

SPARKS

**JOHN MURRAY PRESS
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INTRODUCTION

All great things begin with a spark. Whether it's a sudden thought that ignites into an idea, a moment of connection that kindles a bond, or the opening of a book that sets our hearts and minds aflame.

At John Murray Press we publish books that shape and shake our world. Each is a spark in our readers' lives, offering new experiences, feelings, and inspirations. In this zine, we are delighted to present a collection of our novels publishing in 2025 from our talented authors, with each offering something fresh and unexpected.

Inside these pages you'll be transported to 1920s Provence where love, art and deception intertwine; bear witness to a pulse-pounding love story where past passions and present dangers collide on a rural English farm. We'll meet the unforgettably fierce Jamaican sleuth taking on the mysteries that plague the streets of Birmingham; and step into a sinisterly skewed version of 1979 England where the lives of three triplets are ruled by three mothers and three books.

We have asked each of our authors to introduce their novels and share an extract to offer you a sneak peek into the incredible fictional worlds that they have created. So, turn the page and get ready for sparks to fly.

THE ARTIST



© Paul Stuart

LUCY STEEDS

The year is 1920. The place is a remote corner of the south of France. In a lonely, crumbling house lives a painter. His only companion is his niece, Ettie.

Into this house comes Joseph, a journalist hoping to interview the famous painter. But the more he entangles himself in the strange, isolated household, the more his curiosity grows. Ettie cooks and cleans for her uncle. She prepares his studio, scrubs his paintbrushes and creates the perfect environment for him to work. She is sharp-eyed and watchful. But beneath her cool exterior, something simmers . . .

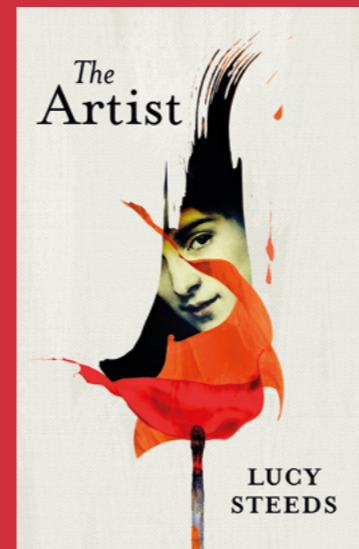
One of the first sparks for this novel was a question asked by Hannah Williams: 'If women are unsupervised, what might they be doing? What if the woman who lies next to you at night, folds your laundry, cooks your meals, is merely hiding her claws and scales and razor-teeth and licking her lips with her forked tongue?'

The Artist is about women's place in art. It's about who gets to be a creative person at all. I wanted to probe the invisible labour that goes into a painting. Who cleans the brushes? Who primes the canvas? Who goes to the market and buys oranges and arranges them in a bowl to become a still life? *The Artist* is about the subversive ways women carve out creative lives for themselves. What are they plotting, biding their time in the dark?

If this all sounds very serious, then I hope it is one of the novel's many deceptions. *The Artist* is a mystery and a love story. There are drunk kisses and secret letters and eating dinner in silk pyjamas. It's jam-packed with food: I began writing this while living in France and each character is rarely more than an arm's reach away from a bag of shiny cherries or a baguette smeared with butter. If the novel's pages reflected its contents they would be spattered with nectarine juice and olive oil and grubby fingerprints.

The Artist is about three people stuck in a house together over a hot, crackling summer in 1920. I wanted to run my fingers over the scars WWI had left on the landscape, on people's bodies, on their minds. The world that emerged from the war was shattered and traumatised on the one hand, but eager for thrills and abandon on the other, and I wanted to dig into this duality. What does it mean to gaze on art every day while screaming into a pillow at night? To eat a perfect peach while feeling so white-hot with rage you have to plunge your head into a river? This is a novel about the alchemy of making beautiful things from the rubble.

How do we create beauty from nothing? There has to be a spark. And in this novel the spark is furious determination, cultivated in darkness. The spark is a connection between two people. The spark is one woman, exploding into the light.



'In this remote, ramshackle farmhouse, something inside him has come alive.'

Ettie watches Joseph, this shy boy curled around his absinthe glass. A sweat has broken out across his brow and he is struggling to keep up with Tata's relentless pace. She wants to reach out and brush the hair from his eyes. To run her fingers down the skin of his cheek. Rest them in the damp hollow of his collar.

Just as Tata does not want to let the painting go, Ettie does not want to let Joseph go. She has grown used to having him around the house. She likes the way he looks at her, the way his hand reaches for hers when he wants to tell her something, the way his eyes light up when he watches Tata paint.

She likes the way he asks if she wants coffee, clementines, croissants. The way he stands in the field each morning, arms aloft, feeling the tips of the grass when he thinks no one is watching.

She likes that he questions her life here. Why do you read Tata's letters for him? Don't you have any friends in the village? Have you really never been further than Avignon?

She looks at this pale boy who has been undone by art. By the sun and the freedom of being far from home. She remembers his halting presence that first day, his tentative walk around the house when nobody answered his knock. She had watched as he stumbled on a fallen roof tile in his ill-fitting boots. He looked like a newborn deer that day, all shaky legs and fearful eyes. Eyes waiting to be opened.

Tata belches loudly and Joseph's head slips off his arm where it had been resting. The black flies of the daytime have long been replaced by mosquitoes, and the stars are appearing one by one. Joseph looks around himself and a streak of sadness crosses his face. It is there only for a moment, but Ettie catches it. There is longing in his eyes: the longing to draw out this moment. The longing to stay.

She has already glimpsed his knapsack lying open in his bedroom. It is ready but not yet packed. He has not been able to bring himself to tidy this life away, not yet. Raimondi will be coming in the morning. *Young Man with Orange* will leave and Joseph will follow a few days later. The train timetable has been cut out of the local newspaper and pinned to the kitchen cupboard, a time circled in red pencil. It counts down their final days.

As Joseph looks around the darkened terrace his eyes seem to be drinking in this moment. Savouring it. Then he blinks. Shakes his head. He takes the hand Tata is offering him and the older man pulls the younger one to his feet. Ettie watches as they stumble inside and soft sounds fill the air. The hollow clink of empty bottles. The uneasy sway of feet on the stairs. Doors fitting into frames. The household turning over. The night beginning.

THE TIGER'S SHARE

'To live in Delhi is to know that there is nothing future about the climate dystopia.'



© Ayesha Jhunjunwala

KESHAVA GUHA

In 2016 the Indian novelist (and John Murray author) Amitav Ghosh published *The Great Derangement*, a reflection-cum-manifesto that posed the question: why does climate change feature so little in fiction? Since 2016, things have changed – whether it's the climate, with the world currently on course to overshoot the globally agreed target of no more than 1.5 degrees of warming, or in fiction, where Ghosh's call to arms has been answered by the emergence of an entire genre – climate fiction.

