How Bleak is the Crow’s Nest

edited by Rosalchen Whitecross

The aperture through which we view prisons is narrow, distorted, and often boarded up. Life on the inside is shown to us through fleeting glimpses: in mainstream media, crime novels, and TV shows. This impersonal representation—a ‘lopsided story’—is not only a poor likeness of prison life; it is, in the case of women’s prisons and prisoners, an empty landscape. Drastically under- and mis-represented, their voices are drowned out by the focus on the much larger male prison estate.

In How Bleak is the Crow’s Nest, Rosalchen Whitecross anthologises the writing of 18 women prisoners at HMP Downview and HMP East Sutton Park in 2018; writing their own stories told in their own words. In doing so, this anthology writes into ‘the silence of the lived experiences’ of women prisoners, opening an important space for us to better understand prison life for women, and the treatment of women prisoners, in the UK’s criminal justice system.
How Bleak is the Crow’s Nest
How Bleak is the Crow’s Nest
An Anthology of Women’s Prison Writing

Edited by Rosalchen Whitecross
In a ripple echo to Seen and Heard by Lucy Baldwin and Ben Raikes, this anthology is dedicated to the memory of all women who have lost their lives in prison, and the children and families they have left behind.

Proceeds from this anthology will be donated to INQUEST.
In this anthology readers will encounter references to the maps of the writers' life journeys drawn as rivers and trees. When I think of the journey map of the anthology itself, it too becomes a river with many tributaries along the way. Besides the writers, whom I thank in the preface, my gratitude for the following contributions also extends to:

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~ Mr Robin Eldridge, the Governor of HMP Downview and HMP East Sutton Park at the time, who granted access to both prisons for the creative writing workshops;

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~ Sort of Books for donating copies of The Summer Book by Tove Jansson and Headline Review for donating a copy of The Snow Child by Eowyn Ivey for each research participant.

Here it is, your writing from our creative writing workshops. It is published in this anthology under the name How Bleak is the Crow’s Nest. Do you still remember The Summer Book that we read together? I have followed the same format in compiling this anthology where your individual stories, writing and thoughts are shaped together to form a whole new, composite story of your lived experiences. It also traces the creative journey of our time writing and reading together.

I hope you have been keeping well? It has been quite some time since our workshops ended and I hope that you haven’t given up yet on receiving your book… sometimes things take a bit more time than anticipated. I did not forget.

Everyone’s writing is featured in this anthology — thank you again to each of you. I used your pseudonyms and in the text I have changed the names of your pets and family members to protect your identities. Other than that, the publishers and I have kept your writing just as you wrote it in our workshops, except here and there where we tweaked spelling, as happens with every publication. We appreciated your individual voices, style and expressions.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research and for writing the difficult things, delving deep into your life journeys, and for sharing moments of quiet reflection. Thank you for working with me and understanding that, when we write, our voices need to be contained in a safe space so that we can express
our own truth without being scared. Thank you for being kind to one another and for remembering that there is no right or wrong way to write. Thank you for listening to one another’s stories when you read your work out loud to the rest of us in the group. Each one of us knows what courage this took. Thank you for finding words, sentences or images that stayed with you from our writing and reading together, sharing them as feedback; affirming the writer’s experience.

At the front and back of the book are photos of the writing tablecloth for you. I hope you do not mind that I am sharing the process of our workshops with the other readers of the anthology, telling them our story of how we worked together. When you hold this book in your hands and read what we have made together, I hope that you realise its value and appreciate the real-life contribution you have made to knowledge about women’s imprisonment, writing your stories in your own words,

Rosa

Dear Reader,

The steep rise in the worldwide female prison population over the last three decades, as well as in the UK, has increased the urgency for a critical concern with the experiences of women in prison, and with their representations thereof in life writing and prison narratives. Particularly as we find that,

The women who end up in prison are amongst the most powerless and disadvantaged in society largely due to traumatic life experiences of: sexual and physical abuse, domestic violence, exploitation, periods of homelessness, institutional care, self-harm, educational disadvantage, trafficking, racism, drug and alcohol misuse and mental illness, underpinned by poverty and inequality. (Deborah Coles — INQUEST, Still Dying on the Inside, 2018, p. 5)

My narrative research is a study of writing, stories, and the lived experiences of women in prison. I examine the critical role of art — the art of writing — from two perspectives: first, the perspective of the link between the creative process of writing for the writer in the personal sphere, interwoven with the wider sphere of the society in which the writer lives and writes. Second, what this writing reveals and reflects of the life lived within this society. For the woman in prison, ‘life-writing serves [...] as a means of working through the trauma of imprisonment and bearing witness to their experience’ (Scheffler, 2002, p. xxxv). The writing in this anthology is situated within the wider social context in the UK, where Still Dying on the Inside, a report published in 2018 by the charity INQUEST, lays bare the enduring harms inflicted on women in the prison system, most of whom are non-violent and pose no threat to public safety (Coles, Roberts and Cavcav, 2018).

In 2018, the UK’s Female Offender Strategy set out its strategic aim of reducing the number of women in the criminal justice system (Ministry of Justice, 2018). It acknowledged that ‘Our evidence shows that women do not respond well to the custodial environment’; that most offences committed by women are low-level, whilst also recognising the vulnerabilities of female offenders — the domestic abuse, addiction, unemployment, homelessness and poverty — that lead to offending (Ministry of Justice, 2018, p. 27). Even so, this is an area of systemic reform that has remained resistant to the implementation of policy and research recommendations to work with women who come into contact with the Criminal Justice System in ‘considered and holistic ways’ (Hine, 2019, p. 14). In May 2018, plans presented in the Female Offender Strategy for five community prisons for women were shelved due to budget cuts (Syal, 2018). And, paradoxically, despite expressing a commitment to divert more women from custody, in January 2021 the Ministry of Justice (Press Release, 2021) announced 500 new prison places for women which would allow children to spend time overnight with their mothers in prison.

It is against this wider social background that I met the writers featured in this anthology in the summer of 2018 as part of my PhD research on women writing in prison and their prison writings. Our first meeting took place almost exactly a year after I had first approached the Prison Governor of both HMP Downview
and HMP East Sutton Park in 2017 to enquire about facilitating creative writing workshops with women in both of these prisons. Once the Governor had granted provisional access, my research study underwent detailed ethical scrutiny and rigorous external validation by both the University of Sussex Research Governance Sponsorship Sub-Committee and by Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Services (HMPPS) (previously known as NOMS — National Offender Management Service).

As I write this preface, it is now April 2021 and I am preparing to submit my doctoral research thesis *Wallflowers have eyes too — The critical engagement with women writing in prison and their narratives of lived experience*. This anthology, *How Bleak is the Crow’s Nest*, forms the creative companion piece to the critical narrative thesis. These two texts, deeply interwoven, each exist because of the other. They share the collaborative focus on the process of writing in prison and the stories of the lived experiences of women in prison told in their own words — two shutters opening on the hidden world of women’s imprisonment.

Scheffler (2002, p. xv) describes women’s prison writing as ‘the marginal texts too often lost in the marginal literature of prison’. *Wallflowers* contains the narrative of the research journey, grappling with the questions of the dearth of women’s prison writing as a genre and why the critical engagement with women’s prison writing is under-represented in the cultural and academic sphere in the UK, where bodies of work in this area have been steadily growing in other parts of the world. This anthology is the creative outcome of this narrative research journey, showing and sharing the voices of women in prison; to this end, I used creative writing workshops as the research method. This had the dual purpose of allowing the women in prison to write about and explore their lived experiences in their own words as research participants over a sustained period of time, while also enabling their writing to form the research material for the critical engagement in the thesis.

The research material was thus produced within the creative strand of the methodology, moving from data to words using participatory arts-based action research, contained within the wider reflective narrative inquiry as the critical and theoretical framework for the research and analysis. The research participants selected themselves; no requirements were imposed when it came to literacy levels or English language proficiency. I did not elicit any information about the writers’ convictions and what is known about the writers’ life journeys flows from what is explored in their writing. Drawing on the Amherst Writers and Artists (AWA) method (Schneider, 2003), the women were all writers in a writing space with its own rules of conduct: ritual and support based on the notions of kindness, respect, and listening to encourage a supportive and reflective space for engagement with their stories and writing. The workshops focused on the theme of reconceptualising the self as a process, writing the self amongst others as a colour, the seasons, in response to listening to three pieces of music, and in conversation with a stranger. It was also emphasised that there was no right or wrong way to write.

The tablecloth adorned with reds and blues, oranges and green, becomes my parachute that saves me. Diamond, circle, flower and birds, repeat. A repetition before my eyes. I write. (Raven Hawthorn)

Scheffler writes (1984, p. 65) that women’s prison writing and narratives are a rich storehouse of records, both empirical and practical, of the physical surroundings, attitudes, people and events that make an impression on the woman as writer in prison. Yet, this writing stands neglected and unexplored because it is not viewed as a necessary element in theorising punishment on the grounds of not being cerebral or theoretical enough. In my thesis, I examine this assertion from the perspective of epistemic justice and my research finds that this exclusionary stance enforces the hegemonic status quo of the master narrative of punishment. As Crewe and Liebling (2017, p. 890) observe, ‘prisoners are sensitive and well-informed evaluators of their own predicament’ and articulate in their descriptions ‘how power feels’ in prison, how it impacts on their well-being and psychological security, and what it means in terms of their opportunities for self-determination. Exactly as we find expressed in this collection of writing.

The memory of the writing produced for this anthology is infused with the heat wave of the summer of 2018. In the 10-week
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period stretching from the beginning of June to mid-August, I worked with the aforementioned 18 writers, writing and reading together. They chose their pseudonyms from books — books about birds, flowers and trees that I had brought to the workshops — to protect their own identities and for confidentiality, but also to open up a personal creative space sheathed in anonymity. Each writer chose a name that resonated with them, and these inspired the illustrations used in this anthology; each drawing representing one of the writers.

