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**'And All That Is In Between': A Critical/Creative Exploration of
Language, Otherness and The Role of The Contemporary Writer.**

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Abstract

This project is divided into two components; a novel in short stories entitled *And All That Is In Between* and an accompanying critical thesis. The novel centers upon two interconnected families, each story told from a different character's perspective and moving between different countries and time periods, encompassing the recent refugee crisis, the Syrian civil war and the Holocaust. The novel's themes are disability, migration, grief and language, and the novel specifically seeks to examine the role that communication plays in connecting people across the divides of difference. The first and second chapters of the critical thesis discuss the play *Children of a Lesser God* by Mark Medoff and the collection of short stories, *Chattering* by Louise Stern. Chapter one looks at the theme of D/deaf education and language supremacy, drawing on the work of Harlan Lane to argue that education has typically been the site in which D/deaf community's cultural and linguistic heritage has been dismantled through the unwilling enforcement of hearing people's language and normative expectations. Chapter two explores the problematic use of metaphor in disability narratives, and uses the work of Amy Vidali to argue that D/deaf characters in *Chattering* and *Children of a Lesser God* reclaim the use of metaphor from the associations which hearing society have created and perpetuated through literature. Chapter three examines the choices of writers when creating characters outside of their own identity, and the contention that this can evoke. I use my own text as a focus for these questions and examine my own process of questioning and self-reflection when writing *And All That is in Between*. The thesis concludes by analyzing key the most prominent theme of the novel, the concept of 'in between' and how it relates to many of the topics of the novel, focussing specifically on education, borders and grief. It also gives a brief literary review and commentary on decisions in regards to structure and form.

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And All That Is In Between

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase 'each other'
doesn't make any sense.

Rumi

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What The Words Looked Like

‘Can we talk about him like we always have?’ Ellie asks, ‘not like a dead person?’

Jools and her daughters are driving back from the hospital. They had been in silence until now, and Jools had wondered if the girls had fallen asleep. But of course, they weren’t asleep, they were teenagers now, not little kids. Jools looks at them in her rear-view mirror; they are slumped away from each other, both staring out at their own view.

It is one of those idyllic summer’s evenings, the sun setting in an orange glow so beautiful and so contrasted to the no-man’s-land of the hospital that it feels quite absurd to Jools. What time was it they went into Daniel’s room, what time had they left? The whole thing was absurd. *Daniel was dead, Daniel was dead*. Jools wanted to practice saying the words out loud, to test that her mouth could form these patterns, get the right intonation for when she had to start saying them later – who would she need to ring first?

‘Of course,’ Jools replied to her eldest daughter’s question, ‘you can always talk about him however you like.’

But when you do, Jools thinks, will you please let me know how you found the words? Where they came from, what they look like?

Father. That was the word Jools had used to talk about her own dad, and the lack of him. The word that had seemed the most suitable to voice somebody who had never existed to her, but to whom her own existence was inextricably and forever bound to. *I never knew my father*, she would say when it was necessary, and that would be it.

The girls had never used the word father, and Jools hoped that they never would. Instead, they had followed the usual trajectory of Dada, Daddy, Dad. Zennor had once come home from school announcing that her friend Lily called her parents by their real names (which were Humphrey and Fanny, so Lord knows why this was encouraged) and she would from now on be calling Jools and Daniel by their real names too. *Fine by*

me, Jools had said, maybe now I'll stop turning around every time some little brat in the supermarket screams for his mum.

No, Daniel had said, please don't; please call me Dad.

Husband. Jools had never liked the word, had never wanted to be somebody's wife, had only got married because it meant something to Daniel. Now she was relieved at not having to use the word 'boyfriend', shuddered thinking about using it to describe Daniel. 'My children's dad'—that made it sound as if they weren't together, or as if Jools wanted to be disconnected to him. Soul mate— obviously far too corny but also impossible to use in a factual conversation; *apologies for the inconvenience, but my soul mate just died so I will be taking two weeks leave.*

What they had been to one another would remain between them; it would never become untrue just because she couldn't find a word, Jools knew this. But even so, she would have liked to find that word— just a single word— that summed everything up neatly, to be able to show to others, to say; *here— now you understand.*

But Daniel refuses to be contained in singular words.

*

It was not love at first sight, but a sense of ease in the belly, a lightness in the chest. No thunderbolt; more a coming home.

They had met at Oxford, in Oriel college student bar, where Sarah was celebrating her birthday. It was June, a month before Jools would tell Professor Samuels that she wasn't coming back in September.

I won't bother arguing with you, he would say. But just satisfy my own curiosity; what on earth are you planning on doing instead?

I'm going to start my own fashion brand, Jools would say, the words leaving her mouth before she had time to think them through, and he would smile; good for you.

Sarah had talked about Daniel a few times before, but Jools had stopped engaging after she heard 'reading chemistry'. Jools had met a number of other chemistry students and they were all predictably cast to type; nervy, ferrety creatures, with a permanent

squinty look as if they were taken aback by the appearance of sunlight and the expectation to make conversation. True enough, Daniel had shown all the obvious signs of geek. His corduroy trousers seemed to have been ironed, presumably in some ill-advised attempt to look suave. He had thick round glasses that kept sliding down his nose, and his curly brown hair stood up all over the place in uneven tufts, like a chicken. Yet, there was something about him that seemed, almost immediately, more alive than anyone else Jools had ever met.

She eyed him up for a little while, watching the way he talked to the others. There was something about his manner that suggested gentleness and an ease with his own oddness. Twice she saw him laugh so much that tears came, accompanied by a girlish sound half way between squeak and snort. She wanted to know who this person was.

They had separated from the rest of the group, hogging the pool table by the window for ages, and she could tell that Sarah was gossiping about them. She was probably pissed off with her, but Jools couldn't care less. Let Sarah gossip— *Jools* wasn't the one who plucked her chin hairs out whilst making conversation. In any case, Jools would struggle to remember her name in ten years' time. *It was Sophie's party, she would say and Daniel would look at her, disbelieving and say—Jools, she was called Sarah— you lived with her for a year, how can you not remember?*

There was something about the way he looked, was he Italian? A certain profile, a sense of familiarity... she had seen someone who looked like him before. Famous person? No. Those photos. *Fuckity fuck he looked like her Father didn't he.*

'You're Jewish, aren't you?' She said accusingly.

'Don't tell anyone!' He staged whispered, and laughed. Then he looked at her, still smiling, 'Are you? You don't really look it.'

'No. But my father was. Well, is, I suppose, I think he's still alive. But it's the mother line, isn't it?'

'It's still in half your blood, whatever the flip that means.'

Flip, fiddle sticks, heck, jiffy. One day in the future when their pre-teen daughters cringe at their father's embarrassing old man language, Jools will assure them that he spoke as if he were some kind of human antique even at twenty.

'Well, I've never stepped foot in a synagogue. And anyway, I'm more French than Jewish...my mum comes from Paris, actually,' Jools said, with the hint of pride she always reserved for this admission.

'Ooh la la. Do you speak French?'

'*Mais oui*. Well, kind of badly now.' Jools admitted. 'Where are you from?'

'I grew up in Manchester. But then we moved to Cornwall...and we spent every summer in Switzerland because my parents grew up there. And...*now* I suppose I live here. So, kind of everywhere and nowhere.'

'I can relate to that', Jools said.

*

They never said that they were in a relationship because Jools didn't believe in labels. (Daniel said this was ironic considering her career pursuits. Jools told Daniel he needed to learn better jokes.) They moved between Daniel's grand double room complete with weekly cleaner in his halls, and Jools' mould-filled squat in Hackney for a year and a half. Then, four months before Daniel took his finals, he came down to see Jools, looking miserable.

'What the hell is wrong with you?' Jools asked as Daniel sat on the futon she slept on, picking at a piece of toast.

'Nothing,' he said.

'Why do you look so bloody sad then?' she asked.

'I don't,' he said, visibly squirming, eyes on the floor. Then, mumbling, 'I really hope that one day you might want to marry me.'

Jools burst out laughing, but Daniel continued to look at the ground.

'It's just right now... I think you're going to grow the most amazing business- no, I know you are. And I really need to focus on my exams—'

The lump in her throat came instantly. 'So, you're not marrying me, you're actually breaking up with me?'

He did the squirming thing again. 'I'm not breaking up with you. I just need these last four months to concentrate.'

'And I should just wait around for you?'

'It's only four months, Jools.'

'Yeah, and then what — you get some job that takes all your time, and you need another four months?'