2016 was also when I moved to Delhi. I was born in Delhi but raised on the other side of India, in Bangalore, and throughout my childhood the city of my birth, India's capital, loomed large in my imagination. Delhi, my teenage self believed, was where the action was – the site of all that mattered in politics and culture. I knew I would move there one day.

The Delhi I actually found was not short on political or cultural action, but as a new arrival I had to squint to see it. I couldn't see past something that seemed much more immediate: this was a city, and a region, in a state of advanced ecological collapse. A place unfit for human – or non-human – habitation. On a good day, Delhi's air is ten times more polluted than any air the World Health Organization deems safe for humans to breathe. On a bad day, it may be the most polluted air any creature in planetary history has ever breathed.

Climate change had also intensified. Delhi's already brutal annual heat-waves had worsened, and transformed its previously mild monsoon. In a city surrounded by arid near-desert, floods are now common. And yet, this uninhabitable place has never been more habited. A megalopolis of fifty million humans, and more bird species than any city other than Nairobi.

The flotilla of Western climate novels that have appeared in recent years are, almost without exception, set in a near-future dystopia. To live in Delhi is to know that there is nothing future about the climate dystopia. It is here. It isn't the stuff of speculative fiction, but of lived fact.

The genesis of my novel, *The Tiger's Share*, had nothing to do with Delhi, or indeed climate change – the book's opening and major characters came to me in a jungle in central India, a few moments after I first saw a tiger in the wild. In the novel, one of my characters takes his wife on tiger safari and is seized by a similar idea.

All I had was a family, and a situation – a place to start. I thought it might be a short story. The next month I moved to Delhi, and my idea became a novel, a novel that is also a portrait of a city at a moment in history. No novel is 'about' just one thing – *The Tiger's Share* is not only a piece of climate fiction. But any novel set today, in a city in northern India, or Pakistan, or Bangladesh, can't but be a story of the climate and how we live in it.



At Govindpuri metro station Baba walked to the row of autos and got into the first one, which was empty. When the driver arrived Baba said, 'Take us to the mountain of trash.' That was what he literally said, in Hindi: Kachra ka pahar.

For a few years now there had been one or two news stories a year about a famous landfill in Ghazipur, in north-east Delhi. The headlines usually framed the situation in terms of architectural achievement: Delhi's garbage peak is now higher than the Leaning Tower of Pisa, now the London Eye. In a minor way, Ghazipur had become something of a local tourist site.

But that was Ghazipur – which, if you lived in south or central Delhi, was as far away, as easily ignored, as Azerbaijan. The mountain we were going to was in our Delhi, in Okhla, home of textile workshops and start-ups and the India Art Fair.

It was through a scratched and blotchy windscreen that we first saw the mountain. It entered the scene, or we entered its scene, and as it began to take up more of the frame it didn't stop looking like a geological feature, an Okhla Uluru. Not even when we got out of the auto, and my father pointed out to me where we stood.

'The landfill is next to a hospital?'

'A government hospital. Central government.'

Mountain and hospital stood cheek to cheek, like Fred and Ginger. Is a hospital a temple to life, or death? You came to the hospital to die, and the mountain was the last part of the living or dying world that you saw. Or you were born in this hospital, and the world in which you would live and die began for you with the mountain of garbage.

We walked past the hospital to the open gate that led to the landfill. Here Baba stopped.

'You don't want to go in?' I asked.

'I have been, many times. I don't need to go again. There's no need for you to go at all.'

'Then why bring me here?'

'You can see enough from here.'

And with all my years of training and practice I tried to see what he wanted me to see. Not people – on this day the only other people there were two men, sharing a beedi by a stationary JCB grader. Not even the mountain or massif itself, its slopes and ledges, the changing patterns of its fabric of mud and refuse. He wanted me to look to the very top. He wanted me to look at the animals.

The mountain had a table roof. And on this roof dogs trotted back and forth. These were not the familiar stray dogs of south Delhi colonies, that livened up the days and nights of security guards with distant families and sparked civil wars between young dog-lovers and elderly park-walkers. The trot of these dogs was robotically regular, more perfect than any dog-show champion. Nor were they scrawny. They looked strong. They looked – *adapted* to their habitat.

Above, the crows and black kites carried out their surveillance, swooping down occasionally to claim a prize.

'One reads,' I said, 'about how many species humans are pushing into extinction every year. But looking at this, you start to wonder if we should be worrying more about the ones that will survive.'

'You understand. It is the height of human arrogance to think that death is the problem. The question is not, Are we causing death, the question is, What are we doing to life?'

John Murray | 9781399813389 | HB | £16.99 | 13th March 2025 | X @keshavaguha

DIRTY MONEY



© Barbara Evripidou

CHARLOTTE PHILBY

Every story starts with the spark of an idea. In the case of *Dirty Money*, the spark first came in 2010 during my first maternity leave from my job as a newspaper reporter and took a solid thirteen years to catch fire.

I was 27 years old when I was first accosted by Ramona Chang on the Piccadilly line train from Holloway Road to Covent Garden. I'd recently had my first baby and, desperate to occasionally escape the monotony of my new domestic life – having swapped undercover prison visits and exotic press trips for NCT classes and off-key sing-alongs in the local library – I had signed up to a creative writing course at the City Lit technical college in town. If nothing else, I reasoned, as I set off that first time with no idea what to expect besides the freedom of boarding public transport without a buggy, the hour or so I would have to myself on the journey to and from class would be worth it, regardless of what the course itself was actually like.

Those weekly classes, it turned out, were a lifeline. They say write what you know. In the throes of sleep deprivation and a looming identity crisis, I didn't know much except that while I loved and cherished my little baby and our new life together, I also missed the promise of the life I might otherwise have had. During maternity leave, the 700-word weekly writing exercises I was set in class expanded to fill every spare moment I had.

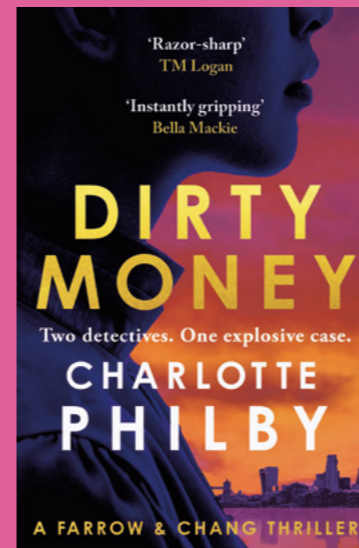
From the confines of my living room, with a nursing baby fixed to my chest, I was roaming the streets of London in my mind and on the page, indulging alternative realities where I became an intrepid war reporter or a private eye. As the idea for a detective series started to take shape, it was Ramona Chang who became the spark for the series that would become the Farrow and Chang thrillers. A wayward local reporter forever destined to be an outsider, Ramona was bold and unbridled, fearless and unfettered in a way that I felt I could never truly be again.

To cut a long story short – which is exactly what I did when my nine-month maternity leave came to an end and I tossed the unfinished manuscript into a drawer – it wasn't until more than a decade later that the story of Ramona and her unlikely accomplice, Madeleine Farrow, came together in the form of *Dirty Money*.

