

SIX SHORT PIECES OF WRITING BY JULIE FAIRWEATHER

PERFORMED ON 12TH SEPTEMBER 2014 DURING AN EVENING OF

Poetry, Prose and Prosecco

AT TAYLOR'S CAFE AND BOOKSHOP ON BAR STREET, SCARBOROUGH WITH

Writers on the Loose

(Ian Baird, John Cooper, Julie Fairweather, Shirley Waite)

This PDF file contains the work of Julie Fairweather that was performed at the above event, which included updated versions of 4 of the shorter stories from the collection of 22 stories by the same author.

The PDF file is a gift to you, reader, with special thanks for purchasing 'Picking at the Bones', and to readers who may (or may not) want to purchase 'Picking at the Bones' in the future.

STORY 1: DOLL DOCTOR

Doll Doctor is a short story inspired by a childhood memory. A visit to a place called The Dolls' Hospital that was located in the centre of Manchester (where I'm from). It's a place where broken dolls wait to be fixed.

DOLL DOCTOR

Anna smiles as she reads the sign on the dolls' hospital wall: *99% success rate*. The young girl pushes the door open and steps onto the concrete, tapping her way across the factory floor. She stops when she reaches the ancient doctor hard at work behind a counter, his specs balancing on the brink of his nose. Multi-coloured lollipops linger in a jar labelled *for the 1%*. Anna sighs.

The old man pokes an eye out of a cross-eyed doll with a screwdriver and squelches a squirt of glue into the empty socket. Before the nose can slip out of joint, he pops a piercing blue marble into the black hole, instantly restoring the doll's sight. His rounded shoulders and metal-pinned hips creak

with phantom pain as he moulds the doll's face back into shape. He glances up at Anna through the rimmed bridge of his spectacles.

'Come fer yer dolly, have yer?' He clicks his tongue inside his cheek (tut) and picks up his hammer and nails. 'Foller me, lass.'

She creeps behind his crooked (*c r u c k e d*) finger as they trail the corridors. They pass through rows of body parts, with ribbons of hair dripping from shelves piled high with balding scalps. The young girl stifles a grimace buried deep in her throat as she breathes in the fumes from the valley of dolls. She chants a prayer, in time to her footsteps, for the loveless, limbless bodies waiting to be fixed, then hurries to catch up with the old man at the end of the line.

He pulls a wooden casket down from the top shelf and places it on a table in front of the young girl. Anna looks inside and identifies her doll, who's staring blindly into the silence. The old man hands Anna a multi-coloured lollipop - *for the 1%* - picks up his hammer... and nails the coffin lid shut.

STORY 2: LADYBIRDS

Ladybirds is a short story, again inspired by a childhood memory – so again in Manchester – at a place called Boggart Hole Clough - known locally as The Clough. As well as the usual park features the Clough area varies from steep ravines to gentle sloping gullies and also has a woods section.

If you're old enough, you may recall this particular summer and the events that took place at Boggart Hole Clough - sometime in the 1960s.

LADYBIRDS

There were six murders down at Boggart Hole that summer - it was the summer of the ladybirds. Hundreds of them had invaded the Clough. My best friend Sam was on a sleep-over at my house and we sneaked out early to go down and track them. We wanted to set traps for the ladybirds before they had chance to march their way across river to a new site.

We arrived in the woods as dawn broke. The only sound in the graveyard quiet was a solitary magpie, flapping and squawking overhead, tree-hopping as it scouted us on our trawl through. We strode stealthily through the

thicket until we found the old worn path that opened up into a concealed miniature enclosure. A mound of loosened earth supported a fallen log that was smothered in a carpet of damp moss. We shifted the log over onto its side. Underneath were a dozen or so black-fused red dots, dancing around in a mouldy mushroom ring. The ladybirds, dazzled by the sudden light, disbanded and scurried off to explore the new day. Until... we crept in closer to snare them.