Writing and reading in Downview, we find Baby Blue 79; Hearts; Sea-Coral; Purple Rose; Rainbow Rose; Raven Hawthorn; Tall Melilot; The Mallard; The White Cow and Yellowhammer. Writing in East Sutton Park, we meet Andromeda Marsh; Daisy Dove; Foxglove; Oriental Redwood; Periwinkle; Snapdragon; Wood Lily and Yellowhorned Poppy. I approached the publishers of two books — The Snow Child and The Summer Book — and explained my research project, asking whether they would contribute to it by donating 20 copies of each book. They kindly obliged, which meant I could gift a copy to each writer, to thank them for taking part in the project but also, from a practical perspective, to enable us to read together as a group so as to inspire and enrich our writing practice. As you will see in the anthology, at the end of the writing workshops, the research participants wrote thank you notes to the publishers describing what the novels had meant to them.

How Bleak is the Crow’s Nest writes into the silence of the lived experiences of women in prison. The aim of publishing it is to present the writers in prison — the research participants — with a concrete outcome of our time spent writing and reading together, exploring their aesthetic responses to and communication of their lived experiences, both in and out of prison. It is also to feature their work in the wider social and cultural sphere beyond my thesis, in its own right, as real-life contributions to knowledge in the area of women’s imprisonment; the acknowledgement of the prisoner viewpoint in the wider cultural and academic dialogue pertaining to punishment and prison reform.

The titles of both this anthology and my research thesis draw
on the notion that ‘Our species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories’ (Bateson, 1994, p. 11). Wallflowers have eyes too is a line from a poem by The White Cow. This metaphor encapsulates my thesis’ critical engagement with the aesthetic expression of the internal gaze by women in prison through their writing. Likewise, How Bleak is the Crow’s Nest is a companion metaphor from the writing and reflections of Raven Hawthorn. Continuing this thinking through metaphor, Sea-Coral’s introductory piece about the distant, foreboding tower is an apposite frame to the story of women writing in prison, where prisons exist on the outskirts of towns and cities, hidden from sight, behind high walls topped with rolling barbed wire or concealed by trees at the end of remote country lanes.

Though removed from everyday life, prisons form part of the collective subconscious. Embedded in the communal social and cultural mind’s eye, the story of prison and punishment has been shaped over time by a choir — or rather, a cacophony of disparate voices — its range conjured in a collage of images and writing drawn from articles in newspapers and magazines, crime novels and true-crime stories, popular television shows and films, political speeches and arguments. These narrative representations remain one-dimensional and flat, more often than not depicting women in prison as hardened criminals, yet, unless you have experienced prison life itself, either personally or through an incarcerated family member or acquaintance, or through someone working in prison or the criminal justice system, what we know is filtered through this external, normative gaze. Thus, from the outside, the story of punishment, told in the official language of statistics and headlines, obscures the textured lived experiences and realities of those who live and work within these institutions. It is a lopsided story.

When Raven Hawthorn writes that ‘We are all part of the puzzle’, it poses the question about what we do with and how we respond to these pieces of the puzzle — the lived experiences of women in prison, written in their own words. It indicates a future where two very different paths might be taken: either listening, engagement and dialogue with women’s prison writing and their narratives of lived experience, or continued dismissal and silence as response, in which Sea-Coral’s fear that the fate of the two skeletons — locked away in the distant tower, sitting at the table, with their scratch marks etched into its surface — might also become her fate.

Rosalchen Whitecross
April 2021
Once a thing is known, it can never be unknown. It can only be forgotten. And, in a way that bends time, so long as it is remembered, it will indicate the future.

— (Anita Brookner, *Look at Me*)

Publishing women’s prison literature is one method of reminding society that incarcerated women exist.

— (Judith Scheffler, *Wall Tappings*)
Introductions
Introductions

Thrashing through the dark dank water I asked myself, “Why are you doing this?” From the shore the distance to the tower seemed so short. I knew I was getting exhausted. The sea was so cold and waves were getting larger.

Through the icy spray of the waves I looked up and saw the tower close now but so unwelcoming. Dark slimy walls, tiny windows. My heart was racing as I swam around to find an entrance. A small wooden door came into view. Brown, battered and wet. With great difficulty I hurled myself up on the ledge with waves lapping at my feet. I reached up for the handle, fingers wet and trembling, saying a silent prayer. I pushed the door. It moved silently. My heart skipped a beat as I almost fell into the dank, dank, musty blackness. I found the slippery soaking stairs going round and round, higher and higher.

With a shaking body I ascended up the tower. What would emerge from on high? Suddenly no more stairs, my heart almost stopped. There was a large wooden table. Sitting around the table were two skeletons with their heads dropped onto it. I noticed scratches on the table. Had they been trapped in here? I was terrified.

I almost fell down the stairs, slipping and sliding, knocking my arms and legs on the side walls. Eventually I was back at the dreaded door. I stood stock still for a second or two, too frightened to move. I pushed at the door, realising there was no knob. Oh my god, the door didn’t move! The image from the top of the tower came into my mind. I froze, trembling.

Would the tower now become my grave too?
Raven Hawthorn turned to me and said,
   RH: I’m surprised they’ve allowed you in here to do this.
   RW: Do what?
   RH: Let us write and talk about our feelings. In here no one
ever talks about feelings.

|Raven Hawthorn|

As a machine, I know little of this language. Although at times I
   am full of feeling.
   I am a robot.

|The White Cow|

I feel like I am losing my mind. I can’t remember what I was
thinking 3 seconds ago. I mix up names. My thoughts don’t
translate to my mouth. It is like having two separate entities in my
head that refuse to collaborate or compute.

   It feels like it is summer 365 days of the year as a hot consuming
rush transpires upwards through my body like a burning furnace,
on a daily basis.
   Getting older isn’t easy the old adage says. I completely agree,
it sucks.

|Periwinkle|

Driving feels like I am in charge. Just being myself.

|Yellow-horned Poppy|

Rainbows in Maps of Rivers and Trees

~

My name is Orange.
   My mind is sometimes sweet, sometimes sour.
   When I concentrate I can read and write, but when my mind
flies out, I can’t do anything.

|The Mallard|

My name is Yellow.
   I am warm like the Sun, the attachment of the Soil to the
grains of grass that cover the plains of the world. Giraffes carry a
warm yellow within them, they are like sunflowers and grow in
pleasant harmony with that which is around them.
   I am yellow, calm and peaceful.
   Yellow can be very inviting.

|The White Cow|

My name is Red, it feels sticky, wet. It brings a darkness.
   Red makes me full of little bug-like creatures, the body can’t
stay still. I’ve never killed but torturous death is always on my
mind.
   Darkness, depth, red.
   Blood releasing, rushing.

|Tall Melilot|

My name is Baby Blue and I feel like the sky. I feel like I am free
from anything or anyone.
   My Baby Blue is like a newborn baby wearing all blue to tell
us he is a boy.
   My colour is dealing with people that I have lost in my life and
that I keep close to my heart. And how to deal with it — in here
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My colour is emerald. It is in front of me, shining. It’s pretty to me. This is a forest stone that holds great power for me. When I am feeling lost or upset, I sometimes stop and think of this colour, because it reminds me of when I was young child. I loved being out in the woods and I love nature.

Trees are forever growing, just like life.
Water is forever flowing, life will live on.
Emerald can easily turn black.
Emerald cannot talk. It feels and thinks, but it cannot talk, it’s speechless.
The tree is not always filled with colour. There is a dark place under the tree.

I am associating the word “Anxious” with the colour “Orange”.

I have used the colour orange to define my anxious feelings today. The reason I have used this colour is because I am coming closer to my release date and currently have a couple of Avenues open in regards to my housing upon release.

However, I feel like I am not getting any responses at present and so I feel like I’m sitting at traffic lights with the amber colour stuck on, not knowing if I should go or wait!!

My colour is red and it is small, claustrophobic, fragile.
It is a picture of being trapped and a feeling of having no control. Because I have 0% tolerance left for being in custody and it makes me feel trapped.
I wear my heart on my sleeve and I care too much.

Blue is the sky, a light colour.
The colour blue is my mum’s colour.
Blue is my football team, Chelsea.
Blue is lovely and light, a happy colour. I am in a bad time but blue is getting me through my worst nightmare.

Pink was dismayed to learn that upon her release she would not be permitted to use a party popper or indeed hold a sparkler with her grandchildren.

My map is complex and winding. It shows the point at which my identity was lost. I am still travelling along the river, hoping to find Lily again.

Wood Lily is sad today, her colour is purple.
She has missed both her children’s birthdays and hasn’t seen them for three months. She hasn’t had the simple pleasure of burying her nose into their hair to smell their special smell.

Wood Lily is dark purple in colour today, almost the deepest shade of purple, nearly black almost. Wood Lily’s purple heart is bruised.
The colour will brighten to a lilac when she hears their voices again.

The river runs red all the way through. Ups and downs in a good flow, then extremely turbulent.
The black hole sucks the river down, which makes the turbulence rapid.

Around the edges the greenery shows the lifeline. After the bad times the flow is at a steady pace. It shows where things went bad and what was good.
The river makes it choices! Although, sometimes, it can’t make a choice because the flow is already there.
The river’s flow is red, the stickiness currently being sucked into the black hole. The hole pulls Red deeper and deeper. Sometimes it feels like there won’t be a light at the end of the hole. The hole just has to regurgitate Red. It will happen in good time. The hole needs to hold Red till Red is cleansed and can start a steady flow again.

Red was flowing too fast. Red had to be slowed down.

My colour is blue, just like the sea. I am like a fish, smooth and swimming around in the blue sea. Lots more fish come to see me. I am happy, swimming, just swimming with the other fish, because I don’t have to think about where I am.

Suddenly, the sea becomes rough and changes colour. It is grey now and begins to rain hard. A shark appears and starts to eat the fish. I swim as fast as I can to get out of the sea. No more fish, the shark ate them all, poor fish.

The shark is not nice. No one is left.

As I gaze upwards there’s blue all around me. No horizon line as the sky merges effortlessly with the depths of the sea. Everything is shades of aquamarine. But it is only inside my head as the outside is dark and bleak.

My map is chaotic. It twists and turns and reflects the chaos that permeates my life.