Ironically, Ramona's first assignment in the book is going undercover on a case inspired by the first undercover job I did after returning to work from that same maternity leave. Working as part of a team of reporters, with the assistance of the Metropolitan police, I was sent undercover to record a confession from a man purporting to connect young women with wealthy older men who would pay their university tuition fees in return for sexual favours.

Thanks to my button-hole camera and our front-page exposé, the assailant was caught and imprisoned – and I finally found the story that would bring Ramona to life. A spark that became a blazing inferno, which – much like Ramona herself – shows no sign of dying out any time soon.

Baskerville | 9781399812078 | HB | £16.99 | 13th February 2025 | @charlotte_philby



'She had picked it up . . . the night O'Keegan's men had finally busted her for wearing a wire.'

Ramona reaches for the shirt inside her bag as she approaches Hatton Garden, a single road best known for its jewellers, in the historic area of Farringdon.

Tuesday, two o'clock, exactly as arranged. Following the curve of the pavement, she turns right into a mews street that reminds her of a different life.

It had been Si who had first brought her here, not long after they first got together, stopping briefly in front of the inconspicuous entrance, knocking twice and waiting for an overweight man in a Metallica T-shirt – part off-duty Viking, part central casting spyware nerd – to receive them.

Seconds before the door opened, Si had leaned in to kiss her and Ramona had let him, despite not being one for public displays of affection even at the best of times – and this was not Ramona at her best. She had been putting in long hours, determined to work her way up from covering traffic accidents and town planning meetings to covering crime.

Spending evenings and weekends linking the dots in a spate of violence connected to Camden's notorious Somers Town – thanks to the kind of contacts you only really get from having gone to school in an area – meant that Ramona hadn't been getting much sleep.

She had recently started taking prescription pills to switch off and these, mixed with booze, had the after-effect of making her feel both groggy and anxious, as she waited that first time on the doorstep.

Still, she tingled with excitement, knowing that she was doing exactly what she had wanted to do for as long as she could remember.

This was the first time the news editor had agreed to let her go undercover in a case that she had no way of knowing would go on to dominate three years of her life, and Ramona had been gleeful as Gareth the Viking led her and Si up a narrow flight of steps into his shop.

Sometimes, recently, she finds herself wondering whether she ever really loved Si or whether she just associated him with moments like this, which made her feel alive.

Pressing the buzzer now, she reprimands herself. This is not a fair assessment of their relationship, and she knows it. She had loved Si. She loved that he was sweet but serious, never more so than when it came to his work or Arsenal's position in the league.

Her thoughts are interrupted by the sight of Gareth, answering the door in a black T-shirt with a Seinfeld logo; instantly Ramona pictures the oversized Reservoir Dogs T-shirt, so large that she uses it as a nightie.

Of course: this is where it had come from. She had picked it up from Gareth, the night O'Keegan's men had finally busted her for wearing a wire.

She will never forget the look on Gareth's face when he opened the door to her that morning, visibly shaking, blood streaking her face and the remains of the white shirt she had arrived in the evening before, still with part of the buttonhole camera lodged inside it. How had she forgotten that it had been him who had given her one of his tops to replace the stained one? In answer, a lot from that time in her life was hazy. Some of the haziness was a result of the booze and the pills, the rest an act of self-preservation.

BROKEN COUNTRY



© Oli Green

John Murray | 9781399820417 | HB | £16.99 | 4th March 2025 | @clarelesliehall | X @clareempson2

CLARE LESLIE HALL

A moment of horror was the spark for *Broken Country*, a novel which is primarily about love.

My husband had been running in the fields behind our house with my son Felix's beloved puppy. When the dog strayed into a field of sheep, the farmer threatened to shoot him.

We'd bought my son Felix a puppy to make up for the age gap between him and his elder siblings (six and eight years respectively). While the teens were out socialising, boy and dog became inseparable. Everywhere Felix went, Magnus went too, trotting at his heels contentedly.

We were horrified to think a farmer might shoot Magnus, but within minutes of talking about it a vivid scene came into my head. I pictured a farmer and his wife amidst their field of sheep and a young boy chasing after his lost dog. I knew the boy reminded the couple of their dead son and I could also feel a strong connection between the farmer's wife and the boy's father. A love triangle was waiting to be born.

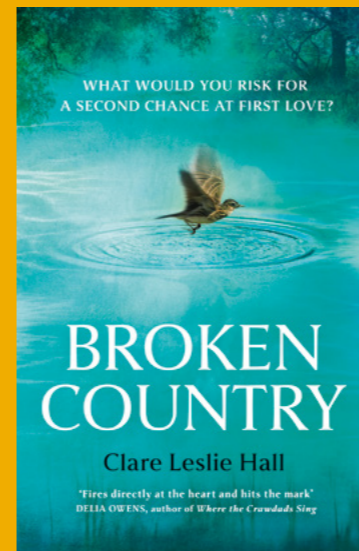
We live in an ancient farmhouse surrounded by fields. In the spring, we wake to the sound of ewes calling out for their lambs. The more I thought about it, the more I began to understand just how devastating it would be for a farmer to lose his lambs to a dog attack. And I began to see that there was a disconnect between ex-Londoners like myself, who did not always recognise the traditions of the countryside, and the rural old guard who had lived here for centuries. I knew I needed to write this novel.

I began spending time with local farmers. I learned how to milk cows, I helped birth a lamb, I went harvesting. I was struck by the farmers' instinctive understanding of the land and its wildlife. And their conviction that theirs was the most gilded way of life despite the harsh weather, long hours and financial uncertainty. Through their eyes, the pastoral landscape came alive for me. It was a privilege spending time with them.

Broken Country is the story of Beth, a woman who is torn between two lifestyles as much as the two men she loves. As a young girl she falls in love with Gabriel, the boy from the big house, who is romantic and creative just like her. They spend a whole summer writing poetry beside the lake and learning the rhythms of early sexual love. But Beth ends up marrying Frank, a farmer, and through him she discovers the natural world, both its daily beauty and the inherent brutality within it.

It is a novel about love in all its forms. The dizzying euphoria and far-reaching legacy of first love, a burning passion that is hardwired into your veins. And the more enduring kind, a couple who must journey through the most unimaginable loss and try to find each other again. It is about a young mother's love for her son – where does all that love go when the son no longer exists? And it is about a couple's deep connection with their land, a thread of knowledge and belonging that reaches back through the centuries like a trail of smoke.

*'It's true what they say:
you can live a whole lifetime
in a final moment.'*



I don't know which of us hears the barking first. We spin around to a golden-haired lurcher tearing towards us.

A stray dog, no owners with him, charging our lambs.

'Get out of it!' Frank tries to block the lurcher. He is six foot two, broad and fierce, but the dog just darts around him, straight into the thick of our ewes.

The sheep are moaning, tiny offspring bleating in fear; only a few days old, but they sense the danger. A flick switch change in the dog. Eyes black, teeth bared, body rigid with adrenaline.