'No!' Daniel said, finally meeting her eyes, 'Four months and then we're together whatever. I promise.'

*

In the end it was only two months before they saw each other again. The longest they would ever spend apart in the sixteen years they were together.

Jools didn't pay attention to the first months missed period; she had missed them before when she was stressed. When her breasts started to hurt, she grumbled to whichever one of her six housemates happened to be walking past about how *utterly crap* PMT was, but the period never came.

She managed to borrow the money for the train fare from Arlo, which was quite some feat because he was, what her mother would call '*as tight as an arse*,' despite still being on an allowance from his parents. *You could say an allowance is a perfect word, yeah*, he liked to say, *they're 'allowing' me to explore my true self ... money is an illusion guys*, he would retort when anyone in the house pushed him on it. Jools was grateful that he had been stoned out of his skull when she asked him, writing his crappy poetry whilst sitting on that disgusting beanbag he'd found on the street.

Go, Jools, go speak your truth he said, closing his eyes.

*

'Are you joking?' were the first words that Daniel had said when he had found the ability to speak again.

'Yes I am. I came all this way for a hilarious ruse. Haha. Now I'll be off back to London.'

'Fucking hell, Jools.'

'Don't you fucking- hell-Jools me! It's not my fault!'

'You *said* you knew your own menstrual cycle—'

'I design clothes! What the fuck do I know! You're a shitting scientist!'

'*Chemistry*. I study geomorphological processes.'

'Oh, for God's sake. Look, whatever. There is a human growing inside me. Do you want to be involved or not? You still actually have a choice.'

'So do you,' he said quietly.

Jools, for once, didn't answer. Daniel took a piece of blu-tack off the wall and started squeezing it between his fingers. He had ripped the wallpaper. Jools stared at him, willing him to say something useful.

'I'm too young to have a baby,' he said eventually. 'We don't have any money...where are we going to live?'

'I don't know, Daniel. You don't have to live with me. You can stay here, finish your degree, get a great job. Pretend this whole disaster never happened.'

'No. Please, just give me some time.'

'I tried, Daniel. But you'd already impregnated me.'

'I don't mean that sort of time. Just, look— take this,' he said, taking some coins from his pocket, 'go to the bar, get a drink— I mean a juice. I just need half an hour by myself. I will come and join you. I promise.'

He actually took fifty-five minutes. Jools had spent most of the time feeling pissed -off about how expensive orange juice was. What was the point of not being able to drink if it barely saved you any money? On arrival to his room, Jools had some suspicions that Daniel's dress sense had got better, and when he came into the bar, wearing a jean jacket she'd never seen before, they were confirmed. She felt a jolt of fear. What if somebody else fell in love with him? What if they already had?

They sat at the little table in the corner, across from the pool table, and Jools was distracted looking at it. What if she had never met Daniel? Would she still be in this

same situation, with another man? But she couldn't imagine another man, because some part of her believed that this was always going to be her future. She screwed up her eyes as tight as she could and tried to imagine another person, another life.

Daniel touched her on the shoulder. 'Jools,' he said 'Don't cry.'

Jools opened her eyes into his. It was always going to be him.

'I'm not crying,' she said truthfully.

'I love you,' Daniel said.

'You don't have to say that just because.'

'I'm not, it's just the truth,' Daniel said simply.

'Ok.'

'I've been thinking,' he said.

'For that whole fifty-five minutes?'

'Yeah,' Daniel said, blankly, 'and in a way why not? I mean apart from the money and age and everything... but it's not like we're teenagers and we might as well get the kids over and done with now- I mean if we were going to at some point anyway. I mean— in a way— why not?'

'Hmm, well let's see: we're technically not even together right now. I ate pasta and tinned tuna for five consecutive days last week. I had to borrow the train fare from a deluded pothead to come and tell you this ridiculous news. And I live in a squat.'

'Yeah, I know, but we were going to get back together anyway. And I'm almost finished and then we can move to Cornwall— stay with my parents for a bit, save some money—'

'No fucking way.'

'Just for a bit—'

'Over my dead body,' Jools said, and drained the last of her overpriced orange juice.

*

Jools packed everything she owned into an old backpack she took from Arlo's room and moved into Daniel's parents' guest room six weeks later. It was a clean, spacious room overlooking the sea, and Jools knew that she was lucky to have it, to be presented with choices. Daniel joined her a fortnight afterwards, and Eleanor Beaulieu Abramovich joined them both two months after that.

*

'What was it like, realising I was going to come so early?' Ellie had asked, aged fifteen, sitting on the sofa, watching *Casualty*.

'Like when you invite people to come over for a dinner party at seven and they turn up at five, while you're in the middle of washing your hair, and expect you to entertain them. Seriously irritating,' Jools would tell her. But really, she is seeing Ellie's tiny body lying in the incubator. She is seeing her tiny fists, her little head; *oh, sa tete, elle est aussi petite qu'une orange*, her mum had said when she saw her. Jools is seeing Ellie for the first time, and how she had recognised her at once: her baby, as if she'd always known her. She is remembering the nurse who brought her a blanket when she insisted on sleeping on the floor next to the incubator; *just one more night, Ms Beaulieu, but parents really can't sleep here. But she is mine, Jools had said, and I'm not leaving her.*

*

When, at twenty, Jools imagined being thirty, she pictured living in a big warehouse with actors and film directors, or maybe an art-collector boyfriend in a flat in Soho. She pictured parties and clubs. She imagined wearing all black as the glamorous employer of many glamorous people. She did not imagine a husband, two kids under the age of nine and a small but moderately successful children's clothing range. She definitely did not imagine living, quite literally, at the ends of the earth. Most of all, she would never have in a million years thought that any of this would make her happy.

Sometimes, at the beginning of their relationship, she had worried that they had nothing in common. What, really, were their shared interests? Neither had a particular penchant for politics, but their alignment was the same; they had cleared that one up quickly. They both had an appreciation of good food, and a similar taste in aesthetics (meaning Daniel seemed happy to leave Jools to decorate the house, and Jools was more than

happy for Daniel to cook the meals), but really, that was it. She would never be able to convincingly feign interest in new scientific discoveries, but it made her happy when Daniel talked about them, she liked how his face looked when it lit up. She liked that it was him who she talked about her day with, and that she always wanted to know about his. She felt safe and happy when she was with him. He made her laugh. He respected her. He didn't take her too seriously. *Comfy*, was the word he had used once, *you're a very comfy person to be around*, he had said.

She wanted to spend her life with him.

*

I've got this thing on my tongue, Daniel said, *peering into the mirror, toothbrush in hand.*

What do you mean? Jools said, *spitting into the sink.*

I dunno, like a lump, Daniel said.

You probably just bit it, Jools said, *drying her face.*

It really hurts, said Daniel, *drying his face.*

Oh dear, poor bubba with an ouchy tongue, Jools said, *leaving the bathroom.*

*

Daniel was often described by friends of Jools as *a man of little words*.

What they meant was that if he were with a group of people, he would probably be the person listening, not talking. They did not mean that he had a little amount of words at his disposal. He was like a fucking encyclopedia of words. Ask him about anything and he would have a concise summary of it ready for you, with dates and evidence. Often, Daniel would get excited about something and start spouting chemistry words, which were incomprehensible to Jools. *Amphoteric. Chromatography. Titration.*

Mostly she would tune out when he did this; she didn't stop listening entirely, she just filtered things out, like drifting softly in and out of a radio programme.

Sometimes she would make the effort to engage, to ask him, *what does this mean then*. She had learnt from doing this that there are some words that seem incomprehensible when you look at them, but when you learn what they mean they are,

in fact, quite straight forward. Like *labile*, which just means easily broken down, or displaced.

Then, there are the words that nobody ever learns unless something terrible happens. Something that had seemed so tiny, so ordinary that maybe they mistook it for another name altogether, an entirely harmless name, like *ulcer*.

What's a Glossectomy? Daniel had asked the consultant.

It's... the removal of the tongue, the consultant had said.

And then there are other words, ordinary words that everybody knows and yet are incomprehensible when they are formed by the lips of the one you love.

Like *cancer*.

*

It had been a nurse called Anna who had the idea to record his voice.

'What for?' Daniel had asked.

'We just find that other people have liked having a record of how they used to sound,' she had said.

Jools didn't want to do it, to watch him speaking and imagine that he may never do this again. So, a week before the operation, Ellie and Zennor had been given a hand-held video camera and told that the red button meant record. Jools had walked past the three of them in Ellie's bedroom: Daniel sitting on a chair opposite her in his shirt and jeans, Ellie and Zennor in their school uniforms, crossed legged on Ellie's unmade bed.