Death is significant. I keep coming up against it and it plummets me deep into a black hole till I am yet again spluttering for breath and struggling to breathe. Unable to see much light or focus on a way forward. Too much sadness, always turmoil dragging me deeper into its depths. Till rock bottom. I can feel it, touch it, then the darkness overtakes everything.

Aquamarine is turning dark, turning rapidly black. The sense of peace and becoming calm has gone. She has turned into non-descript nothingness. No feeling, no emotion, just unsteady nervousness and emptiness.

The colour before the storm.

I can see the core of the tree — the trunk — as sad and very dark. My daughter has been a shining light.

I chose a tree, because I feel more rooted in the earth, as a river I would be dry and not know where to go. Felt like I had to climb the tree to where I am today.

My life has only bloomed when my daughter was with me.

How my life fell apart due to drugs. All the shame and regret, disgust at the things I have done.

I found my river very hard. It brought back emotions about my life and what I had been through. But I have come through it, out on the other side.

A life in care.

Why did my birth family give me away?

Buoy you saved my life…

River scouts, sea scouts and all those whom over the years have worked with the water ways and developed and honed their skills in how to work with various items around them to make good but safe use of their environment.

Water can be an amazingly clever resource once we’ve become more aware of its own properties it can be great fun. Water is very nourishing within itself and can hold you in good stead for sustainability. Water can help to cell certain plants, life and draw upon various elements to bring previously harsher climates to life.

Floating about on the riverbed are the freshwater pearls glowing in a warm yellow. Slightly dull next the mussels, which filter off the grime of previous days. A warm natural cleansing flourish of lichen holds onto the face of various rocks. Thick yellow, green trout laugh and splash as the river flows.
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The river can be plain sailing in the right setting with the right kind of know and so the seemingly dull pearls flourish with no disturbance.

—The White Cow

My colour green is around the regret and the shame of what I had done and the consequences of my actions. Things I can never have back.

A deep core sadness.

Longing to be free. Free from prison, but also a freedom from within. I can see a light at the end of the tunnel, but I struggle to know how to get there.

—Raven Hawthorn

I confide in you my heartache,
my life alone is free,
I was well and truly born this way,
it’s a happy life for oui.

I’ve always known I love you,
trust you, and, trust me.
That’s a straight up dirty martini,
no swivel on the spoon.
It’s really straight up easy style,
low riding to the moon.

when I come back you will be there
when you come back, the same

I confide in you my heartache,
am but born free.
Free to live my life and run wild among the trees.
If I so choose to stand beside,
know I am but love.
On the Inside
Am I Human?

My words turn to dust as I try to show my life along the way.

Sophisticated, cunning and devious...

The three words the Judge had used when handing down my sentence of five years. Save for those three hurtful words, I was somewhat strangely relieved to finally receive the sentence, which could have been longer. The Judge had, in fact, been incredibly fair when passing sentence. I had pleaded guilty, so could not really fault him. Except for those three words, which continued to nag at the back of my mind. So was I really a woman who was sophisticated, cunning and devious or was I the daughter, wife, mother who was so desperate to look after her family that she committed the ultimate act of theft/fraud for which she was now serving the sentence?!

How had it come to this?

What would now become of the lovely family that I had long continued to shield and care for? Seven years of struggling, seven years, seven years of anti-depressants.

To the outside world, a successful, professional businesswoman. Inside the home, a miserable, depressed creature, sick with worry and constantly juggling things. Looking after my husband who had heart disease, caring for my children who were still at school, caring for my father who was bedridden and in a home — yet another expense.

For each day of my sentence that passes is one day nearer me going home. I have missed an awful lot of family events. The birth of a precious granddaughter (my first grandchild) and my youngest daughter going through a major operation. I have not been able to be there for her. It hits hard! The photos arrive which are lovely
but painful — a daughter’s 21st birthday, a son’s 18th birthday, my daughter’s graduation, my son’s A Level results and seeing him awarded the prize on leaving school before starting university.

My granddaughter is three today. I love the very bones of her and am missing her grow up. However, I am lucky in that I have been re-categorised and moved to an open prison, which is nearer to my home and family.

But to go back to the beginning, am I really sophisticated, cunning and devious? NO, I think just plain stupid. Therefore until you walk in the shoes of another, it is best not to judge, even if you are The Judge!

I have long wanted to write about the three words used to describe me in court.

I’m sorry I let you down. I am sorry I was selfish and only thought of myself. I look back and see someone I do not recognise. What was I thinking? Why was I like that?

Upon reflection I’ve spent hours and hours and hours on this journey. For ten years, maybe more, from when I found myself homeless and broken, committing crime and hating the person I became. Not caring about my self and seeking solace in the bottle. It’s easy to have a drink, that buzz that takes away the loneliness, the hatred, the shame.

Two years for each charge, that’s five charges!! I thought I’d got ten years. Then it was explained to me that they run concurrent. "Take her down", he said!!

Off I went to a world where I lost myself and was totally stripped bare. A world with women and people I’ve never encountered, and also with myself, my overthinking brain, my anxiety, my grumpiness. Analyzing everything and everyone and how it must be directed at me. Everyone’s mood must be directed at me.

Prison life!!
Wow this is almost surreal.

Come to prison I was so scared and cried a lot. I did not know what to think about being in prison.
Bars everywhere.
Lock up all the time.
Bad food.
Tea was terrible.

I was so scared to even come out of my cell. Officer came into my room and said to me to stop crying and get on with it. But I was still crying and scared of the officer, which made it worse. Letters from my family and seeing them, cheered me up.

It got a little bit better when the officer said, if they can get me into an open prison if I would like to go? Yes. Please I said.

I did not know what it meant. But I stopped crying and cheered up, a lot better.

I remember thinking, well they all look normal and then the cell door opened, and I thought, What now?

Everyone else knew what they were doing, getting toast and milk, lots of shouting and clanging. I gingerly stepped out feeling nervous at what awaited my first day. Fortunately I looked out and saw a lady in a prison-grey tracksuit, horrible black plimsolls, and white grey hair smiling at me in the same nervous way with tears in her eyes. And I knew I would be ok. (She’s still a friend to this date, a friend for life).

I remember then an officer, who looked totally harassed and frazzled, said,

“Listen Miss, let me tell you some rules”.
He then did an about turn and said,
“Behind your doors ladies, bang up!”
That was that, behind my door it was! Then around an hour later, he said,
“Come with me, you’re going in a double.”
Lo and behold it was the lady in the dodgy grey tracksuit, still with tears in her eyes. We smiled again and I did a silent prayer to God,
“Thank you Father, she seems nice.”

We had six glorious weeks together on G Wing on House Block 7 before I was transferred to the dreaded Holloway (I’d heard horror stories). We laughed so much at the various things that only being in prison will make you smile at. The dodgy clothes - think of your grandmother’s nighties, tracksuits three times too big and bras that look like a comedy sketch with points on as if they were training bras.

Soon we settled in and helped welcome the new women, as distraught and unsettled as we once were. It was over the winter that I started. I remember sleeping so much, the peanut butter baps I ate and going from 56kg to 59kg over six weeks, and being put on medication for my anxiety.

I have experienced unkindness. An officer I was speaking to just before lock up shut the door in my face. This left me feeling both angry and depressed.

I sat in my room, tearful. I am human. I do have feelings.

I could not sleep that night. That small act of unkindness left me feeling worthless for days. Obviously the officer had no idea that he had caused such trauma.

I really want to see my mum. I’ve not seen her for over a year.

Kindness is something beautiful. Words can be kind, thoughts can be kind, actions can be kind. I’m so grateful when people are kind to me. Made me realise how others can affect us so much. To be kind takes nothing for us to do and can have massive consequences.

We are all part of the puzzle.

My choice has been taken away from me. I have to be in this environment. Sometimes I feel like an animal, lost. Totally out of the environment I’m used to. Feel like an alien, a fish out of water.

There are people who delight in horrible behaviour. A menacing glee crosses their face. When an officer picks on me. Makes me feel small and not good enough.

Why would she choose me?

Makes me question myself. That I am not good enough.

Daily taunts. Locks me away, always. Even though I have done nothing wrong.

My communication shuts down. I’m separate from the others.

Don’t know who to turn to. Which way should I go?

Find my voice to stand up to the officers. Find my voice to stand up to bullies.

I am worth kindness.

My words become distorted. Feel like a child again. Past scars are re-opened.

Take back my power and not give it away.

Being kind can change so very much.

We started out very differently to what we are today and we have to learn how to socialise and integrate. We need the basic skills to live.

Surviving is not enough.

I am going to sleep with a smile on my face tonight, as I had my first RDR (resettlement day release) and I spent good quality time with my dad in the morning and then he dropped me off at my

Daisy Dove

Sea-Coral

Raven Hawthorn

The White Cow
mum’s and I spent the rest of the afternoon with her and my dog, and I also got over some travel fear! Which was a bonus!

Prison in Time — A Composite Day

Living on the edge is a confusing place to be.

Early every morning, at about four o’clock I can hear the birds whistle. The chicken sings very noisily not far from my room. Noise comes from the officer’s radio and alarms, every day.

I always wake up between five to six o’clock in the morning, and look up to the sky. The patterns are very beautiful. I can see many different shapes of cloud up in the sky. Some shapes look like a house, an elephant, a person, flowers, rainbow, a boat, a tree, a plane. Or birds flying.

It looks beautiful and I want to cry, but keep telling myself to keep very strong, you are not going to collapse, stay strong don’t do it. I miss my children very much.

Don’t have a chance to stop and think. Try to focus on the clock, screwing my eyes up. It’s no good without my glasses. I give up and open the cabinet drawer. 7am. Still have time to doze. Routines of washing, dressing, roll-call, working. Still have time.

I haul myself up not daring to close my eyes knowing my time management leaves much to be desired. I look at myself in the mirror as I brush my teeth. Another day starts. Days left of canteens and sleeps. I can’t see beyond 5pm.

Stand in line. Roll-call. First of the four of the day. Standing with a cup in hand. A line, girls’ faces, the backs of heads. Another day.

Smell of the farm hits me as I move from the main building. What will the day hold today? It’s Tuesday, pig serving I think to myself. Every day marked by an animal need, a routine, an expectation.

