir Dòmhnall crìoch air a' chiad phinnt cha mhòr sa bhad gun ach a dhà no thrì de bhalgaman 's ghlugan sìos a sgòrnan. Shil deur leanna sìos a pheirceall.

'Cà bheil thu dol an dèidh seo?' dh'fhaighnich Fergie dha.

'Dhachaigh.'

'S math gu bheil rathad agad dhen deoch ma-tà.'

'Ò, thà.'

Shluig Dòmhnall sìos an ath phinnt na bu luaithe na a' chiad fhear agus dh'èirich e na sheasamh. Dh'fhalbh e. Le dà phinnt leanna làidir na ghoile air airgead a' choitheanail, agus gealladh dha fhèin nach dèanadh e a leithid a-rithist fhad 's a bu bheò e.

Dòmhnall na Dachaigh 's am boireannach bàn

Nuair a dh'fhàg Dòmhnall an taigh-òsta bha e a' faireachdainn a chionta. Chan e gun do ghabh e deàrrsach, ach cha robh còir aige òl air airgead a' choitheanail idir, ge b' e cho beag 's a bha na chosg e. Chan fhada gus an cuireadh e na sgillinnean ud air ais don chuach - latha aig a' char as fhaide, gheall e ris fhèin.

Ge-tà, bha a chogais ga bhualadh agus e a-nis astar math air a shlighe dhachaigh. Nuair a ruigeadh e forc an rathaid a-rithist, dè a bha e a' dol a dhèanamh? Bha e airson faochadh a thoirt da chogais. Chrom Dòmhnall a cheann le throm smuaintean agus ghabh e mall-cheum air mhall-cheum a-null an rathaid. Ged nach robh timcheall air ach achaidhean loma, dh'fhairicheadh e na clachan ga cheasnachadh, agus an talamh fhèin a' brunndail gu neo-fhoisneach fo a chasan.

‘Dh’fhalbh an t-airgead, dh’fhalbh e, dh’fhalbh e.
Sgillinnean, sgillinnean a’ choitheanail.’

Dh’fhògair Dòmhnall na guthan far eanchainn ach thàinig maille eile na cheum agus mu dheireadh stad e, a shùil a’ laighe air an talamh-treabhaidh. Faileasan bho na neòil os a chionn a’ cumail an dubhair air. Cha b’ e droch bheairt a rinn e ach mearachd, carson a bha e a’ cur na coire air fhèin? Chluinneadh e guth a mhàthar a-nise.

‘S tu a ghabh an droch othaig. Dè thug ort an t-airgead a chur nad phòcaid?’

‘Cha bu mhi, a mhàthair ... a’ chiad turas a rinn mi a leithid a-riamh!’

Cha bu nì leis smaoineachadh air an leann-dubha a bheireadh e air a mhàthair mun tigeadh e dhachaigh. Chuir e roimhe dhol air ais don eaglais. An-dràsta fhèin. Ach, càit am faigheadh e na sgillinnean? Chosg e iad uile aig cunntair a’ bhàir. Mu cheithir notaichean agus na trì notaichean a rinn suas an còrr airson na seachd notaichean a phàigheadh. Seachd notaichean airson dà phinnt? ‘S ann flodach a bha tè dhiubh.

Dh’fhan Dòmhnall na sheasamh air fàl an rathaid a’ sealltainn air an achadh, ’s air an sgeallan a dh’fheumte spìonadh às mus deigheadh e an lùib a’ bhàrr ùir. Na fòidean ’s clodan air an raon chorrach mar shamhla air an ùpraid a rinn aon iomrall beag air inntinn. Bha a’ mhearachd a-nis a’ dol a mhilleadh nam planaichean aige gus falbh dhachaigh agus an t-àrd-fheasgar ’s an oidhche a chur seachad air beulaibh an telebhisein. Cha robh air ach tilleadh an làrach nam bonn gu talla na h-eaglaise agus an rud a chur ceart. Càit am faigheadh e na sgillinnean a bha a dhìth air, shaoil e.

Hmm, bheireadh e an t-airgead bho chunntasan na seachdain sa chaidh, ’s chuireadh e sin ris an tional airgid agus dhèanadh sin suas na dh’òl e dheth. ’S an uair

sin, thigeadh e air ais an ath latha leis na beagan bhuinn a chosg e san taigh-òsta, a ghabhadh e air iasad o a mhàthair agus bhiodh a h-uile càil rèidh! Cunntasan na h-eaglaise agus eanchainn fhèin. Sin na dhèanadh e agus ràinig Dòmhnall am forc san rathad agus bha dà roghainn ann. Ghabh e an rathad air ais chun na h-eaglaise agus an latha a' ciaradh.