'Gun, Jimmy! Now!' Frank yells, and Jimmy turns and runs to the shed.

He's fast, Frank, racing at the dog with his primeval roar, but the dog is quicker. It picks off a lamb, nips it up by its neck, throat ripped open. The appalling red of its blood, a jet of crimson pools on the grass. One lamb, two lambs, then three; guts spilling out like sacrificial entrails. The ewes are scattering everywhere now, stumbling out, terror-blind, their newborns exposed.

I'm running at the dog, shrieking, trying to gather up the lambs but I hear Jimmy yelling, 'Out of the way, Beth! Move.'

And then Frank has grabbed me into his arms so tightly I'm pressed right into his chest, and I can feel the thundering of his heart. I hear the gunshot and then another, and the dog's quick, indignant howl of pain. It's over.

'Bloody hell,' Frank says, pulling back, checking my face, a palm pressed against my cheek.

We walk over to the dog, the three of us cooing and calling out to the sheep, 'Come on, girls,' but they are shivering and bleating and giving the three infant corpses a wide berth.

Out of nowhere, like a mirage, a boy comes running up the field. Small and skinny in shorts. Maybe ten years old. 'My dog,' he screams.

His voice so sweet and high.

'Fuck,' Jimmy says, just as the child sees the bloody heap of fur and yelps, 'You killed my dog!'

His father is here now, panting and flushed, but scarcely different from the boy I knew. 'Oh, Jesus Christ, you shot him.'

'Had to,' Frank gestures at the butchered lambs.

I don't think Gabriel has any idea who Frank is, or at least, who he is married to, but then he turns and catches sight of me. Momentarily, panic flits across his face before he recovers himself.

'Beth,' he says.

But I ignore him. No one is looking after the child. He is standing by his dog, hands covering his eyes as if to black out the horror.

'Here.' I'm beside him in seconds, my hands on his shoulders. And then I kneel in front of him and wrap my arms around him. He begins to weep.

'Keep crying,' I say. 'Crying will help.'

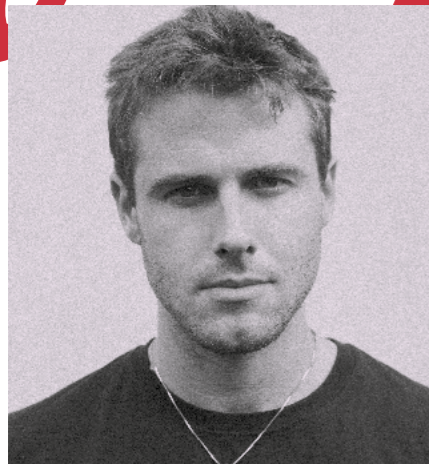
He collapses against me, wailing now, a boy in shorts in my arms.

And this is how it begins again.

EXTRACT

EDEN'S SHORE

OISÍN FAGAN



© Jamie Goldrick

John Murray | 9781399815901 | HB | £16.99 | 10th April 2025 | @oisinfagan91 | X @OisínFagan

Shortly after I first learned japa meditation in September 2018, during one particular session, I felt my blood moving in a manner that I felt to be commensurate with the ocean. When I opened my eyes I wrote the first scene of *Eden's Shore*, now deleted, in which a drunken, young man named Angel plays cards aboard a wooden ship surrounded by noises that neither he nor I then understood.

The story went on, but, before I could settle into the stability of a style, something cruel happened, and I put the book down in astonishment, not willing to go any further. It was clearly an ending, and it had arrived so early. While writing must be true, the writing life is full of self-deception. I pretended to myself I had written a horror disguised as a sentimental journey, a brief allegorical novella such as Sheridan Le Fanu might have written had he read Borges, but deception only really gets going once you believe yourself to have become undeceived, and after a few weeks I was back at the manuscript every day, realising that what I had was a beginning.

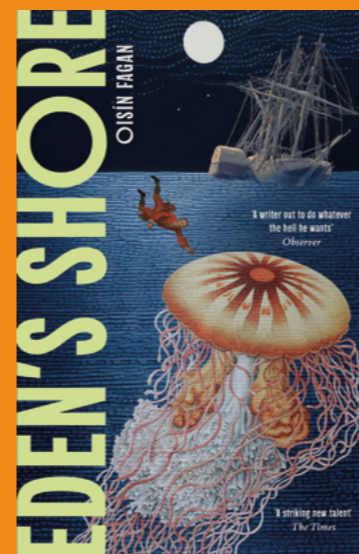
A year later, on a beach in Ayamonte, I was sitting in the shallows with my burnt back facing the sun, head between my knees, watching ferries and trawlers cross the Guadiana River to Portugal, and a naked woman walked by, carrying her baby in a low sling, and the whole second half of the novel occurred to me there and then, including nearly word for word the last episode, though I wouldn't write it down for another three years.

It is from such discreet centres, often later discarded, forgotten or suppressed, that books are generated. Only after this can they be written outward, gathered together from a collection of images, profound landscapes that have moved you, poetic atmospheres you have not understood, voices of a certain timbre, unwelcome insights, encounters of a heightened variety, convictions you are no longer certain of, convictions that you wish to destroy in yourself. Of course, you are just hunched in a chair, tapping away, but, still, they are composed on all fronts: emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, physically.

For me, my longer works have been sustained by the physical, and if I cannot feel some pulse of physicality upon the page I cannot continue. The work must have its heat and cold; its health and sickness; its motion and its sleep; its sex and abstinence, its sunshine and hail, and so must I if I am to sit through the thousand mornings of a novel and have, once in a while, that spacious feeling overwhelm me where I know how to reach out to the next sentence.

With *Eden's Shore*, I felt not just the occasional flash of inspiration, but sometimes total immersion. It is a sea book. Its physical foundation is the ocean, and, of course, the ocean is no foundation. It can only submerge you, or you can float.

'He understood, then, all at once, that the sea was alive, that it wanted to kill him.'



The *Atlas* cast off from Liverpool in March, moving towards Brazil and winter by way of somewhere else, and within moments of leaving behind the estuary she hit her first swell. Angel Kelly, who had been sitting on a hatch watching the black walls of the harbour diminish, felt his face tighten, his lungs shallow and a heat surge through his throat. He understood, then, all at once, that the sea was alive, that it wanted to kill him, and that there were many things the body hated more than extinction, and that the worst of these was seasickness. Confining himself to his private quarters, he prayed for death.

In darkness, he alternated between hammock and floor; sometimes he leant against the wall, drowsing off, other times he curled up in a corner. Tremoring waves of nausea blossomed in the belly, crawled up through organs until, in serpentine reaching, they kissed his eyes, and everything blurred. He would vomit until he passed out, and then would awaken almost immediately to feel the awful ritual already begun again inside him. By the third day, he was vomiting streams of clear liquid into a bucket through his nose, his mouth too fatigued to open. Waterfalls of nausea sluiced up his throat, and he was guided through inner landscapes by the vagaries of a ragged breath. There was a motion to the body that was commensurate with the motion of the sea; a falling, an unfolding, a decompressing, a jarring, the sense that he had been hurled into the wrong part of the universe and was being taught something, through pain, by a being far greater than him.