It’s summer now. The days are different. I first arrived before
How Bleak is the Crow’s Nest

Xmas. It was cold and wet. I was bogged down in layers. Struggled to move my weight from one side of the yard to another, unable to see an end to the day. My bulk limiting my capacity to do much.

Wondering how I got here and how I would ever be able to get through it. Never have been on a farm for long work — adjusting to the smells and sounds, wondering if I’d be able to see out the end of the day, never mind my sentence.

I have been awake a while. I listen to the birds, mainly pigeons cooing loudly. Greeting each other ready for another day.

The sun is rising. Soon it will be shining into my room. This always makes me smile. I leave my bed and all my night thoughts and look out of the window. The trees are swaying in the breeze, thick, rich green foliage. It doesn’t seem possible when I first saw this view. The trees were barren and leafless, stark and naked. I spend a while just staring at the leaves, continuing to sway.

I mark off my calendar, another day gone, I wonder what this day will bring. The usual sound of keys in locks, voices can be heard, the usual good morning greetings. I take a last longing look at the trees and off I go. Like most days I go to English as a Classroom Assistant. Some days are quiet, others not so.

Lunchtime arrives. Back in my room my eyes are drawn to the trees now fiercely blowing as if they are angry, the leaves being tossed in fury.

Back to English after lunch, a hectic afternoon, girls shouting not wanting to learn. I think of the peace of my room and the trees. I mustn’t clock watch time will seem longer.

At last I am back and the trees have calmed down. Peace has been restored. The pigeons are still cooing.

The light is fading, pigeons have roosted. No longer can I see the trees. They too must be sleeping, but it is comforting knowing they are there. I read. I do crosswords. I think my thoughts, another day almost done. Another day I have survived. I try not to think dark thoughts. I will get through this. The day will come when I leave this all behind.

I long for the trees to turn their beautiful red and gold eventually falling leaving the trees vulnerable and bare. It will mean another season. The year I will be leaving this all behind. The year that I will no longer be a number. I will just be me!

Prison is time.

Time goes fast sometimes, another seven months has gone by behind the wire. Time goes quickly when I am positive and happy. It goes extra fast sometimes when I think back on days out of prison.

Time is a word that makes me feel a different array of feelings — hopeless, embarrassed, sad, confused, long and exhausted. It makes me think of watching the clock, canteen dates, roll count, dinnertime and breakfast breaks. How many more days?

Time goes by quickly on the outside, it stops when incarcerated. It goes like a snail, long and drawn out. The snail with a shell on its back, with the whole of his house on his back, crawling along - my 40th birthday, my 37th birthday, two Christmases and two New Years. Tick tock, tick tock!

Time comes and goes in different ways.

It can be slow and it can go fast through the days. The moment is the future and then it's the past in a gaze. What we see is what we saw, it's like walking in and out through the door.

Time in here is like a light bulb, from light to dark.

Too much time on my hands.

I worry about home. I worry about my family. I need to be occupied fully to stop the boredom from settling in.

Bored is purple, grey or blue.

How laborious I find time. I languish in the hours. I bask in the minutes. I stir my tea and dunk 12pm.
How my life has changed.
I long to make time my best friend. Draped over the long hand.
Why are you so slow? I will be your best friend if you just let me go.

How I long for the hours to whizz past me. Every fibre in my body willing it to pass. Not to let it touch me. Time taunts me with the tick tock. A steady reminder of who is in charge. Certainly not me.

As my life has become measured by Father Time, we all worship the clock. Hurry up. Slow down. I am in a constant pull between fast and slow.

Can’t find my place no matter how hard I try. Help me to find peace in my day. To appreciate what is given to me so freely, for me to do with what I will. I don’t want it, have it back, return to sender. Alas, the sender is me.

My head spins with spirals, round and round. Trapped, my foot caught in the snare. You’ve got me, half an hour to go.

The patterns of time become rigid within the confines of the prison gates.

Time is what we have and yet we have no time.

This is my first summer in prison. The girls are all sunbathing on my wing, trying to get tanned, trying to wear as less as possible. I laugh when I see them run to get a spot on the grass.

For me, I’m fasting as it’s Ramadan and the fast is long over 18 hours. It is hot in our rooms. We don’t have fans and the windows are small and let only a little air in. I stay in my room and sit out only one hour a day for air.

We fight to sit on the bench, which is funny. I do like the sun as it’s bronzing my skin. The sky is a beautiful blue with white clouds and the rays of sun streaking through.

No one can force me to turn up. No matter what I am threatened with. Yes the officer has the key to the door. But not the key to me.

Prison is based on threats and bribery. The miserable officers that want nothing more than to bring you down. Wake up with roll count. Keys, those bloody keys, jangling. I’m sure they do it on purpose. Still, I lay asleep, earplugs in so that I can’t hear them so much. Stop calling my name. I am ready.

I sort the bins. Drag these massive heavy loads. Rip the cardboard to take my anger out on it. Go round litter picking with a grubby hand tool.

Thank god, I’m out in the sunshine. Nature is my true friend. I smile at the trees and laugh with the flowers. They know me, not many do.

The vile stench of the bins in the summer heat, get it done, and glide invisibly past the officers.

I have been in this prison for six months. Every day I stand next to the window and look at the pigeons. Every day I see a little pigeon with one leg. It is a lovely grey colour. I feed the pigeon with my food. I eat some food and leave some for the pigeon. I feel sorry for the pigeon. It just has one leg so it is difficult to chase the food that I put outside because the other pigeons are very much quicker than the one with the one leg.

The pigeons are friendly and look at me when I feed them.

I also told my children about the pigeon with the one leg. They feel sorry for the pigeon as well. My children asked me, “Mum why don’t you let the pigeon stay in your room with you?”

Now I think I can give a name for the pigeon, which is So Sorry Lovely. Every day I can feed the pigeon I am happy.

But since yesterday I am very sad, because my re-cat [re-categorisation] is still not open yet. I don’t know why and they told me to wait until December. I am heartbroken and have been crying all night.
Twenty minutes ago they rang and said to go up to OMU [sic] and speak to them. They said they haven’t received any report from security yet.

I always join with all the activities in prison and am never impolite with all the officers. I do not understand the reason for refusing my re-cat.

A few months ago I injured my leg. It is very painful, but I never cried. I always talk to myself to keep me strong and let the time run by quickly. But last night I cried and was very upset and sad.

Every day and night, I stand next to the window in my room and look up at the sky and pray for everyone,

“Please keep healthy and be careful at all time”.

It doesn’t matter how strong you are, in a minute’s time you feel very weak.

I am very disappointed with myself, because my English is not good enough to explain about my situation. Some people could understand when I talk to them, but some say they don’t. At the moment I try all my best to concentrate on studying English. I don’t want to waste my time in here. Hopefully one day very soon, when I am released and out of prison, my English should be much better than before.

The black bird and its baby don’t visit anymore. Maybe they have moved?

The little buggers danced round in circles, stretching their necks in anticipation of a human form coming into view.

“Evening ladies”, I cried.

The excited gaggle responded with a cacophony of clucks. I smiled inwardly, laughing silently to myself as I edged closer towards their enclosure. They fell in unison with my step at the other side of the fence.

The Mallard

Oriental Redwood

Periwinkle

On the Inside

6pm on the landing. Everyone is fed up with the day taking so long to end. Living in a place where all people want is for the day to start and end.

I am physically willing the day to end every day. I feel one thing I have is the luxury of days. I’ve fed on hours. I’m full of weeks. I have a gluttony of lunches, a soup bowl full of minutes.

Conversations that I hear of absolute dogs dinners, tripe, fodder to feed the hens. Voices that pierce my very being. How I detest the sound of some of these girls’ voices. Sometimes I want to drown out the voices. I welcome the night time bang up. At least there is quiet. No chatter, no arguments, no alarms, no “last call medication”, no “last call dinner”.

How my day is poured out in measurements. Single or double. Just let this day end.

Officers willing the day to finish. They just want to go home. I want to go home.

Raven Hawthorn

I hear the dreaded footsteps marching along. My slot in my door opens. No sounds, no noise, no smile, no goodnight. Just peering in to see I’m in sight.

Am I human, can this face see I’m not right?

Every night, always the same. Never ever do they say my name. Yes I know I have done wrong, but I am trying to be strong. Just one little word, one little smile, to know I am human would make it worthwhile. If only someone would acknowledge that I am here, it would make my day, I might even cheer.

If you should read this on your next shift, just smile or wave, it would give me a lift.

Sea-Coral

Roll check at ESP [East Sutton Park] at 11pm. The officers just check for the feet. Three pairs of feet.

I’m writing this because I’m very lonely right now as I am going through therapy and a number of courses. This is helping to ease the trauma but my emotions are raw and unsettled. This is a
natural progression to help me heal, but I feel cold inside and tired. This is an unnatural feeling for me as my default setting is positive and I struggle with being down and despondent.

|Daisy Dove|

End of my day.

Today is so hot. The heat is thick and the air is still. Officers lock us in and no air can blow through the cells. Everything is so laborious. Luckily there is a good/fair officer on so it is not too bad.

Doors bang, hoovers whir! There is always a constant noise. Quiet, I wait for the quiet.

I was sick today. When outside walking, I came over feeling sick and vomited constantly. Nurse said maybe it’s the heat.

When we are locked in for the night, I feel like I don’t have one friend in the whole world. I’m so alone. Keep my chin up. How do I socialise and fit in with other people? Why can’t I be like everyone else? Talk about stupid stuff and not mind people coming round?

Thank god it’s the weekend. I can chill out and try and have a lie in. Well try to is the only thing I can do.

So here we go. Everyone is unlocked, the shouting and loud music starts! Then it is a knock at the door,

“Have you got any spare milk?”

“Have you got this and that?”

It feels as if I am the landing’s shop, but without money.

Oh please can I have a bit of peace and quiet! I work all week and it seems like every 5 minutes my door opens. There’s one person on my landing — she walks around and just goes into people’s rooms. Oh no, here we go, my door has just opened. Speak of the devil, here she is. Just walks in and sits down. What the hell!! After a while she ups and leaves, but leaves my door wide open!