They were laughing together: the combined girlish snort-squeaks of a man and his two children.

*

It wasn't the ill part of the illness, the squeamishness of it; it wasn't really even about the threat of death. It was about the control. Jools was scared of it. Perhaps she seemed like she was good at it, having it— managing a situation, people, a business. But she needed the resistance, the equality of a steady voice challenging her off-hand remarks. She needed to know where her edges were. Yes, she had always spoken more than Daniel, yes she told him what to do. But that didn't mean he did it. She knew he could handle himself. That he had confidence. *He's a dark horse your Daniel*, his colleagues would tell her. Softly spoken, *away with the fairies* at times. But a compelling lecturer; the kind of academic who showed that introverts can be orators too, can hold a crowd. And, when it was time to speak up, he was straight to the point too- when he needed to be, when it mattered.

Do you know what the worst thing is? Daniel said to her one night,
It's people treating me differently. I don't think they know they're doing it, but they are.
They treat me like I'm a child.

It worried Jools that she knew this was true, and how she saw this in herself too. Not the patronizing, she hoped she didn't do that, but how she felt an undeniable shift in power that had taken place. Where she could speak effortlessly, without thinking— he had to wait; to find a way of saying the words, or to weigh up whether it was worth it to say them at all. It reminded her of helping the girls with their writing practice when they were young, and resisting that small but undeniable part of her that wanted to grab the pen out of their hands and write the answers for them, rather than spend one more minute listening to them 'sound out' word after word. It had always been her talking over him, but then his silence had power. Jools could talk and talk herself into a frenzy about something or someone, what people had done to her, how she had been wronged in some way, and Daniel could sit and look at her, a wry smile on his face and that's all he needed.

He was calm and collected; Jools was the mess. Gibbering. *Gibberish*. Now Daniel's silence meant a million things and she didn't know what to do with any of them. Was she giving him enough time to speak if he wanted, was she listening to his signals?

Speech had become a practice, a task, a prize to be earned, not a right to play with, to stop and start as you wish.

D, N, and T's, press your upper teeth against your lower lip to produce the start of the sound. Vary the pressure applied to your lip, depending on the sound you want to make. T requires the most, then D and the least is N.

The k and 'ee' sound, it seemed that they were nearly impossible for anyone but Jools to understand. '*Come on, make an effort!*' she wanted to scream at friends of his that smiled awkwardly at him, nodding along, too embarrassed to say that they hadn't understood, that they didn't know what he was saying.

The thing is, most of the time it wasn't *what* was said; it was how, Jools realised. Letters on a whiteboard don't have the same meaning as words that rolled, effortlessly, *off the tongue*, or as a joke that was timed just at the right moment, or as words that were uttered with the deadpan tones of sarcasm or whispered into a lover's ear.

But then, as they began to return, Jools noticed the subtleties of Daniel's voice; the returning of a particular smirk, a certain smile, a well-timed look. And then, the words started to come too, became smoother, and grew into sentences, then full conversations. They inched their way into being the way winter turns to spring, how the light creeps back into the mornings; minutes at first, and then all of a sudden. She learnt to notice the temptation in herself to get louder when he got quieter, tried not to speak when it was his turn, tried to listen more. To make space for the silence. To be with him. That was all she wanted.

*

It was a new adjustment to an old life but it was good. Jools went back to her business, Daniel went back to teach; (*eighteen-year-old chemistry students are all so awkward anyway, it's hard to tell if they even notice*), Ellie and Zennor became teenagers before they were technically teenagers, and Jools had to learn yet another system of communication, where grunts could mean both *yes* and *no* and 'fine' was the most Jools could expect to get by way of a response to any question.

And then, out of nowhere, all at once, and all over, it came back.

*

Jools wanted the girls to be there too, whatever people said to the contrary. There was no such thing as *old enough*. They weren't old enough to lose their dad, but this was what was happening and they needed to see that it was okay.

One day soon Zennor will yell at Jools and tell her she should have never made her be there. *You made me watch my dad die*, she will say.

Another day, ten years after this day in the hospital, when Zennor is twenty- two years old, she will tell Jools that she was glad to have been there; *thank you for doing what you knew was right for us*, she will say.

And fourteen years ago today, when Jools was twenty-two years old herself, she had lain on another hospital floor with the baby that would become Zennor's older sister, and willed her to survive.

And in a years time from this day, Jools will find the tape of Daniel speaking as their daughters filmed him and they laughed together, and she will not listen to the words that are spoken, but she will let the sound of his voice merge with their daughters' voices, will let the sounds of his voice and their laughter wash over her like music, like water.

But right now, it is not any of these days, it is not any other moment in time. It is not even yet the moment when they will drive back from the hospital and Jools will need to find answers to her daughter's question.

It is only this moment, on this day and it is Daniel's last day. Here they are now, in this weather less, timeless room, listening to a CD of songs that Daniel had made for Ellie and Zennor's births, never used then (Ellie's birth too quick, too scary, Zennor's birth, Jools had shouted for him to turn that *fucking depressing music off*), now it is perfect. The songs are not depressing after all, they are soft and lilting, fade into the background yet provide a texture to the time, something to lean into.

So yes, there will be other moments, times where grief will make all of them individually wish for all of time to stop altogether, to get into bed and turn off the light, but those times need not be thought about now!

Right now, they need only lie together right here, as one family, as four bodies draped together on one bed.

The Dancer

Ellie collects Isaac from breakfast club in the hall. He is lying on the stage on his back, staring up at the strip lighting, giggling to himself. Sometimes, before she walks up the stairs to the stage, touches him on the shoulder and rouses him from his happy trance, she gives herself a moment to look at him in that place on the floor. She watches his body rolling around the shiny laminated flooring, still sticky from yesterday's sandwiches and spaghetti hoops, and wonders how it feels to be so entranced by your own company and the small space around you.

How are you? she signs and, when he ignores her, flutters her fingers above him until she has his attention, his eyes just past her face. She asks him again, *how are you*, two fists separating, and he gives her a single thumbs-up before running out of the hall.

He's a runner, the SENCO had told Ellie on her first day, and she had wondered if this was an official term, some sort of school speak she was unaware of. In fact, it just means that Isaac will bolt suddenly from his desk, from assembly or the lunch line, and Ellie will have to follow— *wear sensible shoes and sports gear*. Ellie likes the excuse to run, could never be sat on a small plastic chair all day any more than Isaac could, but she finds it difficult to muster the same urgency towards the situation that seems to be expected of her. It is not as if Isaac can leave the school premises, and Ellie knows now where she will find him—running up and down the hallways, turning on and off the lights and shrieking in delight as his teachers are plunged into darkness and out again.

*

Ellie hadn't dropped out of dance school; she had just stopped going. The first week she told them she had flu, the second week she ignored two phone calls from the university, and on the third she received a letter telling her that as *a highly competitive and prestigious course they had no choice but to give her place to one of the many people on the waiting list*. She had made no friends so nobody texted her to see if she was ok. She'd never gone into halls, instead moving into a flat-share in Whitechapel that she'd found on Gumtree two days before her mum drove her up from Cornwall. They were a couple, both studying economics and something, or maybe it was business and something, Ellie wasn't sure of the differences. Regardless, they spent all day at the library and all-night

clanking around with pans in the kitchen; Ellie had barely spoken two words to them. If she was cooking in the kitchen and they came down to boil a kettle and saw her, they'd go upstairs, waiting until they could hear her close the door back in her bedroom before coming back to pour the water onto their cup a soup.

She still had the first term's loan but it wouldn't last long. She needed to get a job but it was hard to know where to start. In Penzance there had always been work available when she wanted it, and it was hard to remember any official protocol. She could barely remember the process—telling a friend you needed some money and then their uncles' cousin's daughter had a job for you in town. The delight of London was that nobody knew who she was, but it was dawning on Ellie slowly that this also meant she wasn't going to be given a job simply for being Jools' daughter. She spent an afternoon writing a CV, messing about with the layout to make her experience seem more professional or more extensive. What to leave in and what to add? Did anyone hire waitresses because they could dance? Could she find a way of shoehorning a subtle play on words: hard working employee, very *flexible*. But was she really going to stay in the most expensive place in England just to be a waitress?