Sometimes, still awake, he could feel himself moving slowly into dreams, carried on some presence's back towards a lighted hamlet through a penumbra of tangled forest, dragged about in false spaces that he was powerless to leave. Once he saw a small girl, skin darker than a gypsy's, laying on her side next to him; her gut had been torn open, exposing a meadow of pink flowers, in which roamed a pigeon that moved like a sea creature. It scuttled and pulsed around the wound, until it came to rest and laid a clutch of eggs along a riverlike bend in her intestine, and from these eggs black saplings hatched and grew. More often she appeared to him intact. She came into his cabin, accompanied by a child he recognised as himself, and then they would hold hands, lower their eyes and pray.

One evening, he woke up and felt within him the sea; it was no longer a thing apart. Lighting some candles, he checked the looking glass. He was much diminished, his skin so pale it was as if he had emerged from the powdered rubble of some ruined city. He tried to unpack some of his papers, and then, immediately fatigued again, he lay down in his hammock to enjoy the gentle thrumming of being alive, the creaturely smell his own skin gave off.

Someone, he realised, had taken care of him during his lengthy sickness.

GULF

MO OGRODNIK



© Winky Lewis

When I was living in Abu Dhabi and working for NYU, a friend of mine who was the Director of Equality Now, a global women’s rights organization, enlisted my help to find a lawyer. Five South Asian women had collectively murdered their trafficker and needed legal representation in the UAE. Wanting to learn about the case, online research led me into a labyrinth of police reports and occasional news coverage.

Articles recounted violence between female employers and their domestic workers. The intimacy of the violence stayed with me. The tools of abuse were often household items: irons, boiling water, electrical cords, kitchen knives, Clorox, and fire. Patterns emerged and I began to see these crimes as expressions of larger political structures (patriarchy, migration, and labor) being enacted by women in domestic and private spaces.

Questions began to consume me: *What is the relationship between violence and freedom? How does a woman, who has never exhibited violent behavior, evolve to commit these acts?*

These questions led me to the broader region: women setting themselves aflame in Afghanistan and Iraq, women policing other women on the streets of Raqqa, and the larger legacy of violence and erasure of which I was a part. As James Baldwin says, ‘When you’re writing, you’re trying to find out something which you don’t know. The whole language of writing for me is finding out what you don’t want to know, what you don’t want to find out. But something forces you to anyway.’

I received two travel grants: the first took me across the Philippines, including three days in a domestic training center in Manila with forty women being deployed to Saudi Arabia. The second brought me to Ethiopia with Gulf-return girls who’d been illegally trafficked through Yemen. I read extensively about women who’d joined the female morality police in Iraq and Syria, about the history of the U.S. presence in the region and the deaths caused by our drone strikes on civilian populations.

How research alchemizes into a novel is a bit mysterious. Because of my background as a filmmaker, I gravitate towards the visual and the psychological. For a long time, photographs were part of the book: a cemetery of blue stones and blue stars, women at the Manila training center ironing shirts and sheets, an abandoned box of china marked FRAGILE on a bombed-out street, the expanse of the Empty Quarter, crops of tomatoes dying beneath greenhouses flattened by war.

And of course, reading. Michael Ondaatje, Han Kang, Elfriede Jelinek, Svetlana Alexievich, J. M. Coetzee, and many others, held torches along the way as I unspooled the idea of *Gulf*. Gulf as a physical place with a history but also as a chasm that exists between people and within ourselves. A gap we seek to cross because as I discovered: hope is a rebel.

John Murray | 9781399815277 | HB | £16.99 | 8th May 2025 | [@MoOgrodnik](#)

‘A strong and wild spirit has few options when trapped. Compliance can bend a person feral.’

Forty women wearing red UNO training T-shirts mingled around the ironing boards positioned against the wall. The instructor split them into small groups and instructed them to bring an ironing board to their respective station where a spray bottle, iron, and basket of wrinkled clothes awaited them. As each group struggled to set the metal legs free, laughter infused the room. Their teacher, Miss Karla, stood at the front in a blue pressed dress that hugged her egg-like figure. She wore stockings and black flats accentuating her bulbous calves and she’d pulled her hair back into a bun. Her coral lipstick was the color of Datu’s baby blanket and Flora felt the sudden swerve of loss as the iron grew hot.

‘How many have used an iron?’ Only a few hands went up. There was an air of girlhood competition. ‘Don’t worry, I was the same.’ Miss Karla waved a wrinkled shirt in the air with one hand and an ironed shirt on a hanger in the other. ‘You’ll see it feels good to turn something wrinkled into something smooth. Ironed clothes lift a household and can win your employer’s heart. Give a sense of order.’ The teacher raised the iron above her head and pointed to the dial.

‘One dot: cool, synthetics.’

Flora’s grandmother taught her to iron by hand; the old woman’s thumb pressed upon her own and together they traveled across damp collars, cuffs, and cold cotton skirts.

‘Two dots: warm, silk and wool.’

She recalled a red shirt on a clothesline, bleached orange by the sun.

‘Three dots: Hot, cotton, and linen.’

Summer winds ballooned pillowcases on branches, napkins snapped and swayed. During the rainy season, clothes hung from rafters, moist underwear stuck to her bottom, and sheets smelled like woodsmoke and ash.

‘If you have the right attitude, you can free your mind,’ said Miss Karla as she ironed a dress, back and forth, back and forth. Flora had the right attitude, but she was also clumsy and broke things. A pile of splintered tools and broken handles had littered her garden in Tacloban. But freeing your mind sounded good to Flora and she swept across the ironing board with abandon. The teacher paused at her station and addressed the class, ‘Enthusiasm is good, but you need to slow down. Be mindful of the equipment. Some employers will deduct broken appliances from your pay.’

THE LADIE UPSTAIRS



© YellowBellyPhoto

JESSIE ELLAND

Before the light, before the flicker and glimmer of hope, there has to exist an ugly, rasping clash; a painful meeting of metal on metal, or stone on stone. That is how fire, that is how sparks, are made.

It is that ugly we forget. But to me, it is the ugly that is perhaps even more interesting than the tantalising promise of a blaze. When I think about sparks, or rather their conception, in relation to my book, it is in two parts: the ugly in the writing, and the ugly in the written.

A great part of writing is sheer brute force. It is the friction in your mind as you grind together memories and ideas, and clash together experiences and dreams to make a collection of words that is somewhat sensical (if you're lucky). As a reader we get to see the sparks on the pages, we get to enjoy the warmth and crackle, or the pain and blisters from the fire they create (it depends on what you're into, I guess). But that wouldn't exist without all that ugly friction. And I don't just mean in the conception of ideas, but all that goes into the planning too; the scenes and backstories cut, the darlings killed, gone but not forgotten, because without them the words that made it onto the page and managed against all odds to remain and ignite a fire would not exist. It is the moments before the spark that makes it all that more spectacular.