Why can’t these women talk to each other? Instead they just scream at each other. Even with my door shut I can hear them.

Oh what now? The officers are at the door. They are doing room checks and testing the smoke alarms. That noise goes through me. It is very loud first thing in the morning. I know it is prison but I just want to chill out.

|Rainbow Rose|

And on the 7th day…

It was Sunday. The Sabbath. Although not of religious persuasion I had been introduced to the Chaplain soon after entering HMP. Not a practising Protestant, despite years of being bundled off to Scripture union camps, mostly to give my parents a break I had long since surmised, I nevertheless attended Sunday service. It had a lasting effect on me but not for the right reasons and I quickly tied myself up to working weekends on the farm despite a 6.30am start. I had quickly dropped out unable to acquiesce to the dulcet tones of the girls’ voices ringing in my ears. Even with great gusto and compassion, there wasn’t one of us in tune. It brought memories back of childhood and being allowed in the school choir provided I mimed, but the Chaplain wasn’t so inclined and obviously quite deaf I imagined.

And so ended Sunday service.

Wednesday was a different matter — a safe place where I could listen with rapt attention to the melodious voice of Father Mark and his sermon. Although I wasn’t Catholic, Father Mark closed his doors to no one and with his thought-provoking words of wisdom which lulled me to a sense of peace and cleaning, gave me food for thought. The hail Marys and communion divided me from the others present but I did gratefully receive a blessing. Perhaps he would hear my confession one day, a kindly and patient soul. Though I could only imagine how much the Mary be invoked did I ever decide to unburden myself of my sins. I’d always been scared of the Catholic guilt I felt was a regulatory aspect of the religion, but now I sensed it was unimportant at best, at worst misguided.
To Turn Up Means Not Giving Up

Turning up means I get peace. I feel cared for and I love the unknown.

The writing class has given me the chance to start using more of my imagination. It has helped me to find my true feelings. Almost, not quite, but I’m now learning to not be afraid of writing how I feel.

*The Shadow People*

- Sad Shadow — This person sits with their head in their lap.
- Anxious Shadow — This person stands against the well’s wall twiddling their fingers.
- Scared Shadow — This person stays in the foetal position.
- Intrigued Shadow — This person is standing forward with their head tilted to one side.

Writing helps me understand myself.

I’ve just woken up and it’s Monday morning. My make-up and hair all look really good (even if I do say so myself). I’m in a goodish mood and go and look at the work list. I see my name. Next to it, it says Maths! Oh no! My mood has sunk.

I go over to the education block and find the teacher. I tell her my name and sign in. The teacher decides to sit next to me. Not just close, but really close and she is explaining what I have to do. Then it hits me, the awful smell,

“Eew. Yuck!”

It’s coming from my maths teacher, the smell, the stink of body sweat. B.O.!! It’s making me feel sick and really suffocated. I hold my breath while she is near me.

“Oh please let me out of this classroom.”

It makes me feel dirty.

Finally, I am allowed to leave and I am free and can breathe. I breathe a sigh of relief as I don’t have to go back to that dreaded classroom.

I looked at the list. Oh God no, I saw to my horror my name on the list for English. Yes, I loved this subject at school, but that was many years ago.

My heart was beating fast as I approached the classroom. Everyone was so much younger. I wanted to disappear. Mary, the teacher, was kind, but I thought what good were qualifications at my age. I had retired and did not want to learn anymore.

Things went from bad to worse. The dreaded computer! Mary said I could go straight to level 2.

“Whoa”, I said, “let me start at level 1 first”.

Much to my surprise I enjoyed each session writing stories and letters. Then came the dreaded day of the Exam. I was so nervous I could hardly write. Much to my surprise I passed level 1. Mary said that she never doubted me. She gave me so much confidence. I went on to pass level 2 and now find myself a classroom assistant to Mary, helping others.

I look back to that first awful day and give thanks that I walked into that classroom and I thank Mary for her patience and confidence in me.

Turning up is like where you go to work. Every morning I wake up thinking to myself,

“I can’t be bothered to go in today.”

But I pull myself together and get ready for a full morning of making jewellery. I get up, have a wash, brush my teeth, get dressed and try and do something with my hair. Once I’ve finished, I sit there and watch TV. Next thing I hear the officers call,

“Movement.”

So I get my stuff and lock my door. I walk round to the gate.
Before I can walk off the landing I have to say my room number to be signed out. I walk to the other side to get one of the lovely ladies and we enter work and I say,

“Good morning ladies” to the others and get a nice response back.

We then get our boxes and sit down to begin work. I sit there and get my needle and thread ready, my beads in place. It starts with one bracelet, then two, three and four. It’s joyful in there as we all get on so well. The chats can be funny. Sometimes there’s not a day where we don’t laugh.

I have got to say that there’s this one lady, well, she’s just funny but sweet at the same time. She sits next to me every day and tries her hardest to make the new bracelets, but now and then I’ll hear, “Oh what have I done here?” or “Please could you help?”.

Of course I’ll help no matter how many times this lady makes mistakes. I’ve always got time for her.

I love my job and the ladies I work with. So even though I sit there and think I can’t be bothered, I turn up because I enjoy my job and the company I have around me.

|Rainbow Rose

Your presence is required.
But, your attendance is a requirement.
Until you have a cold and are unwell.
There you are every day turning up, on time.
Ready to go.
Today is different.
You’ve been sneezing, caught one of those adorable bugs that children seem to carry around like their comfort blanket! One sneeze, covered in snot, eyes streaming, temperature goes through the roof along with the fairy cakes, the suitcase, the broomstick, a 24pk [sic] of four ply loo rolls and the dinosaur is still bearing the grin as your hot soup is being made.
Suddenly you realize, still groggy, oh I’ve got to turn up, at least show myself. I’m loyal, always on time.
Running off to get dressed, I’ll be fine, you arrive.
Hard time about, looking like the hangover from “When did we marry?” then you sneeze all over the sweet girl from “SNEEEZEEE”.
Go Home.
I should go home,
I burst into tears and go to work, within minutes I’ve gone dizzy and passed out.
A week later I still don’t remember Anything.
The whole workplace is ill and the worst thing is… we could have stopped it all!
What is converse,
Your voice is still, you and as for your presence!
Gain organisational skills.
I don’t want to put people in a position where they might get ill.
The creep theory — No means No.
Be real — take time and get well.

|The White Cow

A poem for Sea-Coral who was poorly the week before and missed the writing workshop

I found we really missed you, we missed your smile and your voice. It’s much nicer to have you around and know that you’re ok.
We are really lucky to have you around you’re a real asset.
We hope you’re feeling better now  
we miss you!  
Hurry back but take your time and  
be better.  
We be waiting for you  
we miss you!

Turning up means not giving up on things, like me giving up on this writing course at the beginning, because I thought I couldn’t do it. But I didn’t. I wouldn’t get this far with my ideas for writing my own book if I wanted to do one.  
Now that I am here, I don’t want it to end.

I try every day to show up. Showing up to me is real. When I sit with my writing group and I feel the raw emotion there is a beautiful radiance I see and I want to touch it.  
When I really turn up I can feel the dial being turned from 0 to 100 in the glint of my eye. When I truly see myself, I know that I am being seen. To turn up is to be seen. Share in the delight of our inner beauty, something we all possess but often deny ourselves and others.  
There is a magic that happens when we show up. We all long to be seen. To be heard. I delight in others when they push themselves to be truly here. Truly take part. Turn up the dial, play it full blast, for we are the musical notes that make a symphony every day.

The hedgehog forages for food after a long hibernation. It is now ready to travel to fresh habitats. It finds all sorts of places to relax and eat. She likes to sleep under leaves and sniffs everywhere she goes. It helps her to be aware of danger and to find a mate.  
There is a fly that hovers around her and she thinks it is highly annoying.
Pools and Mirrors —
The Infinite Refraction of Memory

Delve deep. The pool on the surface is still, a mirror image.
I stand on the high cliff edge. I want to jump in. Dive down.
The crystal image is broken. Shattered in a thousand pieces.
The puzzle building begins.

I take a look in the mirror and I see myself and how times have
changed. My hairstyle for one. When I was little I had blonde hair.
It then turned a mousie brown and really thick. I hate the way I
look. I am not the prettiest person.

Also, my reflection can be looking back at my childhood and
how I grew up and who was around me at the time. I ask myself,
are memories a reflection? I am not keen on seeing myself in a
mirror, but looking back at a memory, I think that can be my
reflection. When riding the horses, we had big mirrors in the
school. We had to look at ourselves as it helped with our postures
and positions. I guess, I don't mind looking if there is a reason.
Sometimes you can see a reflection in the water bucket. Quick,
put it away in the stable.
Now I can hide.

I was getting ready to go out to a party. Looking in the mirror
I saw myself when I was old and grey. It made me stop, but then
I walked away. I wanted to stay young like I was as a little girl,
blonde, pretty, in a pink dress. Or when I got married, I was nice-
looking in a lovely white dress walking down the aisle to meet my
new husband.

Now, I am 58 years old, getting grey hair and looking older
than I am. I saw myself as about 80 years old. I didn't like what I
saw, so I covered up the mirror.

I walk past the glassy pool. Shocked by my reflection. How long
has it been since I really saw myself?

Who was this woman looking at me?

I felt sadness at life lost. Where had it gone? Years that I can
never get back. They are told on my face, each line telling a
different story. I didn't see them all. I hide from my reflection
sometimes. I don't want to see my past. I feel scared of my future.
I try to find the good in what has been.

These are the same young eyes that once saw the magic and
delight in all. When did it disappear? I try to carve a new shape.

This is my time to grow. I look in horror as I see what I have
become. How do I get out of here? Tell me where the exit is please.
I want to escape to be anywhere else where I am far away from me.

Strong dislike and battle with me. Somehow I've become my
own worst enemy. The negativity swells up and the huge wave
 crashes against me. Wash away my fears and renew my self view.

King and Queen I can be. Master of my own destiny. Rise up
and fight. The goblins that live under my bridge, sit with a riddle
waiting for me. I never get it right. Maybe one day I will. The
grotesque figure taunts me. She glides past me knowing one day
she will defeat.