Ellie had always had a full and predictable schedule; school, dance, school, work, school, dance. Now she had found other ways to occupy her time. One of these newfound occupations was sleep. She was sleeping a lot, in intense, short bursts that were laden with dreams that felt heavy and dense. Each time she awoke between dreams she felt convinced that each one was telling her something and that she should get a pen at once and write it down. But a new wave of sleep would come over her too quickly, and she'd be back to a fresh dream, all of them mixing into some great useless soup in her head. When she finally awoke in the morning, it seemed to take an eternity to convince herself that she was really here, that this was reality. In her waking hours she went for aimless walks around town, looking at people as they passed her by without a hint of recognition or interest and basking in this whole new world of anonymity. Sometimes she'd stuff a few CVs in her rucksack with the promise to herself that she would pluck up the courage to ask for a job at one of the bagel shops in Shoreditch. Get in touch with her Jewish ancestry. But every time she got inside she'd only ask for a cream cheese bagel and leave again. She really needed to eat some vegetables.

*

It must be that performance they did in Norway, the one with all the mist and silence but they aren't in Norway they're in her school canteen and her *dad* is there in the background — what is he doing is it really him— she wants to run towards him, touch his arm but she can't because she has to keep going, keep dancing and who was that in the front row — the girls from year seven, the ones who cornered her outside at lunch time, the ones who told her that she was ugly, would never amount to anything and they are watching her pointing and laughing and her heart is beating and beating too fast she can't breathe and—

She is not sure where she is now, but it is somewhere hot, the kind of hot that thickens the air, and she is sleepy and light. She is walking down a busy street, past motorbikes beeping, dogs barking, cicadas and frogs competing for attention. Now she is walking away from the main road, as if led by some force, down a side alley, around and around a path, she doesn't know where she's going but she feels entirely safe... a calm has filled her up from her toes to her head. All noises start to dim and then they simply stop. She keeps going and then she sees them—

She sees their hands first, they are moving around in the shadows, are dancing in the smallest circle of light, in time to their own choreography. It is two women, she can see that now, can see their expressions; unbound, open, free. She watches for a moment and then one of the women turns to her and beckons her in.

*

A minimal amount of late-night googling had found Ellie a sign language class, and she had entered her bank details in the hasty denial that Internet shopping at a certain time of day allowed. The sickening dread in her stomach the next day had kept her up all of the *next* night mindlessly uploading her CV to every place that invited it. When she saw an advert for a teaching assistant at a deaf school, she opened up a new word document and wrote a cover letter, fingertips awakened suddenly; emotion streaming out from some place inside of her that was only accessed alone in her bedroom at three am.

The following morning, she woke up to a voicemail from an education agency asking her into the office for an interview. 'Call me Dave' was from the agency *Bright*

Things! He was one of twenty or so in a room of what appeared to be exceptionally loud, exceptionally tall teenagers in suits sitting at desks decorated in sweet wrappers and coffee cups. Dave said he was ‘super impressed’ with her cover letter and Ellie resisted the overwhelming urge to run out the building, hide underneath her bed and never reveal any more of herself than her name, ever again. *This guy had read her letter.*

‘So, like, yeah, very cool, very cool,’ Dave was saying ‘and er— you already know some sign, right?’

‘Well only a little— I’m just about to start a BSL course. But I’m...well like I said I’m really interested in learning, because of my microtia.’

‘Your what?’

Ellie pulled back her hair, and pointed to her ear; ‘This,’ she said.

Dave’s own ears went very red. ‘Oh right! I didn’t get what that was from your letter. So, er YOU’RE DEAF?’ He said as if Ellie had been following the last ten minutes of the conversation through telepathy.

‘No. Yes. Sort of. In this ear. But I’m really, really interested in the deaf community.’

Dave looked relieved. ‘Amazing! That’s so cool. Well the only problem is this deaf school— it’s a signing school? So they like, use sign language?’

Ellie nodded. ‘Yes, I know...’

‘Oh right, right; I see,’ he said. Ellie remained unconvinced that he did.

Dave looked at his computer. ‘Actually though, there is a position we haven’t placed that doesn’t have to be...like a BSL, like someone that can do that— as long as you’re willing to learn? It’s for a kid with autism?’

‘In the deaf school?’

‘Yes, but this kid doesn’t have much sign, or... any I think?’ He looked back at his screen. ‘Yep that’s right— no language at all! Quiet one —easy!’

Ellie was unsure what to say so she didn’t say anything at all. Dave’s cheeks turned red again.

‘Right so, er, yeah, if you’re interested, I’ll send over your CV,’ he told Ellie, adjusting his overly long tie.

*

Isaac was sorting out plastic cubes on the carpet, while the rest of the class was at their desks. Mr. Elliot was teaching a lesson on geometry. Ellie liked maths, had taken it to A-level, along with dance and history.

Hmmm— so how do we connect these subjects together, then? A college tutor had commented when Ellie was making her university applications, with a little laugh. It couldn’t really be seen as cruel comment but it was one of the things that Ellie’s brain had stored, seemingly just to circle in repeat whenever she was feeling bad about herself. Ellie had chosen subjects she found interesting, she hadn’t considered that there was some overarching theme she was supposed to be following, some box to be stepping into. But perhaps she didn’t consider things properly at all; perhaps that was why she was sat on the carpet with a small boy she couldn’t communicate with rather than rehearsing in a dance studio.

She rubbed her eyes, brought herself back to the room. She should be shepherding Isaac back to his desk right now, but instead she was enjoying the excuse to watch Mr. Elliot. *Name me E-D* he had told her the day she had started, with a brief smile and a nod. That had been the sum of their communication so far; smiles and nods, some gesturing at work sheets he had prepared for Isaac. Ellie wondered what he thought of her, whether it was irritating to have the only adult in his class unable to communicate properly with him, or the majority of the students. She had started her sign classes now and in her head her signs were starting to come alive, to flow freely, but when she actually moved her hands they still looked so clunky, forced.

Mr. Elliot was easy to follow, though. Ellie had gathered quickly that he was ‘capital d deaf’, but he had some speech too. The ability to communicate well appeared to be built into him somehow; all of his hand gestures were confident and fluid, his facial expressions an ever-moving map. Ellie had wondered fleetingly if he danced —then imagined how embarrassing it would be to ask that question. She didn’t even know the sign for dance. Isaac had been brought up by deaf, signing parents but would still sign no more than a few basic words; ‘food’ ‘drink’ ‘toilet’, ‘finished’, ‘home’. But he could

pick up long division or how to build a 3D model from just a few, cursory glances at the whiteboard. It made Ellie wonder if language confused things more than was necessary. Sometimes, if Mr. Elliot was busy, the other children, mostly the ones who were confident with their speech, would come over and ask Ellie for help, and she would try desperately to explain in words what she now felt she could have illustrated better with a few, key symbols on the board. Not all of the children were fluent signers yet either. From what Ellie had pieced together, the kids who had been brought up with deaf parents used their hands like Mr. Elliot— as if sculptors or painters, creating an entire scene with a few easy movements. Others, that had been raised with hearing parents desperately trying to learn a language quicker than their child, or who never learnt at all, sometimes looked as though their signs were almost as heavy and difficult to put into place as Ellie's were.

Regardless, it was obvious when Mr. Elliot was teaching that they were captivated. Ellie loved watching people who were good at their job, it almost didn't matter what they did. Her dad had talked a lot about the importance of either doing whatever you did brilliantly, or not doing it at all. He showed her that there was a craft in everything. *This guy is a seriously good waiter*, he would say to Ellie, whilst leaving a mighty tip.

The plastic cubes are sorted by colour now, waiting in piles as Isaac takes one from each group and places them in a line: red, yellow, blue, red, yellow, blue. Ellie found it satisfying to watch, and to hear the *click* as they were slotted together. *Patterns*, that's what she would tell that tutor if she saw her now; all of her chosen subjects were about understanding patterns.

At lunchtimes Ellie sits in one of the comfy chairs in the corner of the staff room to eat her pesto pasta, while the other teaching assistants huddle together on the long table in the middle and shared out their Tupperwares of samosas and lamb biryani. Ellie scrolled aimlessly through her phone whilst looking up regularly to take in the women's facial expressions and their hands moving with words that were too fast for Ellie to make meaning from.

She never saw Mr. Elliot in the staffroom. Maybe he ate in his classroom, or maybe he went out for lunchtime. Teachers had the full hour. An image came to her of him sitting in his car eating a shop bought sandwich, pushing up his glasses as he read a book, or an article on his phone. She felt a similar ache in the pit of her stomach when she thought of him as when she watched the other teaching assistants signing and eating together. She couldn't place words yet to this feeling, or say exactly how they were connected, but it was something to do with either longing or belonging.