*

'S ann a bha Ealasaid na boireannach còir. Na boireannach bàn, còir air a h-ainmeachadh an dèidh na Banrigh Ealasaid, a bha cho còir ri còir - mar a tha fhios aig a h-uile duine san rìoghachd. Bha an Ealasaid againne cho còir 's gun robh fhios aig a h-uile duine san eilean dè dìreach cho còir 's a bha i. Chanadh iad uile gun robh i cho còir 's nach robh còir aig duine sam bith ceist a chur innte. Sin cho còir 's a bha i, eil fhios agad?

A thuilleadh air sin, bha e na thlachd dhi cluich le cainnt. Dìreach san dol seachad. Gu h-àraidh na gnàth-fhaclan. Bha an taigh aice mu cheud slat bhon eaglais ùr a bhiodh i a' frithealadh gach Sàbaid agus far am biodh i a' toirt a leisgeulan nuair a thigeadh e gu cunntais airgead a' choitheanail. Bu shuarach dhi airgead a chunntais. Bha i fada na bu dhèidheile air srùbag, briosgaid agus seinn 's adhradh mar gun tàinig an gràs oirre dà thuras dhùbailte - an *happy-clappy* mar a chanadh cuid ris.

Bha Ealasaid a-staigh anns an t-seòmar-suidhe bheag, chofhurtail a' socrachadh sìos le cupa teatha gus coimhead air *Eastenders*. Thug i sùil a-mach air an uinneig agus chunnaic i duin' air choireigin a' lapanachadh suas an rathad chun na h-eaglaise. Leis a' chupa na làimh, rinn i strì gus a bodhaig thiugh,

dhreachmhor a thogail bhon t-sèis bhog, luasganach ach am faiceadh i cò bh' ann. Ach, ann an ciaradh an anmoich, cha bu lèir dhi ach sgàil-riochd agus 's ann a thug sin oirre èirigh le spàirn bhon lag mhòr san t-sòfa, cupa na làimh cli, an teatha a' plubraich 's a' stealladh air caol a dùirn leis a' chabhaig a bh' oirre an solas san rùm a chur dheth mum faigheadh i brath air, agus an taobh a-muigh ro dhorch gus aithne a dhèanamh air, ge b' e cò a bh' ann.

Niste, bha sùilean Ealasaid geur. Fada na bu ghèire na bha a beul. Ach, cha b' urrainn dhi faicinn cò bh' ann, agus bho nach robh duine sam bith eile anns an eaglais, bha uallach oirre falbh gus rannsachadh a dhèanamh. Bha i na h-aonar agus bha an t-eagal oirre. Ach, dìreach airson mionaid, las an rathad a-muigh suas nuair a thàinig càr a-mach bho ùtraid gu math fada air falbh o far an robh am pearsa dubh seo a' coiseachd. Fhuair Ealasaid boillsgeadh den duine agus dh'aithnich i Dòmhnall anns a' bhad. Chuir e uibhreachd oirre gun robh e a' tilleadh cho anmoch don eaglais seach a bhith aig an taigh còmhla ri mhàthair a' coimhead air *Eastenders* mar a bha i fhèin.

Ach cha robh an t-eagal oirre tuilleadh. B' e Dòmhnall a bh' ann, 's cha b' e an Donas. Chuir i roimhpe dhol a choimhead air gun a bhith ag innse dha gun robh i coimhead air mus fìdreadh e gun robh i a' coimhead air... Na canamaid an còrr ach sin fhèin, ach dh'fhalbh am boireannach còir chun an dorais-aghaidh, chuir i oirre bòtannan 's seacaid 's bonaid fhuairte bhuidhe, rug i air toirds, thionndaidh i an iuchair sa ghlais, dh'fhosgail i an doras agus mheantraig i a-mach a dh'aona ghnothach gu ruige aitreabh na h-eaglaise ann am beul na h-oidhche.

(ri leantainn...)

Dòmhnall na Dachaigh – Gràin air do ghobaireachd!