Don't be afraid anymore, know that I can look after me. I am
the green of a tree, the wing of a magpie. Nature is part of me.
Always my true friend, it has never deserted me.

Purple was not having a good day. So much had gone wrong.
Purple started talking out loud. She had been late for work, she
had words with her boss and got upset.
Purple was now crying, her voice quivering in between sobs. Purple stood up her voice now rising, shouting that her boss was so rude. She shouted loudly that she thought she was going to lose her job. She picked up all the bills she knew she could not pay and threw them in the bin. Her voice now was hysterical. She screamed in anguish and poured another drink into her large glass. She shouted so loudly that her voice became hoarse.

She suddenly stood up and looked in the mirror. She had been staring at her own image, talking to herself. She now screamed at her own image, “Why don’t you answer?!”. With one throw the wine glass hit the mirror. She was done talking. No one ever answered. She just lay there in despair. Why did the mirror never answer? She had no one else to tell her troubles to.

I lie weightless at the bottom of the lake. It’s sunny above the water as I can pick out glints of gold as rays try to push through the liquidy layers above me. Bubbles rise in small rivulets chasing each other to the surface in tiny bursts.

A tired old trout weaves its way slowly, leisurely above me in time to the ripples of water. It is unclear if he’s making them or joining them. Tiny minnows accompany him in his journey, swimming effortlessly in sync as everything moves between light and darkness.

A dark shadow casts itself overhead, looming slowly to settle over me, bobbing silently on the surface, blocking the rays of the sun as it rocks to and fro.

*   *

I reach over the boat and trail my fingertips over the surface of the water, sending small ripples in ever-increasing circles.

It’s murky below the depths, the only glint as the clouds cross over the sun allowing rays to fall and reveal silhouetted shapes beneath the water. A whole other entity of life undiscovered. Brief shadows and hints of colour.

A face stares back at me gazing straight at me, eyes looking into my eyes. I pull a face and smile. It smiles back.

I was walking down the pathway to the lake. It was such a lovely day. The sun was shining.

I sat near the lake just looking at the water when I saw my sister through the water. I was so happy and wanted to jump into the water to be with her. Then I saw my dad and my mum. By then, I just wanted to throw myself in. I could see them, but they could not see me.

The sun went down and it became darker.

I knew then that they weren’t there, that I was just thinking about them. I started to walk to the pathway, to go home with tears running down my face.
On the Outside
Wednesday was a bit sad due to the money for your pin phone didn't go on. So I had to wait till Thursday to talk to my people in the community.

Thursday it went on. So I called dad and the girls. I am so pleased that I spoke to him due to the fact that he has been here.

I'm feeling very happy as I have received a letter and picture from my daughter Willow yesterday. I haven’t stopped smiling since. It's been three whole years from when I last had any contact and I am so happy she wrote back.

Willow is an amazing drawer and writer. Maybe I could reflect my creative writing to her?

Yes!

I most definitely will.

It’s my mum’s birthday! 52 she is indeed. I’m sad I can’t be with her.

For my place it’s the heart of colours that I chose, because I want my baby girl so much. So I sort of like hearts, because she used to love colours and pink, so my house will be made out of her love hearts.

I feel sad and emotional because my best friend went home today. My parole is due next week. My head is all over the place.
The piano sounds make me sad for myself.

I miss my children, my family, my home. I am not there for my children. They have to take care of themselves. I always want to share my life with my children.

The sound of the forest brings back memories of about thirty-eight years ago. At that time four countries were at war over Vietnam. We were moved into the forest and hid there. One morning we woke up and heard that a lot of people were killed everywhere in my country. When we were hiding in the forest, we were hungry, scared and thirsty. Nothing for us to eat. That time I was about ten years old. That war I will never forget. It is still in my mind.

The piano sound makes me very sad for myself.

About thirty-six years ago, when we were in a refugee camp, we always shared sweets and biscuits together. I still remember it, until now. We broke the biscuit into four pieces and shared it with one another.

My structure is Egypt and my place is a lantern. My lantern represents Ramadan. It is the lantern that is displayed in all the front doors of most houses towards the end to mark the coming of our Eid celebration.

In Egypt it is always summer with the heat. The sun is up early and the sky is always bright and blue. Egypt was a happy and educational time for me and my family.

Her dreams were vivid and wild. The trunk of her soul unpacked on the grassy carpet. Her eyes opened and she looked upon her child. Bright sunshine left light spots in her eyes. Colours were distorted. Child’s face was bright green. Golden hair draped over her loving plump face.

They walked back from the stone circle, lumbered with blankets and bags. Amazing how much luggage they had managed to bring. Heavier on the way back than on the way there, even though they had indulged in a beautiful lunch and drank all the liquid that had come with. Seemed almost as if the prankster energy had weighted their bags with rocks, which was a favourite of her mother.

The land pulled the childhood glee from all of them, caught up in the excitement and hubbub of the day. Lucinda, our dog, would run freely up ahead. Surefooted as a mountain goat, scaling the rocks and cautiously staying away from the sheer edge with a deep knowing of where she was going. The ground was loose with sandy stones. Maybe she had got the scent of a wild fox or little stoat as her nose led the way.

Caught up in the salty air, the family had been there for the whole day. The longer they all spent in this magical day, her mother and uncle and Nan all became moulded by the sea air and sand in every little place.

The colour of hazy days and turquoise sea. Cousin Phoenix would be the boy who would pretend to save her as they played and splashed in the frothy surf. With the glint of a spear that would rival the glassy gleam of mackerel fish swimming past.

I love the smell of lavender. I love the colour. The beautiful smell hangs in the air.

My great-granny used to grow lavender in her garden. So much that she used to pick the flowers. Bunches of them and she would make little bags. She used to sell them. My mum when she was a little girl used to sell them with her.

Everyone knew my great-granny. She was so loved and liked. She used to sit in a chair with a big box at her feet selling her lavender.

That Lavender Lady was my mum’s nanny and my great-granny. I have lovely beautiful memories of her.
I don’t think you would have known me as I am looking much younger than you remember. I am now 30 and you are 38, aren’t you?
Yes, that’s right.
Since I’ve left you, you have had some big problems. But you are dealing with them. The way you try to cope makes me so proud.

* 
I wanted to talk to you about the times we’ve spent together. Do you remember when you were little and lived with your mummy in London. I used to take you to mine and Nan’s house in the forest. You loved it there — the horse riding and the parties. I called you my poppet, all the time.

* 
In my later years we also spent a lot of time together. You looked after me.
Yes. I did. I loved helping you — to feed you when you couldn’t manage.
Thank you. You did it so well. I know you came into the care home, that you sat with me or took me into the garden. You were with me on my last day - I gave you my last smile and winked.
By now you will have guessed, I am your Grandfather, just much younger now. I will never leave you.

[|Purple Rose]

In response to the sentence, “Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself”, by Virginia Woolf

Raven said she would buy the flowers herself. She would get it right.
I wanted purple peonies with lemon freesia. The smell was wonderful. I bought flowers every month. Placed them on the ground where his ashes were scattered.
I love to see something living by this sacred spot. I sit on the grass next to the flowers in their heady sweet scent. I look to the sky above. It is white-grey.
I lie back and hold the flowers on my chest. They rise and fall with my breathing. I didn’t want to let them go. A strange fixation that took me back to when I held him in my arms.
Stop. Don’t go there.
No. It’s ok.
Breathe. Let the feeling pass through me.
I delicately arrange the flowers. Find stones from around and place them in a circle. They look beautiful. A lonely figure I cast. I know that he will see them too.
Enjoy my little one.

[|Raven Hawthorn]

Reading together — The Snow Child by Eowyn Ivey

The part of the book that made me emotional was on page 171 when Jack did not return home:

When evening came and dinner sat cold on the table, she knew something was wrong. Panic constricted her throat.

I have felt that panic and worse this week. Twice a day I speak to my husband. I don’t get visits, so these times are precious to us both.

I telephoned him on Tuesday lunchtime. No answer. I continued in the afternoon and into the evening. The phone was ringing, no answer. I was really worried. Wednesday came, still no answer. I too was panicking and worse. The girls were great supporting me but I couldn’t eat, I could hardly breathe. My thoughts were getting darker and darker.

They said they would contact the police. My heart froze. There is only my husband and myself. We only have each other. Thursday came and I was really thinking the worse. Lunchtime I thought try one more time. A female answered.

“Who are you?”, I asked.
“Who are you?”, she replied.
It was the police. My heart almost stopped. My husband had been lying by the front door since Tuesday after a fall. My poor dog was by his side. The police lady let me speak to him. I didn’t know whether to cry or laugh. He was taken to hospital, dehydrated and
full of bad bruises, and kept in for observation.

My beautiful dog seemed no worse for this crisis running around wagging her tail as the police lady watered and fed her. The officer telephoned the wing to tell she had been taken to the local kennels that we use. So knowing she was safe with people she knew and that my husband was safe and most importantly alive! brought tears of joy, but I couldn’t stop shaking.

My friends on the wing were so supportive and I will never forget the kindness given to me. I am sorry this is all so long, but it has helped me to put it in writing. Hopefully my husband and Polly will soon be reunited. Then next year all three of us will be together as we should be.

Polly, Polly my beautiful friend
My love, my loyalty to you I send.
Your wagging tail welcomes me home
Far from you I would never roam.
Amber eyes, long curly ears
Walking with you abates my fears.

Polly came to us from the rescue sanctuary where I volunteer. We already had two German shepherds from the sanctuary that has sadly passed to the animal Rainbow Bridge.

Did we want to go through the heartache of loving and losing another dog?
Yes, we did. Our house was not a home without one.
Polly came one lunchtime and by tea-time it was as if she had always been there. Her golden long curly ears, her amber eyes, captured our hearts at once. Polly is adorable, laid back and loves playing with her toys. I walk her by the sea-shore and go for long walks with her.

I cannot begin to tell you how much I miss her. I only hope that she understands I have not abandoned her. I live for the day we are re-united. I miss you so much my faithful friend.