Sam lured the first runaway over his makeshift stick bridge into the gaping waiting matchbox. It scurried to the baited gap like a mate looking for its long lost lover. The trap's door slid shut so fast that one of its legs got stuck in the crack. Sam grabbed at it to stop her from getting away, then eased the cover ajar to steer her back in. Eager to keep up with his prowess, I teased mine with a twig until she rolled over in surrender. But she doggy-paddled the air, scrambled to her feet, dusted down her shell and whirled off on the wind. Lucky beggar! I prodded the next victim with a determined finger flick – up and over. She landed smack in the centre of my box den, with no chance of escape. Sam said that was so cool.

We stopped taking turns then and hunted together, circling our prey in suffocating succession. After a while most of them had been caught and were squirming around in the secluded squat of their box cell. Sam stuffed half of them into a second box to give them room to breathe... for a while anyway.

We worked in unison to capture the last unsuspecting two that were sitting together on a molehill. They weren't bigger than the rest but they sure were bulkier – and not so fast at running. Their legs seemed to shrink and buckle with fear as we overcame them. We pinned them down in two seconds flat. Sam had this frenzied look about him. He took a safety pin from his shirt (where a button was missing) and opened it out straight. He stuck the pin deep into their flesh and slid it back out again – slowly. We could hear their skin crackling as the blood oozed like honeysuckle glue. Sam studied the gooey mess for a couple of seconds, then began to cut the bodies up with his pen-knife. He emptied the rest of his ladybirds out from his match box and we carried on cutting until we could no longer make out which bit belonged to which body. When we'd finished, he struck up a match-flare and sent their souls off in a blaze of glory. I kept my match box safely tucked away in my trouser pocket.

It was almost dark when we set off for home. On the way back, we came across a stream and skimmed stones for a while. I slipped on a rock and

almost skidded onto a broken beer bottle. There were two tiny fingers impaled on its end. They must have been floating freely in the blood red water and got caught up on it. I took the match box from my pocket and set my ladybirds loose to make room for the child's severed digits. I laid them to rest on the cotton wool bed inside. I held the box out at arm's length and we followed those accusing fingers all the way home.

Yes... there were six murders down at Boggart Hole that summer - it was the summer of the ladybirds. When the story broke, we were questioned by the Police for hours on end about the bloodied fingers we'd found down the Clough.

And in the days that followed, the newspaper reports kept labeling us as '*the alleged child killers*', even though we kept repeating, over and over and over, that we could never even hurt a single fly.

POEM: DANDELIONS

My next offering is a poem titled 'Dandelions' and was inspired by a memory of my son. The poem will be read by John Cooper.

(Author Intro) I was washing dishes at the kitchen sink when my son, who was 18 months old at the time, came running towards me with a fistful of dandelions he'd snatched up from the garden. I still have those dandelions, almost 40 years on. They are pressed inside a book by Oscar Wilde - The Ballad of Reading Gaol - who turned out to be one of my son's favourite authors. I'd like to share the Dandelions with you now.

DANDELIONS

The dandelions are dead.
Pressed between the pages
and lodged inside life's book.

I'll never see their yellow heads
sun-dance in the rain, nor will I see
a smile light up your eyes again.

But I still count the 'one-o'clocks'
as the wind cracks its whip

across a cobwebbed storm

and I remember a time
when you picked dandelions.

POEM: SIDE EFFECTS

(AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION PREAMBLE)

Is there anyone here on medication? What do you think about the side effects – worse than the condition?

Is there anyone here not on medication? Lucky you! But don't think you've gotten away with it. Sometimes, the chemicals that are in our medication are the same ones that are used as preservatives in our food and drink. And we know about every single one of them because of the information age we're living in.

Medication though: It's hard to resist reading the leaflet they shove in with your pills isn't it? The leaflet that tells us about the reactions we can expect due to side effects. So, as well as suffering the illness - we sometimes have to suffer the side effects of our medication.

This piece of writing is a fun verse about such a leaflet - one that came with a medication I'd once been prescribed. I was into rhyming at the time – so the rhyming could be classed as an undisclosed side-effect.