On a bha e a-nis caran fad' air an latha, bha fadachd air Dòmhnall gus am faigheadh e chun na h-eaglaise an ceann a' ghnòthaich thruaighe. Gnothach truagh a bh' ann dha-rìribh a bhith a' tilleadh an rathad a thàinig e ann am beul na h-oidhche gus corra sgillinn a chur air ais don ladar san oifis; ach, nuair a thigeadh e gu h-aon 's gu dhà, cha leigeadh a chogais 's a chiont 's an t-uallach leis smaoineachadh air dòigh eile ach sin fhèin.

An dèidh sgrìob ghoirid de rathad còmhnard, thàinig sgàth-fhras a bha seachad ann an ùine ghoirid ach a dh'fhàg Dòmhnall bog fliuch. Thòisich an rathad air dìreadh beagan nuair a bha e a' triall air adhart agus a' tighinn am fianais corra thaigh agus an eaglais fhèin an taobh shuas. Sheall e air an doras uaine agus smaoinich e air a' bhùrach a bha seo a' dol a dhèanamh air na cunntasan sgiobalta aige bhon t-seachdain sa chaidh.

Chuir e an iuchair mhòr a-steach don doras agus thionndaidh e i. Ghabh e a-steach, agus chuir e air solas na trannsa. Ghabh e grèim air làmh an dorais gus a dhùnadh, agus shaoil e gum faca e faileas air choireigin a' nochdadh san t-solas a bha a' lasadh suas am bad den rathad a b' fhaisge do bheul na h-eaglaise. Stob e cheann a-mach, ach cha robh e a' faicinn dad.

Nuair a dh'fhalbh Dòmhnall a-steach don togalach dh'fhàgadh an doras sraointe fosgailte. Thog Ealasaid a ceann air cùlaibh tolman rainich agus choimhead i air doras-aghaidh na h-eaglaise a' soillseachadh stairsich 's staran. Mheantraig i tighinn a-mach on raineach gu fiatach, 's i na crùban mar chat clobhdach air tòir a chobhartach. Rinn i oidhirp mhòr gun na bòtannan aice a phlumadh ann an glumag no boglach, 's gun am fuaim

a bu lugha a dhèanamh. Thug i ceuman beaga timcheall boglaichean beaga, 's leum i thairis air glumag agus rinn i trotan eadar badan fraoich 's poll mus do stad i le cluasan biorach mu astar fichead slat bhon doras - agus deiseil gus leum don dìg nan tigeadh Dòmhnall a-mach a-rithist.

Dh'fhuirich i an sin a' spleuchdadh air an togalach san dorchadas. Bha i a' feitheamh ach an cluinneadh i gun robh e sàbhailte dhol na b' fhaisge. Dh'fhan i na b' fhaide. Ruith i a dh'ionnsaigh an dorais agus nochd ceann Dhòmhnail aig an dearbh àm. Thuit Ealasaid sìos don talamh na clod - a cridhe na slugain. Le a sùilean dùinte 's a ceann ìosal, bha i guidhe gun cleitheadh an duibhre i on nach robh sìon eile ann don rachadh i am falach. Nuair a dh'fhosgail i a sùilean, cha robh Dòmhnall na sealladh.

Cha robh Dòmhnall a' faicinn sìon seachad air an àite bheag a bh' air a shoillseachadh air beulaibh na h-eaglaise. Shaoil leis gur e fiadh a bh' ann agus thionndaidh e air ais an dàrna turas gus coiseachd an trannsa chun an talla. Bha aire air an airgead sna cunntasan a dh'fheumadh e gluasad do ladar a' choitheanail nach robh air a chunntadh fhathast. Ghreas Dòmhnall a-null an trannsa agus dhìrich e an t-àrd-ùrlar aig ceann thall an talla, ga phutadh fhèin suas le a bhasan 's le a ghlùinean. Bha an uair sin cùirtearan agus doras air gach taobh de chùl an àrd-ùrlair. B' e aonan dhiubh seo am preas mòr anns an robh ladar a' choitheanail na shuidhe ann am bogsa meatailt glaiste. B' e an doras eile an t-slighe a-steach don oifis. Thug e a-mach gad iuchraichean agus dh'fhosgail e doras na h-oifise.