*

Ellie's mum was in London for a meeting with a buyer. Ellie recognized the immediate ease Jools had with the city from the few trips she had taken with her as a child. Ellie imagined the crowded streets allowed Jools a kind of audience that Cornwall couldn't provide. She was set on meeting Ellie for lunch in Chinatown, but then insisted on going for Vietnamese. She ordered nearly half the menu; prawn summer rolls, three different types of bun, two phos.

'Jools,' Ellie kept repeating, 'we don't need this much.'

Jools battered her away 'you can take the leftovers to your digs, share it with your housemates'.

'They're not called digs anymore, mum.'

'What are they called then? Residentials?'

'Halls. But I don't live in them, I found a house share online, remember?'

'Oh potato, potato. *Dis-moi*, then. How is school?'

Quick, like a plaster. 'I'm not doing it anymore but I have a job and I'm happy and I can go back next year if I change my mind,' Ellie said in one breath and put an entire summer roll in her mouth.

Jools swallowed her mouthful of pho. 'What are you talking about, Ellie? What do you mean, "you're not doing it anymore?"'

Ellie wiped her mouth with the sleeve of her dress. 'I'm working at a school now. As a teaching assistant.'

‘Ri—ight. Well we can come to that in a minute—I’m asking you now— what do you mean you left dance school? For what—a pre career sabbatical?’

‘No. Possibly. I mean, as in I stopped going—I quit.’

Jools theatrically mimed pulling out her hair before putting her head in her hands, and Ellie studied her rings briefly. Ellie thought her mum’s Jewelry choices- clunky Topaz and Emerald rings, necklaces with random blobs of silver- represented a specific group of women that Jools surrounded herself with. Like Jools they were artists- designers, makers, painters, but their appearances implied a particular whimsicalness that Ellie was no longer sure they really possessed. *Bohemian*—that was the term Ellie had always used to describe her upbringing. Asking for a ‘normal’ tea in the break room that first week of Uni and expecting Earl Grey, only to get something that tasted bitter and flat, was the first in a list of embarrassing clues Ellie had had since leaving home which indicated perhaps the term wasn’t as edgy as ‘Bohemian,’ but as dull as ‘Middle-Class’.

Jools lifted her head from her hands and cocked it to one side, looking at Ellie with wide, sorrowful eyes. ‘What’s going on, Ellie? Were you unhappy there— did something bad happen to you? I know London can be tough darling, and I know you can be a bit you know, ‘sensitive’’. She put the last word in air quotes, which Ellie didn’t entirely get. Was Jools implying sarcasm or that she was quoting herself? Jools had been calling Ellie sensitive her whole life, along with everybody else. Carla, her dance teacher in Penzance, had told Ellie that her emotional nature made her a better dancer, that she brought feeling to her performance. Ellie remembered one time when she had had a ‘moment’ during class- started thinking about her dad out of nowhere and had left the hall, mortified by her tears— (it wasn’t even an anniversary, why couldn’t she keep it together?) Carla had found her in the car park, came and sat next to her. *Anyone can follow the steps* she had told Ellie as they sat on a bench together, both still in their leotards, *your sensitivity is your gift*.

Had Carla just been patronizing Ellie all along, ‘the poor hopeless girl; that funny face and now a dead dad, tell her she’s special to help her out?’ Yes she had got into school, but she had practiced that piece over and over. When she arrived it was clear there was nothing special about her technical ability— that was for sure. *Talent means*

nothing here they had told all of them, everyone here has talent; a fraction of you will make it: practice, practice, practice and a tough skin— that's what you need to succeed.

And now, as if on cue, when Ellie tried to reply to her mum she felt a lump forming in her throat, blocking her words getting out. *Toughen up Ellie*, she told herself and pushed her words out over the dam.

'I'm just trying out something new—I'll reassess in six months and if I've made a terrible mistake I'll beg them for my place back, okay?'

Jools threw up her hands. 'Ok, ok—it's your life. But you know how hard you worked to get in, that's all I'm saying. Those schools, they ask your life and nothing else is good enough, you know that.'

'Well maybe I don't want to give my life over. Maybe I don't know what kind of life I want yet.'

'But what are you planning on doing then? Do you need money?'

'No. I've got a job— remember? The teaching assistant thing.'

Jools frowned. 'Oh yes. Do you want to be a teacher now? You could have stayed in Cornwall to do that.'

'*I don't know* —I just told you, I need some time to figure things out.'

'Well, what are you actually assisting with the teaching of exactly?'

'I'm just mainly working one to one— for a boy with autism.'

Jools sighed loudly, breathing heavily out her nose. 'Oh Ellie! You don't want to go down that route, the care stuff. Not at your age.'

'What does that mean?'

'It's depressing! I'd always thought you wanted to do something beautiful, creative. If you decide you want to do this whole care thing, you can go into it at anytime. They're always desperate for people.'

'It's *not* care work— I'm a teaching assistant. And actually the position is difficult—'

‘Well there you go—’

‘Difficult and rewarding and *interesting*. It’s so interesting, mum,’ Ellie said. Then— ‘It’s a deaf school. The students are all deaf,’ Ellie told her.

Jools didn’t respond to this. She looked away though; only slightly but Ellie saw it. They changed the subject then, talked about Zennor. Ellie’s sister could always be counted on for doing something more controversial than her, for falling behind where Ellie was shining ahead, and Ellie felt a pang of guilt as she realized that this dynamic had benefited her, that she had never questioned it for this reason. If she were a braver person she would have addressed this before, if she were a braver person she would ask Jools why she herself had dropped out of university. But she wasn’t, and so they carried on eating their lukewarm soup, the spice tickling the back of Ellie’s throat.

*

On the ‘Ears Together’ website, there were five options listed for new parents with babies born with microtia: Prosthetic Ear, Additional Facial Plastic Surgery, Ear Reconstructive Surgery, and Canalplasty Surgery. The fifth option was the Do Nothing Option. This option had written in brackets *keep your little ear*. Ellie found this maddeningly patronizing. For one thing, why did it say ‘your’ when it was addressing parents? It wasn’t *their* ear; it was their child’s. And something about the way microtia was always referred to as a ‘little ear’ made her skin crawl. It was a medical condition, not a cute characteristic. ‘The Do Nothing Option’ was what her parents had chosen for her when she was a baby, although she knew from the few conversations she had had with her dad about it that it wasn’t fair to say that they did nothing. They had spent the first few weeks of her life travelling to umpteen hospital appointments; they had tried, fruitlessly, to make her wear a bone anchor hearing aid for years, they had countless meetings with her teachers about the need for Ellie to be sitting in a good position in class.

But still, as soon as she had got access to the Internet, she had started to read everything there was on the subject. The worst websites were the blog posts from the teenagers, the sixteen and seventeen years old, trying so earnestly to give advice to their younger counter parts: *You don’t need to get the operation, don’t let anyone tell you that you do! You just be you!* They wrote, and yet all of them had had it themselves. The

saddest blog post she had read was from a smiling eighteen-year-old saying all of these same things and explaining that the only reason she had got it was because she couldn't bear the bullying anymore. *But it carried on anyway she wrote, because everyone at my school already knew how it had looked before.*

Ellie had been bullied, too. It felt like a life-time ago now but at one time it seemed to last forever, that this would always be her fate, even though she knew logically that it couldn't be because she hadn't been bullied when she was four or five or six had she? Sometimes she wondered whether this out of place feeling came from microtia or her dad or the bullying or whether it was nothing to do with any of these at all, and it was just something in built. She had scrutinized photos of herself at various stages of her childhood and teenager years to see if she could spot a difference in the way she held herself, some obvious marker of confidence shift. But asides from the standard cute baby shots, she looked awkward and goofy in all of them. There was only one photo of herself she liked, she must have been about ten; she was standing in the garden with her arms crossed out in front of her, her body pushed forward, grinning like she was deeply satisfied with herself for some secret thing. Ellie couldn't remember it being taken and she hadn't asked about it, but she had slipped the photo out of the album before she left for London. Now it was stuck onto the pin-board next to her desk, like an affirmation.

*

The silence surrounding two people communicating in sign language had a tangible quality to Ellie, as velvety as the surface of the sea, and the same sense of magic when disappearing into its depths. When stepping into a conversation with signers, she became a kid making dens out of bedding again, walking into a world within a world.