SIDE EFFECTS

*These pills should make you better,
though you may feel a bit unreal.
They will help with your condition,
but your skin may start to peel.
They could block your nasal passages,
thus tend to make you snore.
If these pills don't work for you,
please try a different cure.
You'll bump into things and start to bruise,
if you cut yourself your blood will ooze.
You'll have sleeplessness, forgetfulness,*

*muscle cramp and pain.
Sometimes, you'll feel indifferent;
and sometimes, quite insane.
There could be temporary blindness,
deafness and a stutter,
fumbling, mumbling, tumbling
and falling in the gutter.
You'll note a change in personality,
nausea and constipation.
There'll be some ringing in your ears
and a very weird sensation.
Your heart will keep on beating
(though thumping like a drum).
We don't think that you should take them
if you complain of feeling numb.
On the pack it says:
try them out for seven days.
For mild reactions – persevere.
Moderate – you can call us here.
Severe – then just ring 999.
We're sure you'll soon be feeling fine.
On rare occasions:
a relative has by-passed this advice
and called for an undertaker.*

STORY 3: CONTACT

This story's inspiration could also be attributed to a possible side effect. I realized, as it was time to perform this one, that my 1st story Doll Doctor has reference to eyes—and my second story Ladybirds has reference to dots. This story, Contact, has reference to both. So, you could say, I'm making sure I'm 'dotting' my 'eyes' (& crossing my 'ts'?). And there's the side effect: cliché. I do like a cliché now and then though - you just know where you stand with them, don't you? They tell it like it is – no messing about with metaphoric language or convoluting verbiage – they get straight to the crux of the matter.

To get back to the story intro, Contact was inspired by my noticing two tiny holes in the ceiling wallpaper where the paint hadn't been absorbed. You know how that can happen sometimes with popped air bubbles? The image stayed with me and I began asking - as writers often do - what if?

CONTACT

My eyes, itchy-tired from watching horror movies since the early hours, are soothed in seconds as I squeeze in the cold drops. I blink rapidly, to dispel the solution, and notice two black dots jutting from the ceiling. The dots start to spread, like ink bubbles on blotting paper, and I can sense someone - or some thing - is watching.

An icy fear skates round my nerve ends, grates at my edges - piercing in and out - like sharp blades grinding right through me. I manage to escape from its iron grip and ease my way to the outside of the bathroom.

I start to hunt for a weapon to defend myself against the intruder and chance a glance back into the bathroom. There's a wild-eyed man with an axe grinning at me from behind the shower curtain. I move to the bedroom on the right, where a strange creature shakes out its long, wiry hair, flicks its horned tail at me and claws its way through a shadow on the wall. In the bedroom on the left, two dwarfed men draped in red capes, brandish scissors, and snap their way towards me. I dart across the landing, tumbling down the stairs in a frantic bid to answer the rapping at the door. My dry throat almost chokes on the words, 'H e l p M e !'

I reach the safe haven of the door and fling it wide open. Two witches menace their flamed lanterns at me, and clutch cauldrons full of... what? I can't ... I daren't... look...

I force the evil witches back, away from the door, but they lunge at me, swinging their broomsticks at my face. In a burst of squeals they screech out, 'trick or treat, missus?'

'Oh, sod off!' (pause) I shout back but just in case they can somehow cast spells, I fumble in my pocket for some change to toss at them. I slam the door shut and promise myself, 'no more horror movies'.

The build up to Halloween has influenced my reaction to the black dots earlier. Full of bravado, I take two determined stairs at a time back up to the bathroom.

I scramble the stepladder determined to tackle the watcher, if indeed there is someone - or some thing - watching. Holding a toothbrush firmly in my hand, my arm is poised. I'm ready to poke the living daylights out of this mother until... a black dot winks at me. I freeze.

I tremble back down the jellied ladder, one rung at a time. On solid ground now, I stand rigid, backed against the wall, squinting at the dots overhead.