Dh'èirich Ealasaid san dorchadas 's bha an ad 's a' bhriogais aice air an stealladh beagan le poll. Coma leatha, thug i roid gu taobh an togalaich gun fhios nach

robh Dòmhnall faisg air an doras fhathast. Stob i a ceann gu sgàthach a-steach air an doras fhosgailte 's cha robh Dòmhnall ri fhaicinn ann, ach bha i cluinntinn anail 's seathan fad às on talla mar gun robh e a' togail no a' giùlan rudeigin trom. Ma bha a cridhe a' plogartaich roimhe, 's ann a bha e a-nis a' bualadh gu trom mar chlag-iarainn nuair a lean Ealasaid fuaim na h-analach gu doras an talla. Na seasamh an sin, thog i màs glugach Dhòmhnail a' streapadh suas air an àrd-ùrlar agus a' falbh às air cùl cùirteir air an taobh dheas.

Air a corra-biod, choisich Ealasaid bhàn gu sàmhach a dh'ionnsaigh ceann thall an talla, agus chrùb i i fhèin sios aig a' bhonn gun fhios nach brùchdadh Dòmhnall a-mach bhon oifis gu h-obann mar a rinn e le a cheann a' stobadh a-mach roimhe, gun rabhadh. Gu socair, dh'èirich pom-pom pinc na h-aid aice suas, agus nochd a bathais leathann 's a dà mhala thana thar àird an ùrlair mus robh i a' coimhead gu dìcheallach a-null chun a' chùil dhorch feuch an robh e sàbhailte dhi. Mheas i gun robh, mar sin, streap i gu luideach suas air an àrd-ùrlar aig an dearbh àm 's a dh'fhosgail doras na h-oifise 's a thàinig Dòmhnall a-mach.

A Thì, beannaich mise! Stad Ealasaid na seasamh cruaidh le geilt 's aon chas air thoiseach air an tè eile mar gun robh i ris na splits, no spad-chasach no rudeigin; na h-inntinn, bha i a' ruith tro gach leisgeul air am b' urrainn dhi smaoineachadh. Ach cha leigeadh i leas, oir thug i an aire nach robh Dòmhnall idir mothachail gun robh i ann. Theich i gu cùirtear air an taobh dheas agus dh'fhalaich i i fhèin ann, le turtar aig a cridhe.

Bha ceann Dhòmhnail fhathast crom 's e a' cunntadh nan sgillinnean na bhois, a' dearbhadh an robh an t-sùm cheart aige fhad 's a bha e a' coiseachd gu mall a-null chun a' phreasa bhon oifis. Thug Ealasaid sùil bhiorach

air san doilleireachd agus, bho nach robh de dhànadas aice na b' fhaide na a leth-cheann a phutadh a-mach air eagal gum faiceadh esan i, chan fhaca i gun robh Dòmhnall a' giùlan sgillinnean na làimh. Cha robh i a' faicinn ach a chliathaich agus cha robh i a' cluinntinn ach tàislich chas fhad 's a bha e a' siabadh a-null an àrd-ùrlair. Ge dè bha e ris?

Chaidh e à sealladh taobh thall an ùrlair agus chuala i gliong iuchair ga tionndadh, doras a' phreas ga fhosgladh, agus làmh a' sporghail anns an dorchadas. An uair sin, sgrìobadh meatailt a' bhogsa. Chuala i e ga fhosgladh - bha a cluasan a' bòcadh ag èisteachd. Cha bu dùraig dhi sealladh fhaighinn air, ach ghabh i grèim teann air a' chùirtear a bha ga cleith agus dhìochuimhnich i a h-anail a tharraing. Bha a bathais preasach le iomagain agus a plucean cho dearg ri glainne fìon rosé, 's i a' strì ri tuigsinn dè an rud amharasach ris an robh Dòmhnall. Nuair a thog a cluais gliongadaich airgid, bha i air a h-uabhasachadh. Dòmhnall, an gille laghach, an duine somalta, cha b' urra dha bhith fìor!

Sheas Dòmhnall a' coimhead a-mach air an talla, a' cuimhneachadh air òige ann an dealbh-chluich na Nollaige. B' esan an cìobair, chuimhnich e. Smaoinich e an sin air na figearan a bha e air atharrachadh air na cunntasan san oifis. Fìthead sgillinn far sùim na teatha 's nam briosgaidean, not far sùim a' bhadmantain oir bha na buill nan tàmh an-dràsta 's cha toireadh iad an aire, agus an còrr far sùim a' chomanachaidh, nach rachadh a chumail airson mìos eile. A' chiad turas a bha Dòmhnall air a leithid de chleitheachd a dhèanamh a-riamh, agus cha robh e air a dhòigh mu dheidhinn.