I can’t stop crying. It hurts. Every tear feels like acid against my blushed cheeks. My hair tugs as his claws get wrapped in them. He releases, yet my face is still buried deep into my knees. I hold onto my legs on the floor. And again his claw crashes against my skull as he lets out a cry that still echoes in my ear today.

I slowly raise my head, my tears cascading even more now to see Jax. He sits in front of me, silently. Every now and again he prods me with his nose as if to say,

“Hey You, stop that, it hurts me too when you cry. Stop because I love you.”

Your beautiful brown and black frowns at me as I wipe away my tears. It’s like we are connected because now your head is buried in my thigh, your nose touching mine. I rest my head against yours. You let me hug you.

Everyone else feared you my King, but you stood by me when everyone else didn’t. You wiped away my tears with your fur, rubbing day-old mechanics oil on my face as you rolled in dad’s hard graft.

Why did you have to go? In the brown coffin you went with orange roses next to each paw. That day I closed that coffin with one tear for you, one for me, one for dad and one for that moment.

My dearest Jax, my best friend, thank you for always reminding me to turn my frown upside down. I love you! 2011–2017

My mum and dad bought me and my sister a lovely puppy dog. He was a boy and black and white. He was so beautiful and lovely.

Me and my sister so looked after our Spot. We used to take him for little walks, have playtime and funtime, kisses and cuddles. He was just our little doggy. He used to sleep with me one night and with my sister the other night. We loved our Spot, he was an amazing dog.

Then one day we took him for a walk. My sister said to me to take Spot’s lead. So I did and Spot just ran straight out into the road and got killed. We were so upset and cried. We went to our mum and said,
“So sorry Mum, it was our fault.”
From that day we never ever had a dog again. But I always remember our Spot. Me and my sister were only 10 or 11 years old.

He shines so bright
the love of my life.
He follows me around
this beautiful hound.
Always at my side
never wanting to hide.
I’m never alone
like him and his bone.
I call out to him
he comes with a grin.
He never lets me down
there’s no need to frown.
We always have fun
my cute little hun.
He pants and he drools
all over my shoes.
I love him I do
my number one Jo.
We’re always cutting caper
my best friend, my sabre.

It came up in my face from nowhere, large,
X-tra large, huge!!
Its nostrils could’ve have swallowed me and
then I’d of been tapping on its tongue
to let me out!
Within seconds it did the almost
unthinkable!
It sneezed on me. Covered
head to toe in gunk!

Like they say in the movies, “Thanks Stanley that’s another fine mess you’ve gotten me into” and like the goo the name stuck!
Stan was rather fond of flowers and such and in truth was anything but a pain once you’ve worked out his obscurities.
We didn’t leave him by bridal parties for too long as the flowers, like the stunning bridesmaids, made him sick.
He could be fairly useful when doing home removal services due to his healthy size and of course his muscle was something most of us drooled over.
Stan was really big in our neighbourhood so we built him a large paddock in the field which is our back yard.
He is great fun on hot days and changes colour.
He may be Jurassic, but we love him like a large overgrown ball of dinosaur!
Oh, and he really enjoys a good belly and back rub!
We recently invested in a special seat that helps us to move when we’re out walking him.
Just think, Flintstones and bright yellow and bluey purple, and you’ll be able to picture him.
We love you Stan.

My cousin Phoenix and I ran out to the fields. Laughing with glee as the sheep ran away from us. Then we jumped over the style
and heard a strange neolithic sound. A ram had got caught on the barbed wire.

We stopped dead in our tracks. This was nothing either of us had ever seen before. Upside down, it mouth foaming. The screams of the ram went right through me. We ran back to the farm and told the farmer what we had seen.

He gathered his shotgun and dog. We guided him to the ram. The farmer tried to hold him next to his body. This strange dance unfolded in front of me. Slabbed on his side there was no hope.

He let the gun off.

A roar like I had never heard before.

After the blast, the fresh blood generously poured on the ground. Bright and fluorescent not seen before. Meat looked dull in the shops, pre-packed. This was vibrant, a life. As it spread over the grass, time stood still.

It was the only bright thing the whole afternoon. The sun was low, white light passed through the trees.

| Raven Hawthorn

It was a chilly autumn day. The sea was choppy, the waves spraying against the small fishing boats anchored in the harbour. The tower far out to sea looked dark and foreboding.

A few brave figures could be seen walking along the shore. It was a small town and most people knew each other. The holidaymakers had mostly left a few weeks ago. The laughter and cries of the children excitedly jumping over the waves were no more. Peace had returned. Most of the locals were relieved to get the place back to themselves.

One resident did not share these views. She was sat on the bench they had spent hours on throughout the summer. Now she was alone. She wondered if it had all been a dream. They had been so happy, hadn’t they?

She cast her mind back to that fateful day they had met. It seemed only yesterday. She had been deep in her book when he said,

“Hi”.

She looked up into his handsome face and her heart missed a beat. Hardly able to speak, she muttered some words. Soon they were having coffee in the little café by the harbour. They chatted easily and that summer they were inseparable.

Glorious summer days passed. They swam, they laughed. She was so happy. She told him all her secrets. She didn’t hold back telling him things she had not told anyone.

She did not know much about him. He did not tell her very much about himself. That just made him all the more mysterious and wonderful. She never knew where he lived or where he was staying. He would just appear. When they were together she didn’t let these things worry her.

The days were getting cooler and he did not come so often.
She did not panic. She was sure he would return soon.

It had been over a month and he had not returned. Every day she came to their bench, hoping, praying, but to no avail. All the happiness and promises, all gone.

Through her tears she smiled. Yes she now realised that he was not coming back. Summer was over. They had shared something special and she had no regrets. How could she regret something so beautiful? She would always return to their bench.

|Sea-Coral

Time can be all different things. It can be about the past and the future. I'll give you an example. This is about my past and the time I've given this stranger chances.

When I was two weeks old this stranger walked out on me with no reason behind it. I did not see this stranger again until 17 years later.

When I was 17, I sat my mum down and told her how I felt, that I wanted to get in contact with this stranger. She supported me and I invited him to this party. He said yes, he'll come.

On the day, I rang him to find out where he was. The stranger said he was in Northamptonshire. I called him every name under the sun, and said,

“Don’t bother coming”.

I sat on the sofa with my mum on one side and my stepdad on the other. I cried my heart out as it felt like the stranger was leaving me all over again.

When I was 18, I got my mum to arrange for me to meet him again. He said to meet in a café. I got ready and was about to leave, but my mum stopped me and said,

“I need to tell you something, but I know you will get upset”.

I sat down and this is what she told me,

“His wife messaged and said that he was not going to be honest and will just agree to everything I said”.

That was it, I couldn’t take anymore. My heart shattered into a million pieces.

“Why??!!”, I was shouting, “Why!!”

I only wanted answers to why he left me and did not want to know me. Surely, it can’t be that hard to explain. My mum told me that he wasn’t worth it and that I had my dad in my life, my stepdad. The dad that’s been there from day one and never let me down.

I’m grateful to have such a loving and supportive man in my life, but still would like that closure!!!!

|Rainbow Rose

What I will say to my stranger:

* What was the reason I was put into care for?
* Did you ever think about us when we weren’t in your care?
* Did you ever have any more children after us?
* Did you love us at all?
* Did you love Dad?

I’m at the bottom of the wishing well, just me being me. Surrounded by pennies sitting at the bottom on my rocks.

So much I’ve seen and I can also hear them and their thoughts. Things that make me laugh out loud, tears in my eyes, clutching my sides. For instance, a man who was asking for a wish to find a way to remove the toupee he had put on his head with superglue and not having to go to the local A&E to get the wig off and admit what had happened. Lots and lots of wishes for unrequited love, people from all walks of life: the vicar, married people, old people, cats and dogs.

Made me realise how much we all just want love. Lots of sadness, wishing for good health and people not to die and get better. Lots of good happy wishes, wishing for peace, a new Barbie, a new bike, for Santa Claus, to lose weight and meet David Beckham.

Then one day she appeared. Maybe then I realised it was perhaps a wish I wanted. It was my mum and she wondered where I was and how I was and that she missed me and she wished I’d come home.

We all need a wishing well.

|Baby Blue 79

|Daisy Dove
I want to help people, young women, a shelter for the homeless. Win the lottery to get funding to help ex-offenders.

I met a young girl in a shop in Tottenham last winter in hot pants. And she was scared and frightened and said she was in London because she had been sold for drugs debt as she was addicted to crack.

This had a deep effect on me as I’ve been back in prison for 6 months and I would like to give something back to society. A place, a safe place for young women to stay at for at least a week and get clean clothes and sanitary ware, food and a show of affection.

This place would be called Cuckoo’s Nest and I would like to focus on self-esteem and loving yourself workshops to empower women.

| Daisy Dove |

**The Future Imagined — Hope is the Bird with Feathers**

Purple stood quite still as the gates opened. She truly believed that time had stood still these last two years. She slowly walked out of the gates and stared.

A bus appeared like a zombie. Purple got on board. She sorted out her money for a ticket and the driver tutted as she was holding up the queue. Purple looked around, people going about their business. Purple realised time had not stood still. Time carried on. Purple took the calendars from her backpack. Two years of ticking time off. Time didn’t stop. It turned into days, turned into weeks and then the weeks into months and at first one year then at last two years.

The day had finally come. Purple was going home. Time had not stood still, but for Purple, time had just begun.

It’s my wedding day! (The one I haven’t had yet).

I am dancing softly with my partner who I now can call my husband. We are dancing along the lake. Two beautiful white swans are swimming along, one male, one female. They look like they are beautifully dancing too. So elegant with their feathers out wide, swimming along the lake so lightly. Me and my partner slowly going round in circles, my head is resting on his shoulder, our arms lightly around each other moving in time with the music.

Then we sit on a picnic blanket with our wedding hamper. My new husband pours us both a drink. It’s a lovely summer’s evening. I lean back into his chest and we watch the sun going down. The sunset is so beautiful, pinks, reds and purple tone to the sky. It’s not at all cold. We feed each other strawberries, dip them in cream and melted chocolate. We are really careful not to get our wedding outfits dirty.

| Sea-Coral |
My hubby takes my glass from me, takes my hands and helps me to my feet. By this time the moon is full and shining so bright. Just like a light has been turned on. The stars are shining bright and twinkling away. We have another dance. This one I get pulled closer. (I don’t want this moment to end). The song ends and my handsome hubby gets his jacket and places it over my shoulders to keep me warm.