In a class full of hearing people the silence was different again, and in this silence Ellie was sure she could feel the fears of those around her, positive that the room reverberated with their collective nervous energy; invisible particles darting around. The teacher was a large lady, with an equally large set of un-brushed bright red dyed curly hair. *Name me B-E-R-N-A-D-E-T-T-E* she signed with an exaggerated slowness, but Ellie still needed the time to put each letter next to one another in her mind. Her *name is Bernadette*, she told herself, and she felt a little thrill as she had a little look around the

room. Everybody else looked lost. Bernadette wrote it on the board. Then she pointed at the class, gesturing that they would go around the circle and spell their own names out. Ellie felt like she did at customs; a fear of being found out for something it was impossible to be found out for. She knew the alphabet perfectly, that was one of the few things she used every day at school. Another look around the room— they looked terrified too, the lot of them. What was the worst that could happen? That they got a letter wrong, spelt a non-existent name?

But they did it, each of them finding the right letters, one by one and gratefully receiving the brief nod they got as praise from Bernadette.

Next, Bernadette asked them to go around in the circle and sign what had made them want to learn BSL. This took longer, as fifteen sets of fumbling fingers tried to spell out relevant words and took self-conscious attempts at miming and mouthing when this didn't work. But again, each of her classmates managed it, and Ellie followed what they were trying to explain: deaf cousins and uncles, jobs as doctors or nurses, life -long fascination, retirement hobby.

Ellie needed to concentrate so intensely on following everyone else that when it came to her turn, she realized she didn't know what to say. What was the reason? She put her hands by her head and mimed sleeping, finger spelt: D-R-E-A-M. Bernadette looked at her as if she were mad. Rubbing the palms of her two hands together, she mouthed at Ellie, *mean what?*

Ellie looked around and saw the entire class was looking at her with the same intense gaze that she had been looking at them and her cheeks filled with an uncomfortable heat. She put on her best smile and kissed her fingers to her lips the way Italians do, a careless shrug of the shoulders. She mouthed back at Bernadette *beautiful language*.

*

Ellie's colleagues have invited her to birthday drinks and a meal, a Wetherspoons and a Nandos; she has never been to either of them before and cannot get over the prices of the drinks at Wetherpoons or understand the ordering system at Nandos. She still can't

communicate with anyone properly and is perpetually waiting for Mr. Elliot to appear. She is very drunk.

Kiran and Rehana put their arms around her, laughing. Kiran circles her finger next to her head: *You crazy.*

*

When she gets home, the house mice are in the kitchen; they haven't been given enough warning to scuttle back to their rooms.

'Hey!' Ellie says 'how are you?'

But they only nod and stare at her in the dim-lit room.

*

They have been told to practice their conversation skills in pairs—the topic is hobbies. *Voices off* Bernadette has instructed them, her right hand turning firmly next to her mouth. Ellie is with an elderly man called Jerome-retirement hobby- who instead of miming or finger spelling when he doesn't know something as they have been told to, whispers it instead. Ellie has guessed that perhaps his own hearing isn't a hundred percent, because whilst his face looks like he is whispering, the volume of his voice is closer to a shout. On top of this, every time Ellie tries to finger spell an unknown word, Jerome shakes his head, bewildered.

'You what, Duck?' He is asking her now, after she has both used her newly acquired sign for dance and spelt it out; three times.

She changes tack, gets up from her seat and makes a plié.

'Ohhh!' Jerome exclaims as Ellie sits back. His face has come alive; he wriggles his body with excitement as he covers his mouth with one hand as if to stop the words falling out of him in one giant, strictly verboten mess.

He points to himself with the other hand and loud whispers 'Me too, me too! I was an actor!'

Ellie cocks her head to one side, her mouth in her own *ohhhh* expression as she tries to show her mutual understanding and enthusiasm solely with her face.

'You know what's good about the stage?' he shouts 'You can practice it over and over until you get it right!' He chuckles to himself, 'The only thing is in real life it's always the live show, isn't it!'

In the break, she is washing her hands in the ladies when Bernadette comes out of the cubicle. They smile at each other in the mirror.

Then, as Bernadette is washing her hands, Ellie lifts up her hair, signs into the mirror. *Why-learn-me-want.*

Bernadette nods knowingly, keeps contact with Ellie's eyes in the reflection. She places her index finger to her forehead and moves it neatly upwards once.

I understand she mouths. Her index finger points up on her left hand, c-shaped right hand circles once around: *community.*

Ellie watches her own head nodding back at her.

*

Ellie had begun to get into a routine at the school. It was good to have something to get up for every morning again, something that still made her slightly nervous, that challenged her. In fact, mornings were now her favourite part of the day, walking through the school gates and feeling a particular kind of chaotic buzz as the buses arrived. It had scared her at first, this kind of chaos and some days it still did, but she saw now that it energized her too. The sheer resourcefulness in the conversations happening between bus drivers and teachers, pupils and parents. Observing how spoken word, sign and written notes on mobile phones converged made her happy in a simple, easy way.

As she walks into the school now and past the buses suddenly Rehana is right in front of her, waving at her and laughing.

'Hey, dreamy girl! Parents want to meet you,' she signs.

A couple were standing with Rehana, smiling nervously, the woman holding Isaac's hand.

Ellie smiles at them both, 'Hello', she signs.

Issac's dad starts signing something that is too quick for Ellie to understand.

'I'm sorry', she signs apologetically, 'slower?'

Rehana gestures at Ellie and signs a baby being cradled and sucking its thumb; the same image Bernadette had created on the first sign lesson. Isaac's dad laughs and nods his head.

He gestures at himself and partner, signs each word out one by one.

'We want to meet you, say hello. Isaac very happy when he gets home, thank you.'

Rehana nods approvingly. 'Ellie very good with him,' she signs and then catching Ellie's eyes laugh. 'Look at your cheeks- embarrass so easy!'

There was a lot Ellie could say in return; that she *was* embarrassed because she couldn't communicate back with them properly, that she felt so slow and clumsy, that often she didn't know whether she was any good with Isaac at all, especially when she couldn't explain things in a way he could understand. That she he had thought working one to one would bore her, but instead it fascinated her; everything she had known to be true was being daily blown apart, as if all that she had been sure was solid fact was in fact only slippery myth. She would like to have been able to explain that the community and creativity she had found in dance she had somehow found here, albeit in an entirely different setting.

But Isaac is pulling at his mum's hand to go in, anxious to get on with the day, and so Ellie just smiles, nods, and signs 'thank you, also', before waving goodbye and taking Isaac's hand in hers.

The Teacher

You regret coming to Deaf pub as soon as you sit down. None of your mates is here yet and you can't be arsed conversing with anyone who is here. What's more, you have somehow, stupidly, got yourself wedged around the table, trapped in by two old guys, who are all waving arms and angry faces, complaining about something you can't be bothered to find out the particulars of. Instead, you concentrate on watching the steady stream of drunken men appearing through the doors and heading confidently in one direction, only to look confused and turn back around. Some of them try to talk to the other people here, reacting with varying degrees of embarrassment and shock when they receive only gesture or mime back, others just stare. The hearing people at the tables are of no more use to the men; Deaf people will use whatever is the easiest method available to them to communicate, but the irony is lost on these principled folk who have some bizarre obsession with being in role at all times. *Voices off*, they correct each other when one of them accidentally speaks.

The older of the guys next to you— hard core Deafie, you've met him before— taps your arm forcefully to get back your wandering attention. *Toilets downstairs broken* he signs at you. You nod briefly back at him, not wanting to invite an expansion of this conversation. But it is no use, he thinks he has you now. It's the orange juice he's angry about— the woman behind the bar was very strange, *strange, strange girl* he keeps signing, his eyes are wild and intense, *charge me more, why?* You know it is important to respect elders, so try your best to come up with understanding seeming comments, but it soon becomes obvious that he just wants someone to be at the receiving end of his thoughts. So, you interchange sips of beers with nods of your head, like an upgraded version of those dogs that sit in the back of cars.

Alex, Pete and Tom all arrive at once, giving out hugs and charming smiles to everyone. Alex tells you with his eyes to come— you use your own to say *help me*, and he smirks and goes to join your friends. You start to plot your escape, as the oldie begins to fart slow, egg filled farts. The only way out is a new drink, but it is still conspicuously full. You drink faster.

You position your eyes so that they are facing the man's hands, and you allow your mind freedom. It takes you to Ellie, the new Teaching Assistant in your class. You think about how you can't place any of her into a box, how she is all blurs and smudges,

like a view from a fast -moving train, or water colours. You think about how when she signs it is slow but smooth, careful but unafraid, as if each sign is a baby or a small bird, as if she might damage the words by putting them down too quickly. You think about the way she interacts with Isaac, the autistic boy; how she follows his lead, yet never looks lost. You think about how voices are described in books, as if they were something you could touch or eat: *smooth, silky, smoky*.