Then... an epiphany! I remove the contact lenses I'd inserted in the wrong eyes this morning.

STORY 4: FADING

(not performed at this event)

A reflective piece not performed on this occasion but which has been rewritten (as have the previous stories) since the publication of the 'Picking at the Bones' collection. I believe that all written work, whether published or not, is always a work in progress. For instance, even Wordsworth published a second version of his famous 'Daffodils' - and if he was here today it's a possibility that a single word change could warrant an updated publication of the same poem.

FADING

The wedding photograph slides from my hands onto the bare floorboards and I stare out of the window into the horizon, stroking my swollen belly... waiting. It is the end of the year and the cold is bitter. The birds' kaleidoscope the sky and merge into one fell swoop, coming home to roost in the nests of the old church rafters.

I hadn't noticed the change in you immediately. The careless clues had crept up on me, cunningly disguised as compliments. I hung on to your lies when your lips spoke, failing to notice when they barely brushed mine with your goodbyes each time you left the house. Once, I saw you together, laughing and loving in a halo of light. Only friends, you said, but my own light had felt dimmer.

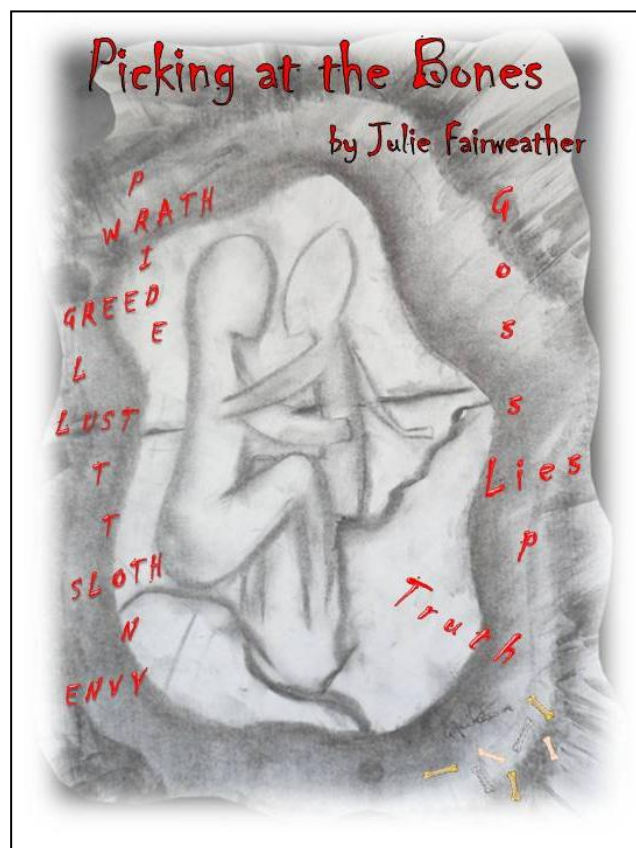
I catch the lush velvet petals of the winter roses as they fall, one by one, onto the window ledge, and I wipe away the tears from my yellow stained palm. You brought them for me yesterday - from her garden I suspect. I knew they wouldn't last - cut flowers never do. I cradle the flower heads as I trim

their lifeless stems, and a vision of you both, standing together with the roses, tugs viciously at my heart.

Your key turns in the door, paralyzing my sadness. I sprawl my once slim frame across the bed and my hair feathers out onto the pillow. You look at me with longing and a memory of the passionate hunger we shared in the early days bursts into the air, illuminating the room with hope. But it filters into a different mood as I remember how you once pleaded your innocence to me whilst in your mind you were planning your next meeting with her.

Now, every time you ask for my forgiveness, the silence haunts the space between us, and our unborn child echoes the agony of waiting. Perhaps it will be months, perhaps longer, before we can nurture the roses together.

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A limited number of paperback versions are available from the author at a discounted price of £5.50 (were £6.50) plus p and p - or as an EBook at £1.79p from Amazon Kindle.

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