We look up at the sky and see a shooting star. We both make a wish. As we look down on to the lake the two swans swim up to us and stop right in front. They look at each other and with their heads and necks they make the heart shape. That along with the whole evening is so magical, with the light beaming down on us and the swans. You can see how amazing they are, their feathers are pure white, soft as velvet. Not one feather is out of place when they swim along the water. It looks so effortless. They are so graceful and light. They never leave each other.

I could watch them for hours.

|Rainbow Rose|

Farewells
Farewells

Today is the day, Tuesday by name.
Something is different, not the same.
I won’t be going to my favourite place.
It’s ended, finished, there’s no more space.
Purple writing book stays upon the shelf.
No creative writing today, I tell myself.
I expect I will have to get used to this.
I will miss the girls I quietly hiss.
No more Rosa, no more fun.
But I have enjoyed 10 weeks with everyone.
Thank you Rosa for all your ideas.
Sorry everyone for my weepy tears.
Thank you girls your work was great.
I will miss your stories that you will create.
Carry on writing it’s not the end.
It’s the start of something that you can depend.
So pick up your pens, you can’t go wrong.
Your writing will make you very strong.

There I was sitting in misery, down and dark. My words evolved
and I was created anew. Now I am laughing and transformed.
I love the way that writing is always there. This is pure alchemy,
from sand and grit to gold and jewels. I can be whoever I want to
be. The magic of words.
Writing has made an elemental space.
I can see how I’ve grown with each week. This has been more
than writing, something has been awoken within.

Reflections on the Creative Journey

~

Writing Together

Today is the day, Tuesday by name.
Something is different, not the same.
I won’t be going to my favourite place.
It’s ended, finished, there’s no more space.
Purple writing book stays upon the shelf.
No creative writing today, I tell myself.
I expect I will have to get used to this.
I will miss the girls I quietly hiss.
No more Rosa, no more fun.
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than writing, something has been awoken within.

|Sea-Coral

|Raven Hawthorn

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How Bleak is the Crow’s Nest

How did it feel to read out our work?

Felt proud and became more and more sure of myself. Pushed past the feeling of discomfort and found a magical place.

To listen to other people felt like a gift. Each time I wrote and read it aloud it became like a diamond added to the crown. My tool bag became more and more full. Before I knew it my set was beginning to feel complete.

Took a real feeling of joy to share my work aloud. The saying of when you have something “under your belt”, that is what it felt like every week.

Something constantly evolving. Strength growing. Organic and fluid.

Writing made me think about my feelings and emotions and putting them down on paper. It’s much better than keeping them in.

Can we go on for another two weeks? I love it and am getting really into it and writing my own story.

When I read my work out, in a way I feel good about it, but on some of my work I feel uncomfortable, but I push myself to read it as it takes the weight of my shoulders.

I didn’t realise how much I would enjoy the class, but I really did. I was able to express my feelings and emotions in colour and with animals.

We are each a celebration of life and all the glorious things that come to fruition between us.

The time is ticking quietly in the background and each of us writing is like a droplet rolling down from the spout of a teapot into a cup that brings the liquid to the top and brims over with happy creativity and rolls onto the saucers and continues to flow.

The bond is formed on our gentle thoughtfulness and creativity helps the bonds to form a web. The webs spring from flowers and at the base warm them to the core as we flourish and grow.

I love this class. I love how the tablecloth gets us in the zone to write.

Transforms the space.

Feels like I’m not in prison for the time we are in here.

* Raven Hawthorn

Reading Together

Thank you notes to the publishers of The Snow Child by Eowyn Ivey and The Summer Book by Tove Jansson who donated books to the creative writing workshops

The Snow Child

I would like to thank you for a magical and wonderful story. I was captivated from the start. I have read it twice now and each time was a delight. I am sure I will return to this story again and again.

I find it impossible to find a favourite part as the whole book gripped me. I did love the chapter with the three of them skating on the lake. I found this scene so magical. The closeness of Mabel and Jack skating hand in hand was so beautiful. A truly magical place, I almost wished I was there.

Silver Magic

Footprints along the path where do they go?
People, animals coming to and fro.
Silver trees, silver hills
Where do they lead to? How soft the snow feels.
Silver branches sway in the breeze

~

| Rainbow Rose

| Foxglove

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-77-
A snowball falls making me sneeze. A silver wonderland for all to see I share this view with you and thee.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to read this book — it was perhaps not one I would have chosen initially to read myself, but am thoroughly glad I did. It was beautifully descriptive and completely engaging and I enjoyed every minute of it.

What stayed with me were the wedding and the feathers on the dress, the birth of the grandchild, the descriptions of the beautiful but bleak landscape. A thoroughly enjoyable book and not one I would have normally chosen to read but I loved it, thank you so much.

I found your book truly inspiring. I enjoyed the storyline and the twist at the end. There were various sentences that stood out for me throughout this book, but I feel as though this one kind of sums up the story as a whole, p. 351:

She had been magic in their lives. Coming and going with the seasons, bringing treasures in her small hands.

I am very grateful to have had the opportunity of not only reading this book, but also to read it out loud as part of a group. It really gave me a firm grip on the characters involved and how they evolved throughout the book. It was also great to have a group discussion about your book and its values. It really got the brain flowing.

Thank you again, it was a lovely read.

I enjoyed this book so much. I was transported to a winter wonderland. I love animals and nature. Amazing language, the skill of the beautiful descriptions. How memories became physical.

Barriers I had seen in the past were tumbled with this writing. How intense the feelings of grief Mabel feels. She fully commits to the snow child, but there is avoidance with Jack about the child. Although they both love the snow girl, Faina.

Thank you.

Thank you, it was a great book to read. I like Mabel and Jack, but it was very sad how they lost their baby. I love it when it was winter and the snow came. It felt very cold and I thought I was inside the book. It was just like a fairy tale with all the animals.

I drew a picture of the snow child, sitting in the warm house she was staying at.
I really enjoyed reading *The Summer Book*. It was such a delight. One bit of the book that has stayed with me is where the Grandma is watching the feather on the grass. I see it as fairies flying along the blue sea. So thanks again, it was a lovely read.

*The Summer Book* was such a good book. I enjoyed it so much and am going to read it again and again and I will pass it on to others when I am done.

Moppy (the cat) really amused me, he lived in a dish bowl and Sophia of course. Thank you.

*The Summer Book* is beautifully descriptive. I love the way she writes. Abstract. It really captures my imagination. Almost many stories in one.

Thank you so much for this book. I grew up with the Moomins, but this was a beautifully written book about relationships that was both touching and easy to read. A really beautifully crafted book that I will read over and over again.

Remember the poppies in the field
Emotions held in like a shield
Good times, bad times, maybe despair
Remember things are not always fair
Emotions closed in like a door
Trust is poppies growing ever more.

Red poppies in a field of gold
Each poppy head blowing so bold
Good times, bad times, all come along
Reminding me I have to be strong
Each poppy head bright and red
Thank you for making me face what I dread.

Red blanket standing like spies
Each poppy under blue skies
Golden fields glow under the sun
Ripening as we do, each and every one
Emotions fighting, I need to be free
Trust me, I am trying just to be me.

Heaven is a safe place. There is no pain and suffering.
One day, when I have done all my jobs down here, I will join all the people that I had lost on my journey, my grandparents, my daughter and my brother and the family I had never met in my life.

Butterflies so gentle and mild
Found in gardens and also the wild.
Beautiful colours, or maybe just white
These wonderful creatures, a perfect sight.
From branch to branch fluttering along
Tiny wings that are so strong.
Blue skies, a sunny day
A butterfly will always come your way.
Softly, softly they appear on the breeze,
Dancing, prancing amid the trees.
They fly about always free,
How I wish that butterfly was me!

[Sea-Coral]

As she lent towards her mother, she made a huge realisation.
If not for the feral likes of young Huck and the such,
and one another there would be nothing.
As the rain poured down and soaked that
dry old lawn, the two of them laughed.
They laughed almost unstoppably.
You see, there is a choice, because the
fact of the matter is Darling…
Wallflowers have eyes too!

[The White Cow]

The girl sank to her knees. You could almost feel the humility
painted on her face as she silently asked for forgiveness. The
woman touched her gently feeling her shame and sorrow.

The room glowed with an abject pallor framed with muted
shadows. It was an altogether sombre sight, heavy with sadness
and expectation. The jewelled costumes of the two figures
overshadowed by the tone of the unspoken conversation between
them, the touch subsuming a thousand words.

[Periwinkle]

To Miss, You

Thank you for all the time that you’ve taken.
Giving us due care and attention.

[Sea-Coral]

Letting us know there is no need to shout.
Quietly helping to point things out.
The way you slowly bring us together.
No matter the mood at the time.
We walk together in sunshine and happiness
Due to your calming ways.

There is a fight deep within that’s raging,
Yearning to escape.
With the careful nurture of our creative skills,
We’ve harnessed the power and found ourselves.

There is no longer a need to always bee shelved,
Like tiny walls of honey.
Thanks to days like these
And fun, vibrant classes,
We’ll understand distinction and,
Claim our passes.

A toast to spreading and sharing
The skills released from within.

From Us

[The White Cow]

The majestic Oak stands tall and proud
Up on high birds are flying through a cloud.
Lush green leaves swaying in the breeze
showing of its petticoats as if to tease.
Seasons come and seasons go
the Royal Oak always puts on a show.
From gold to red to silver and white
this beautiful Oak is a treasured sight.
It bows its branches to the warmth of the sun
for a hundred years, bringing joy to everyone.

[Sea-Coral]
How bleak the crow’s old nest looks through the trees.
   A sparrow hawk cuts in over head.
   My mind wanders from her.
   I watch the leaves on the trees outside. Their dappled light
   plays with my mind.

| Raven Hawthorn |
Bibliography


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