Friday morning and you kick leaves all the way down to the station. It is October, and it feels to you that the days don't belong to a season in their own right, but are stuck somewhere between summer and winter. You too feel stuck, as if you have been lost somewhere in transit. You leave for work in the darkness, and come home in the darkness.

There is a problem with one of your students, Maddie. She has been uncharacteristically rude and sullen and there is a meeting booked first thing with her parents and the SENCO. The interpreter is here ostensibly for the parents, whose signing is basic and forced, but you watch the SENCO listen to him too when you sign, cementing once more what you have always known; that most of your hearing colleagues really can't understand you when you sign the way that comes naturally.

You watch the interpreter, an earnest, nervy man, who has one of those necks that fills up with red blotches with anxiety and a lanyard that says *Hi! I'm Andrew!* You feel for him as he tries to switch between becoming the parents, who are angry and uncooperative, dismissing everything you say about their daughter, and the SENCO, who is rationality personified. Poor Andrew is a good signer, but not a natural actor. He looks on the verge of tears when, twenty minutes into the meeting, the parents decide not to speak, but to sign disconnected words as if you will understand their poor parenting better now that they are moving their hands at you.

Finally, *Hi! I'm Andrew!* asks very politely if they mind sticking to speech. At which point they make a grand show of taking their hands and putting them under their legs, which is what your own parents were told to do at school, *sit on our hands*. But within five minutes their hands are out again and waving around in front of their mouths, as if the privilege of speaking in a speaking world is not enough for them.

You remind yourself that you are the only Deaf teacher at your school; that you have uprooted the stability of hierarchy that had otherwise been left untainted— *teaching assistants are deaf, teachers are hearing*. You tell yourself that it will all be worth it; that you are at the beginning of a movement.

*

When the children have all been collected at the end of the day, you go back to the empty classroom and you notice how the calm is something tangible that you can feel in your body. You let it seep in as you collect broken pencils and dried up glue sticks off the floor.

Ellie pops her head into the class to say goodbye as you are tidying up the book corner. You haven't had a conversation with her that wasn't directly instructional since she started over a month ago. This is deliberate. Whatever you feel for her, it is not worth making a fool out of yourself for. For a moment you consider showing her the anatomy book, the one that you know has a two-page diagram of the penis, and a paragraph explaining in dry detail the process of ejaculation. *Look, you would say, isn't this hilarious?* Or maybe, *hmm, not sure what this is doing here*. But you only go as far as picking the book off the shelf before remembering that this is why you don't talk to Ellie. *No Ed, that would not appear funny and friendly, but only weird, and creepy*.

Bye Ellie, you sign.

Bye Ed, Ellie signs.

When you get home, you are starving and jump on your housemate's pizza order. Ali works from home, a freelance graphic designer, but since his parents bought this flat for him he seems to mostly play a lot of Xbox. Until a few months ago, Ali's younger sister Ina was living here on the sofa, saving up to go find herself at an Ashram in the States. A whirling dervish of mismatched colour, she dyed her hair red, wore green yoga clothes picked up at charity shops, and flitted about on a bright yellow bike. You have little patience for hippies but you liked her.

Ali's parents don't sign and cannot or will not understand technology enough to get face-time, and so Ali received a text message to say that Ina had drowned a few

weeks after she arrived. Ogunquit beach in Maine; you had looked it up, the name meant *beautiful place*. Ali had put her bike in the hall outside your bedroom, and you were going to ask him to move it because you trip up over it every time you get up in the night, but you don't think it's ok to ask now. It's been four months though and last week you bruised your shin.

Ina had that thing that people who die young all have; like she was actually in each moment and wanted to be there, noticing each part of it. You had felt noticed by her, seen. She would tell you about a new friend she made each time she came home: an old man in a pub, a drunk woman sitting on the street. She never had a partner, and when somebody asked her on a date she took unsuspecting friends with her, as if she were unable to process the idea that everyone is not invited everywhere, as if she were blind to the boundaries that exist between people. She was dreamy and sloppy; she had barely any belongings, nothing really apart from the bike and the hippy clothes but she had a way of arranging them to take up the most surface area possible, a kind of reverse tetris. She signed dreamily and sloppily too, but in a way that you have only seen Deaf people do before, like it was natural to her.

You didn't tell anyone at work about her death because what would they do with that information, and it isn't about your feelings anyway. She was Ali's sister. She wasn't even your friend. Ali likes to eat in his room, so you had shared your meals with Ina, sitting up at the dining table that had never before been used. You have never really known how to make food taste nice, other than cover it with grated cheese, but Ina had made you dhal and chickpea curry, leaving a trail of unwashed saucepans and the smell of cumin and ginger in the kitchen. Now the saucepans are stacked unused in the cupboards and the kitchen smells of old takeaways that Ali leaves to fester in the fridge.

Sometimes Ali likes to talk about Ina, sometimes he doesn't. You follow his lead, and his mood. When he does, it is never in the context of her being dead, but about her characteristics and the funny things she *does*. You are not sure whether this means he is in denial; you are not an expert on grief. You try not to think about how you would feel if your own sister died. Kate moved to Australia at eighteen, got married to someone you had only met on Skype, and you have only seen her a handful of times since. There are many things you have shared, baths and bunk beds, DNA and dinners. But when you started boarding at school, your classmates became your siblings. With your classmates,

you shared bed times and meal times too, and though you didn't share DNA, you shared something which felt deeper than that: a language, and deeper even than this, a shared experience of being in the world.

It wasn't until you left school that you met the ache of loneliness for the first time, and it occurs to you sometimes that maybe, as the only hearing person in your immediate family, that she had known this too. Perhaps you could have bonded over this, or perhaps it was what had kept you apart.

When the pizza comes, Ali hands yours over and goes to his room. You sit on the sofa and turn on the television.

*

You are starting to regret having made no plans for the autumn break. The children must have some inner radar that tells them they have been in school long enough for a holiday, and you have spent most of the morning listening to two sides of the ancient classic; the 'he/she was mean to me' story, with a rapidly decreasing sense of sympathy.

You normally spend your lunchtimes walking into town or hiding in your classroom; lunchtimes are for having time out and sitting in the staffroom feels very much like time in. But today it is pissing it down and the head has been sending around an email for the last week with an increasingly desperate tone, announcing a 'bring a dish' shared lunch. You have stocked up your classroom cupboard with multipacks of walkers crisps in the event of deciding to go, but consider walking in the rain into town to get a cheese and pickle sandwich anyway. Then you look out the window and see Rehana and Kiran bring piles of Tupperware out of their cars, and you get the crisps out of the cupboard.

In the staff room you try to surreptitiously drop the crisps off without anyone noticing, but of course Rehana grabs your arm and makes you face the shame.

Look everyone, Mr. Crisp Man! she signs and all the teaching assistants, huddled together on the armchairs, giggle. You cover your eyes with one hand, whilst stealing Rehana's Tupperware with the other. She whacks your hand twice— harder than is necessary for the sign *naughty*.

You look for a free seat; the only one is the blue armchair in the corner. Ellie is sitting next to it.

You nod at her a hello and a thumbs up— the universal *alright?*

Yes thanks, she signs back, *how are you? I never see you here.*

I never come, you sign.

She raises an eyebrow, *Why?*

I need to relax, you sign, closing your eyes to emphasize your pitiful exhaustion.

She laughs, *but you came for the food today?*

You nod guiltily.

To be actually speaking with her is a relief, as if there is at last a place for whatever nervous energy that has been encircling your veins since you first saw and ignored her in September to go; you wonder if this is how an actor feels once he finally gets on stage and starts prancing about.

When you ask, *are you doing anything for half term* it is not meant as an invite but when she talks about wanting to see a Deaf theatre company but not knowing any signers to go with, you find yourself making plans as if there were nothing unusual about this.

*

It has been raining all day and you can feel the damp in your bones. Ellie has suggested a place in Brick Lane to meet before the play; you show up outside expecting a fancy bar and it gives you some amusement to find a tiny Turkish shisha and tea café. Ellie is sitting on a velvet-covered bench, scrolling on her phone. You go over to her and her expression, of uninhibited pleasure, makes the butterflies that have been flitting around your stomach flutter up into your chest.