As for the ugly in the writing, *The Ladie Upstairs* explores the forgotten frictions, the pain and collisions, and the grotesque underbellies that make us curl our lips. It explores the idea of something wonderfully awful bursting into existence from the tiniest, most forgotten speck of a spark.

Before I wrote my book, I clashed stone on stone countless times; sometimes I got sparks and ideas, sometimes I got nothing but sweat and shrapnel. Most of the sparks died, but some stayed stubbornly. One in particular grew hot, grew bigger, burned, and became *The Ladie Upstairs*. Maybe it will dance and delight, maybe it will burn and blister. Either way, I'm glad it caught alight.

Baskerville | 9781399817769 | HB | £16.99 | 22nd May 2025 | @jessieelland | X@jessieelland

'Ropner's grounds yawned and the river stretched around them like a noose.'



The sky was marmalade, and the many eyes of Ropner Hall splintered and reflected it back on itself in all its blazing glory. Ropner's grounds yawned and the river stretched around them like a noose. It was a squat beast. Stony and stern, immobile but immortal, important because it is the only constant. And the story begins here, with the sugared sky, in the depths of Ropner where Petra decided to let herself be fucked by the footman.

Ann always felt, always knew, that fucking was for pigs. It was dirty and involved too much skin and was coloured a screaming pink or an evil dripping brown. 'It feels good and it dun't hurt anyone,' Petra had said. 'Except for if he tried ram it up where he shouldn't. But

if you tell her, I'll come for you in the night. I'll cover your head with your blanket and stick pins where I know your eyes are and curse you to be a mute like Rachel.'

Petra was going to burn in hell.

That stupid bitch's skin would fissure into leather slices of pork crackling and even the tiny hairs on her arms would twist into burning orange worms. Petra would roast until there was nothing left but chalky ash that would draw itself back into her shape and burn all over again for all eternity. (God willing.)

Ann and Petra shared a room. It was cramped even by the standards of the servants, their thin beds abreast and almost touching. The peeling ceiling sloped sharply to kiss the headboards, and at night when the stub of their candle was snuffed and Mrs Hardy, the housekeeper, had locked them in, the room was pitch black.

Ann didn't know where Petra got it, or even when; none of the servants ever left the grounds. Still, she knew Petra had a second key made or stolen because that was how the footman got in.

The footman was Scarecrowfootman; tall and thin with yellow hair thatched over his head like straw. He had a crooked look, with gaps in his teeth that he whistled at the women through, and a slouch about him as well, as if he had been pecked in the field for too long and the frost had got to him and all his straw was spilling out. He was odious and lecherous and foul. All his badness had taken to his skin like a hatchet and disfigured his face with pockmarks. Ann hoped, very sourly, that it hurt him. That his skin itched so furiously that he would one day be overcome with the urge to scratch and scratch and scratch until he bled to death. That unpleasant beast tramped along the servants' garrets every night. The vile creature would steal out his secret second key and twist open the heavy door Mrs Hardy had only just locked to leak into Ann and Petra's room like gas and soil it all over with sin.

THE BOOK OF GUILT

‘Those days were happy days, before I knew what I was.’



© Ebony Lamb

CATHERINE CHIDGEY

Set in an alternate version of late-1970s England, *The Book of Guilt* tells the story of Vincent, William and Lawrence – thirteen-year-old triplets raised in a New Forest boys’ home. Since infancy they have been cared for by Mother Morning, Mother Afternoon and Mother Night, but their quiet lives are upended when the new government decides to close all homes like theirs and release the residents into the community. This gives rise to revelations that will change the boys forever.

If I think about the origins of quite a few of my books, I realise that the research for an earlier story often triggers an idea for another. I wrote two novels about Nazi Germany, but I still hadn’t quite finished exploring the mechanics of a society in which some lives are less valued than others. When the triplets came to me, I knew I wanted them to inhabit a world that in some ways felt like that of my 1970s childhood – idyllic, simple, unquestioning – while also screening terrible secrets.

I realise, too, that I’m the kind of writer who collects sparks and stores them away for many years, until by some mysterious process they reignite in my work. In the 1990s I stayed with family friends in the New Forest and experienced first-hand the exhilarating presence of the New Forest ponies. It felt like a magical place, and it returned to me when I was wondering where to locate *The Book of Guilt*. I wanted the ponies to haunt the margins of the novel, gesturing to an illusory freedom; while they may seem wild, able to roam where they please, they are in their way as confined as the boys.

I returned to the New Forest to research the book, visiting many grand old residences – now hotels, restaurants, wedding venues – and talking my way into backstage tours so I could gather the details I needed to ‘build’ my own home for the boys. A carved griffin, a high flint wall, a Victorian sampler stitched with a creepy motto, a hollowed-out crab-apple tree. I visited Margate, too, since this is a dream destination for the boys – they long to experience the beach and the amusement park Dreamland. Margate’s Shell Grotto was a gift of research; its origins shrouded in mystery, the richly ornamented subterranean passages seemed to belong in a story filled with questions.

I mapped the book’s alternate world very closely to the real 1970s – we glimpse episodes of *The Two Ronnies*, *The Generation Game* and *Jim’ll Fix It*; there are Spirograph sets and Spot the Ball contests, brown corduroy trousers and orange squash. I hope such details will allow readers to feel that the events of *The Book of Guilt* are all the more chillingly possible.

Mother Morning’s shift began at 5 a.m., when we were still sound asleep. Silently she unlocked the door in the upstairs passageway separating their wing from ours, then crept down to the Kitchen to relieve Mother Night. They had a quick chat, keeping their voices low so as not to risk waking us, Mother Night passing on to Mother Morning any information that might be useful for her to know. One of us was talking in his sleep, one of us had wet the bed again – ordinary things like that, we supposed. While we slept on, she made her way to the Laundry, where our dirty clothes waited at the bottom of the chute to be washed, and our clean clothes waited to be ironed and folded and given back to us – green shirts for Lawrence, red for William and yellow for me. We were always nicely turned out; that was important, Mother Morning said, because people judged other people on things like clothes and hair and fingernails – it was just human nature.

At half past six, tucking *The Book of Dreams* under her arm, a floral housecoat buttoned over her plain skirt and blouse, Mother Morning tiptoed up the stairs to our room.

Sometimes we woke before she entered, and we made ourselves lie there still as stones and think of our dreams and only our dreams. Underneath us the sheets had wrinkled and twisted, and we longed to wriggle our bodies clear of the bulky seams where the candy-striped cotton had been repaired – but if we started to move, if we so much as opened our eyes, the dreams might trickle away to nothing, and we’d have to say we were sorry but we couldn’t remember. Mother Morning would speak to us in her sad voice then, as if we had hurt her, jabbed at some soft and secret part of her with the nail scissors that were not a toy. More often, she woke us, touching our shoulders and whispering our names. On those mornings we hardly knew she was there; we were recounting our dreams to ourselves, we felt, still more asleep than awake. Lawrence slept nearest the door, so she went to him first, sitting on the edge of his bed and opening her Book, entering the date and his name, waiting for him to speak. Next she went to William, who slept by the old fireplace, and at last she came to me, over by the windows. I had to block my brothers’ voices as they gave their accounts, otherwise their dreams would creep into my own, and that would really mess things up, said Mother Morning. That would seriously muddy the waters.