Gun fhiosta dha, bha Dòmhnall na sheasamh cha mhòr fo shròin Ealasaid 's i air cùl a' chùirteir. Dh'fhairich i

cuideam 's pian air òrdag mhòr na coise clì. B' e sàil na bròig aig Dòmhnall a bh' ann, agus bha e mar gun robh e a' fùcadh 's a' stampadh oirre a dh'aona bhàgh gus a ciùrradh. An robh fhios aige gun robh ise ann? Chais i a fiacian ga cumail fhèin o èigheachd gu h-àrd. Dh'fhàs a bathais preasach 's i feuchainn gun sgiamh a leigeil aiste.

Bha Dòmhnall a-nis na sheasamh leis a làimh air a smiogaid a' trom smaoineachadh. Bha e a' meòrachadh agus bha sàil a chois chli na laighe air cirb a' chùirteir thiugh ri thaobh. Sin a shaoil leis na sheasamh air ais air a shàil 's e a' cnuasachadh. Cuin a gheibheadh e chun a' bhanca agus cuin an ath thuras a ghabhadh e air tighinn don oifis gus na cunntasan a rèiteachadh, air dha an t-airgead a thilleadh? Shaoil e gun robh e air an rud a bu riata naiche a dhèanamh - airgead a' choitheanail a cheartachadh mun tugadh fa-near an ath latha. Mur robh e air sin a dhèanamh, chailleadh daoine earbsa ann gu buileach. Cha bhiodh de dh'anam air a shròin a nochdadh nan tachradh sin.

B' fheàrrde dha falbh a-nis, 's cha robh e a' coimhead air adhart le tlachd ris an t-slighe dhachaigh, air chor sam bith. Dh'fhaoidte gum faigheadh e ceann earbail nan naidheachdan air an telebhisean nuair a ruigeadh e an taigh. No, dh'fhaoidte gum biodh e air a chlaoidh cho mòr 's nach dèanadh e ach cadal. Thog e air gus falbh, agus lasaich an cràdh ann an òrdag coise Ealasaid. Thug i a dìol dhi gun a bhith a' sgreuchail.

Dh'fhalbh Dòmhnall a-steach don oifis a-rithist agus thog Ealasaid rithe le giorag na com agus bròn na cridhe. Dòmhnall còir, an laochan, nach robh ann dhi a-nis ach an dearg mhèirleach! Cha b' i an seòrsa boireannaich a leigeadh seachad rudeigin mar seo. Dh'fheumadh i smaoineachadh air an dòigh a b' fheàrr aghaidh a thoirt dha. Cò ris am bruidhneadh i? Thòisich na deòir

a' sileadh fhad 's a bha i a' greasadh a-mach. Dòmhnall a shaoil i cho onarach. Dòmhnall laghach a bha dèidheil air an dram 's air *Scrabble*.

Ràinig Ealasaid doras-beòil an togalaich agus thuislich i thar na stairsich a-mach agus a ceann na sgleò. Air a slighe chabhagach thar na talmhainn a bha eadar an taigh aice 's an eaglais, chliob a casan thar badan feòir 's fraoich; phlum a bòtannan do na glumagan 's don a' chlàbar air an do dhanns i timcheall na bu tràithe air a slighe chun na h-eaglaise.

Thàinig Dòmhnall gu clis às an oifis a-rithist air dha na pàipearan a sgioblachadh agus a h-uile càil a chur an òrdugh. Chunnaic e tòn togsaid a' fàgail aig ceann thall an talla agus ghrad-smaoinich e - Ò! A ghobag bhàin a tha thu ann! Ghreas e às a dèidh agus nuair a ràinig e prìomh dhoras an togalaich, bha faileas tiugh air astar beag bhuaithe ach a' sìoladh às san dorchadas a dh'ionnsaigh taigh Ealasaid le ospagail mhuladach an lùib a' phlogartaich agus slapraich chas mar gum b' e bò a bha a' teicheadh. Sheas Dòmhnall na Dachaigh an sin air chrith; bha e doirbh a ràdh an ann le fearg no le uabhas no le ciont... Sheas e an sin a' coimhead air an fhaileas 's ag èisteachd ris a' chaoineadh 's an t-seathain a' sìoladh às, agus a' smaoinichadh air a bheatha mar a bhà, a' seargadh às air a bheulaibh... Dh'èigh e mach ris an oidhche ga h-ionnsaigh: 'Mo ghràin air do ghobaireachd!' Agus dh'èirich an rànaich mar fhreagairt bho fhad às.