‘Vincent,’ she’d murmur when it was my turn, her pen poised, her freckled face and auburn curls beginning to take shape in the brightening room. ‘Tell me everything you remember.’

EXTRACT

John Murray | 9781399823616 | HB | £20 | 22nd May 2025 | @catherinechidgey | X@CathChidgey

A MURDER FOR MISS HORTENSE

MEL PENNANT



© Gemma Day

Miss Hortense is an older black woman. She notices you, but you may not notice her. On the surface, there may not seem to be anything remarkable about her; you might see her getting off the bus, walking along the street or in the local market, and not even give her a second thought.

But the question is, why does she notice you? Why is she watching? The answer is, she makes it her business to. And she makes it her business because she is protecting the community that she dearly loves – suddenly you realise she isn't so ordinary after all.

Miss Hortense is a retired Caribbean nurse from the Windrush generation, who, in *A Murder for Miss Hortense*, is forced back into a past that she won't let herself forget, to solve the mystery of why an unidentified man's dead body has turned up in her neighbourhood.

I was inspired to write *A Murder for Miss Hortense* and this new series by my grandparents and their generation. As I get older, I have a greater awareness of their resilience and how they forged their way in an often hostile environment. The Pardner, a simple scheme of community saving used amongst the Windrush generation, was one of the tools they used to build resilience. It has benefited many of us in the following generations.

I wondered what could happen if I extended the idea of the Pardner, not just as a solution to financial exclusion but as a vehicle to seek justice. Just like that, Miss Hortense entered my world – a woman who, supported by other members of her Pardner Network, seeks justice for those who can't seek it for themselves.

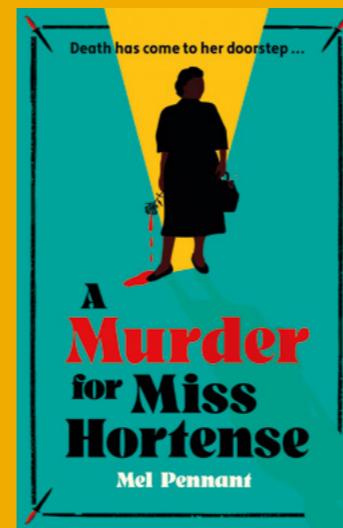
Miss Hortense is fiercely protective of her community, where, underneath the surface, rage burns, intense and historic, and current injustices also lurk. But Miss Hortense doesn't work alone, she is assisted by an array of colourful acquaintances, and *A Murder for Miss Hortense* is powered by love – whether it be forbidden love, the love and loyalty of Miss Hortense's best friend, Blossom, or the love for their community.

I hope that Miss Hortense and the Pardner Network sizzle off the page for you. That you are able to experience the delights of the Jamaican food, the rhythm of the tight-knit community and its good humour, despite the darkness which lingers around the corners.

Miss Hortense is fierce, fearless and uncompromising. She shines off the page and, if you were to look again at that woman who passed you by, you will see that she and the Pardner Network are vivid, rich and multi-layered and far from being easily dismissed or ignored. I hope you enjoy their company as much as I do.

Baskerville | 9781399814379 | £16.99 | 12th June 2025 | @mel_pennant | @MelPennant

'The Pardner Lady, also known as Constance Margorie Brown, was dead.'



On the morning Blossom brought the news that the Pardner Lady, also known as Constance Margorie Brown, was dead, Miss Hortense had not long finished watching *Kilroy* and was in the back garden pruning the Deep Secrets. Her blood-red roses, which she had planted a lifetime ago, were put there to stop her forgetting something that was, by its own nature, quite unforgettable. The sun hadn't yet risen to its highest point and, as she knelt down, it filtered in through the leaves, playing a kind of peek-a-boo against her back.

Blossom, who said she had rushed off the number 64 bus and all the way to Miss Hortense's home, could barely get the words out: 'Dead! And I never saw it!'

She carried the news all the way from Bridge Street Market, where she had been in conversation with Mr Wright. That was the Mr Wright whom Blossom had once said favoured Engelbert Humperdinck, but, apart from the light skin and sideburns, Miss

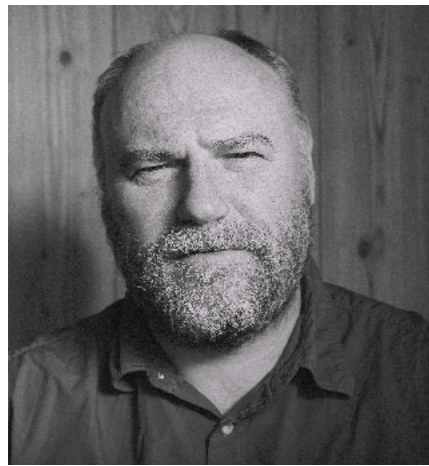
Hortense couldn't see the resemblance. It was Mr Wright who saw the ambulance as it pulled up at a quarter to seven outside Constance's home, number 52 Percival Road, which is the house on the corner. The ambulance didn't leave until something like 8.15 a.m., which means, according to Mr Wright, that they must have been working on her hard. Mr Wright, as they knew, lived in the council flats opposite, so although he didn't quite have direct access into Constance's front room, if he went out on his balcony (which he did upon hearing the sirens and seeing the flash of blue lights) and stood with his neck tilted heavily to the side, he could just about see into the front right corner of Constance's bedroom.

Blossom took a deep breath and stopped fiddling with the chiffon scarf that hung unevenly about her neck. There was a slight tremor at the corner of her mouth. Blossom was a woman who didn't step out of her yard without two layers of foundation and several pins in her hair. Her nails were always immaculately polished in a magenta pink. But on that morning, something had gone wrong, and one eyebrow sat higher than the other and her skin tone was uneven. She licked her lips and continued.

Constance, like Miss Hortense and Blossom, lived by herself, although unlike them, Constance had children – a son and daughter – but Mr Wright was quite sure that it was she in the body bag that was zipped up all the way to the top. 'Body bag' was whispered by Blossom, and she crossed herself before repeating the words and then crossing again, despite the fact that Blossom wasn't a Catholic or in any way a follower of any religion – except, if there were such a religion as Love Thy Money, then it's fair to say that Blossom would have been a very devoted member.

Blossom was quite sure that the information she had was correct. There was no mistaking it. And then, just like that, when she'd got it all out, Blossom deflated like a balloon and nearly lost her footing on Miss Hortense's doorstep because it was a shock. The shock of having Constance be quite alive and full of life, taking up even more space than was strictly necessary, for so many years, to the unbelievable realisation that she had now become a Hope No More.

GUNNER



© Euan Robertson

ALAN PARKS

What sparks an idea? The strangest things it seems. Before I wrote *Gunner*, I had no great interest in World War Two. I remember watching *The World at War* with my dad, but I was never one of those boys that bought war comics or built Airfix model tanks. So, I have no clear idea why at age fifty-seven I started to write a novel centred around a damaged World War Two veteran returning to Glasgow.

There must have been something. Something caught in the net of memory that decided to finally come to the surface. Was it reading that Glasgow was full of AWOL soldiers at the time, men who came back on leave and never went back to the war? That the city was well known as a place where you could disappear, where nobody would look for you? Maybe something about that anti-Blitz spirit appealed and seemed more realistic somehow.

Or maybe it was the fact that infamous Nazi Rudolph Hess, believing in a mystical Aryan race, magic and myths, decided to come to Scotland for reasons that still aren't entirely clear. Maybe it was the photo of excited wee boys and farmers standing by the wreckage of his plane, smiling for the camera, that stuck in my head. The fact that he found himself in a barracks in Maryhill Road being gawped at rather than being feted by the British aristocracy must have been a shock. Where was his master race now?

Could it be that my generation, a generation of men who didn't go to war, are fascinated by those who did? My Uncle John jumped out of a boat on D-Day, rifle in hand, more scared of the water than of being shot, and raced up the beach. What was going through his mind? White-hot fear I would imagine. And then to come home and live your life working on building sites, living in a council flat, never quite enough money to make it through the week. Did he think back on that day often? Or did it fade away in the years of just making it through life?

What do I know about living through World War Two? Nothing really. Maybe that's why I wrote the book, to learn something about it. And what did I learn? Simple stuff that I should have known. War happens to ordinary people. Ordinary lives become extraordinary for a short while. Who knows what my Uncle John thought about when he was on the bus or sitting in the pub. That it was all a kind of dream? That it was the greatest adventure of his life? That the sights he saw in France haunted him until his death bed?

Maybe that's really why I wrote the book. To try and find out what happened to my Uncle John. Maybe he was the spark after all.

Baskerville | 9781399819664 | HB | £16.99 | 17th July 2025 | @alanjparks | X@AlanJParks

'He was back in Glasgow all right, but it didn't take him long to realise how much things here had changed.'

He was half asleep when the train whistle blew. He yawned, stretched, and looked out the window. They were coming into Glasgow at long last. He stood up, pushed the window of the train door down. A rush of cool air as he stuck his head out, looked around for familiar landmarks. The same soot-covered buildings were still there, some rag-and-bone man in a horse and cart slowly making his way along Hallside Street; could even see the edge of Glasgow Green, people's washing out to dry on the long ropes stretched between the iron poles.

He was back in Glasgow all right, but it didn't take him long to realise how much things here had changed. Barrage balloons were hovering above the city, bobbing up and down on their long wires. What looked like bomb shelters in the middle of every second street, windows of the shops all criss-crossed with tape. They rounded a bend, and he could see a tank parked outside the pump works at Weir Street.

A couple of minutes later the train rumbled over the bridge across the Clyde and into the dark cathedral of St Enoch station. Gunner picked up his bag, slung it over his shoulder, stepped over the two snoring boys and went into the corridor. Never been happier to get off a train in his life. He was supposed to have got home yesterday but they'd been held at York Station for eleven hours, waiting for six troop trains to load up. The railway guards wouldn't let them off the train, everyone had had to buy cups of tea through the windows, wee boys running back and forward to the cafe for a penny.

An older one somehow managed to get the whisky from somewhere for two Air Force boys, charged them ten shillings for it, not that they cared. They ended up sitting in the station all night, nothing to do but look out the window, watch the rows and rows of white-faced lads in uniforms that were too big for them boarding trains to God knows where. All laughs and shouts and shoving each other, heading off for a big adventure. A couple of them had seen his uniform, given him the thumbs up. He'd given it back. Why not? They'd find out what it was really like soon enough.

NO OBVIOUS DISTRESS



© Sara Grace Photography

AMANDA QUAID

AJM Original

JM Originals was launched in 2014 to champion risk-taking, genre-breaking fiction and non-fiction. From memoirs and short stories to speculative fiction and adventure writing, it is a place where readers can find something, well, original. Many Originals authors have gone on to win or be shortlisted for a whole host of prizes including the Booker Prize, the Desmond Elliott Award and the Women's Prize for Fiction. To find out more about the full JM Originals list please visit www.johnmurraypress.co.uk.

I was living my life as a busy working mother of a three-year-old girl when I got a call from my doctor informing me that the back pain I'd lived with for years was actually rare bone cancer. Life as I knew it was upended, and I was thrown into treatment that affected my marriage, family, and sense of self.

It's no hyperbole to say I began writing poetry to save myself. In the midst of extreme anguish and physical pain, I needed a way to transform my experience into something beautiful. Poetry gave me a way to organize chaos into form, to find exactly the right language to describe what seemed indescribable, and ultimately, to leave space for the unspoken, the unknown.

To my shock, one of my first attempts was selected by Roger Robinson as the winner of the 2023 Bridport Prize. That recognition taught me that my words might have meaning for other people, and it set me on a path to write *No Obvious Distress*.

As I organized my poems into a manuscript, I set out to tell the story about cancer I longed to read: one that went beyond the 'curse' / 'gift' dichotomy and explored how suffering can coexist with wonder, ecstasy, absurdity and humor. I wanted to flip cancer on its head, interrogate it and our received ideas about it. I wanted to keep my eye on beauty, whether I was swimming in the Caribbean Sea or rolling on a gurney into surgery—both can be the stuff of poetry. I wanted to lean into sexuality and desire in the midst of illness, because it is so little discussed, and I wanted that to coexist with parenthood in a way that felt authentic to me and other women I know.

The spark for my book may have been my illness, but the flame that sustained it was my intense desire to make meaning of my situation, to find and share beauty in unlikely places.

'You believed you were the type to get a dire diagnosis and think of your doctor's feelings first. You were that type once.'

JM Originals | 9781399824569 | TPB | £14.99 | [@amandamquaid](https://www.instagram.com/amandamquaid)



How to be a Friend to the Newly Diagnosed

Before you try to pick me up,
lie down with me awhile.

It's fine to cry – no need to insist
it's not about you. Tell me the ways

you will harbor my child. Show me women,
arms woven like ropes, catching

my girl as she slips from my grasp.

Don't go on about the time
they thought you had it too

but misread the scan. Don't remark
on my protruding bones, my sallow skin.

Don't call me your wake-up call.
Do send peonies and easy-reading fiction,

know the names of my doctors, and do
learn the words, mesenchymal chondrosarcoma.

Ask how to spell it, do write it down.
When I hear it in your mouth, mangled

by most every doctor and nurse,

you hitch your sturdy belt to mine
and stride beside me up the lowering hill.

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