This is not a date, so you share sweet apple tea and *Nakhla* shisha, and notice how it is to be entirely sober whilst out with someone you fancy. You are more aware of everything; perhaps that's how it is. You notice each of the beats of your heart and how the air feels as it cools the sweat on your forehead.

You sign slowly, in English word order, mouthing the words that have no signs when you see Ellie's eyes struggle to catch up. It is these words that go before words, *prepositions*, that are unnecessary in BSL and you have always thought it fitting that the English language has these words, this extra method of delaying getting to the subject. It is another thing you have always resented about the fact your language was taught to you, and distorted by, hearing people; another way, on top of the removal of facial expression and emotion, that your language was appropriated and disembodied from itself. The word order changed to suit English and meaningless fillers added in, as if to tame the directness of the Deaf language, as if to shield hearing people from how Deaf people are; more loving, more truthful, more everything.

But.... tonight you do your best to switch to English word order, *Sign Supported English*, without resentment, and for the first time it feels ok. Ellie is doing all she can to make it easy to communicate with you; maybe it is ok to make it easier for her too. Even so, you are aware of not being too Deaf with her, too direct, so you don't ask about her ear. But she tells you anyway, and you learn a new word, m-i-c-r-o-t-i-a, which literally means *little ear*.

Your ear why you wanted to learn sign? You ask

Yes... she looks embarrassed. WellI had a dream.

Like Martin Luther King?

She laughs, and the tops of her cheeks turn pink.

No, an asleep, night-time dream... group of women signing, felt...really good. When wake up, I decide learn.

Something about this touches you deeply, but you don't know how to express this without looking uncool, so you smile and raise an eyebrow.

She raises an eyebrow back at you— *you think me crazy* she signs, rolling her eyes around on the *crazy* in a way that makes you laugh.

You smile, maybe little bit.

What about you, you grow up signing? Your Parents deaf?

Yes, but my sister hearing. But she lives Australia.

She looks blankly at the sign for Australia; a flat palm and then closed fist on the side of the head, that you have seen many hearing people confuse with sign for stupid, and so you use the variation: two hands picking up something (people...?) and dropping them down west.

All your family hearing? You ask

Yes.

Their job what?

Mum designs clothes, my dad scientist. Few years ago he died, she signs, and you recognize the expression on her face; one that says, please don't make a big deal out of this.

I'm sorry you say, and when you move your fist in a circular movement around your chest, you take extra care, as if you could transmit the softness of the sign to her heart.

Long time ago... but I think continue processing now, she mouths the word processing while signing thinking and you wonder about the difference.

Is either of them a stage of grief? You are aware of your own grief, and not wanting to use it as a comparison to hers. You are still unsure whether this heaviness that has accompanied you constantly for the last four months is grief, and, if it is, whether you are entitled to it. Is it even possible to grieve for someone whose connection to you has no name? What do you call someone that slept on your sofa and didn't pay any of the bills?

Do you have religion? You ask, and the confused expression on her face makes you worry this is a weird question.

But she is confused in a different way.

Plans for Sunday? she asks.

Religion, you mouth.

Oh, she looks embarrassed. No. My dad...goat?

You spit the tea back out into your cup, trying to hide your face but it is no use, she sees.

What?!

Mean you Jewish? You say, mouthing and miming at the same time.

Yes, I sign that.

No, you sign g-o-a-t.

The redness at the tips of her cheeks spreads across her face.

Fuck...what difference?

You show her; both involve a hand coming down from the chin; one is a closed fist, the other spread fingers. You had never thought of them as being similar before.

I can't see difference, she says, covering her face.

You put an arm on her shoulder very briefly, and she uncovers her face.

Watch me, ok? Goat, Jewish, Goat, Jewish. Yes?

She copies.

Perfect!

She sits upright, composing herself.

Goats work, she signs and then mouths, in mysterious ways.

True, you sign and she winks one of her green eyes.

Shall we go theatre?

*

You wake up too early, your body still set on school time. Then you remember the clocks went back whilst you were sleeping, and suddenly time becomes a soupy, meaningless concept. You try to go back to sleep but you need a piss, and when you come back Ellie is awake. Maybe the flush was loud, you always forget about that one. Maybe you were supposed to have left already, you haven't done this in a while, were never very good at

knowing what to do anyway. But you chat a little, and then drift back to sleep again, her face resting in the curve of your back.

Later, you go for a breakfast lunch at one of those homely, cheap places that your grandfather used to call a greasy spoon. Not because the spoons are greasy, you must have at some point realized, but because the food is. *Greasy, cheap and cheerful*, like the red, round man behind the till.

You both order the full breakfast, which is a gigantic plate of grease swimming in baked beans. You talk about the play, which was about male suicide, a subject matter that had reinforced to you how much this wasn't a date, at least until you were having sex in her bed.

When I was a kid, I wanted to be actor, you find yourself saying.

Really? You acted?

Yes, at School. I was what? A wave in The Little Mermaid.

A wave?

Actually, half a wave. I held one end of blue cloth, and waved it about.

Ellie laughs, Just stood there on stage?

No, behind stage. I was too scared to go on stage.

But you wanted to be actor?

When she was young, my sister wanted to be vet. Then someone told her you have to put your hand up cows' bottoms...

Ok, ok. But you stand, everyday, with whole room of children staring at you Ellie says, that scares me.

No stage for you too then?

I'm dancer. Then she blushes I mean...before...for long time. Why I came London, for dance school.

What happened?

She shrugs I don't know. Didn't feel ...right.

With Isaac, you fantastic. You could train, teach children with special needs.

She looks down at her food, as if you have made her shy.

Thank you...maybe.

There is a simultaneous shyness and confidence about Ellie, a combination that feels contradictory and yet familiar to you. The contradictions about your own feelings are busily moving around in your mind: you want to keep chatting until you have found out every small thing about her, and you want to rest some more in her bed, with her face against your back. You want to kiss her all over and you want to wait, to go back to sneaking looks at her from afar. Perhaps it is too late for any of these decisions, things have already been done out of order, too slowly and too quickly and the boundaries between you have been thrown up in the air. Are you even allowed to date, you have no idea. You never read the school handbook; it was sixty-five pages long and mostly detailed the rules about printing costs. You still don't know what your paper allowance is.

Apart from making one of her housemates scream when she walked in on you brushing your teeth with your finger, the morning has passed easily. You feel Ellie is an easy person to be around, and wonder if this could be measured in some form of survey, or if it is just you that finds her easy. If she feels the same way, then is this what is meant by the word *chemistry*? There are chemical reactions that make people feel in love, but is there a formula for *ease*?

You always thinking, right? Ellie says as she walks you to the tube.

Mean you what?

I can see on your face, she signs and then uses the colloquial sign for *brainy*, her hand expanding next to her head to represent the enormity of your brain.

You point, *you yes*. You take her hand and put it next to your own head, shrinking her hand in your own; *me, flat brain*.

She shakes her head, and puts her hands, with your own inside, over your face and kisses you, and you let your big flat brain float away for a few, small moments.

*

Ali has been away at his parents for a couple of nights, and you order his favorite pizza for his arrival back home this evening. When he arrives, he looks appropriately awkward and touched in equal measure by the gesture, and makes a point of not going straight to his room. You put plates out and the two of you sit together at the kitchen table as if it is a special occasion. Ali looks different sitting up on a chair, a bit vulnerable as if he's unsure of the dress code for the level of intimacy involved in sharing a meal.

You eat in silence for a while, and then Ali starts to talk about a conversation he had with his parents last night. Apparently, his dad has become very interested in star signs since Ina's death and it has made him feel calmer about everything. *Everything*: in English, a euphemism for all that is too much to be said, in sign: two hands travelling in opposite directions, uniting at the end of a circle, fingers seeming to hold on to the air between them.

It is Ina's age that has something to do with the everything, apparently.

Because of return S-a-t-u-r-n he says.

S-a-t-a-n? You ask.

No, no, not devil, planet. S- a- t-u-r-n.

Oh. Astrology?

Yes.

Return where?

Same place when born. Ali puts one hand in the air, *when born, Saturn here*, he points with his other hand, then puts it back and points with the Saturn hand. *Sun here.* His hand circles around the other and comes back to where it was, before resuming to pick up a pizza slice and put it in his mouth.

Understand?

You have entirely no idea what is going on, but you sense importance.

Yes. You continue to eat.

So maybe why, Ali says.

Mean you what? You ask.

Because hard time, and some people no problem, other people too hard. But Ina, in the twenty- seven club you know? Like singers and actors. Very special person, understand?

You don't know if you understand. You don't know what happened to Ina, you don't know what you are supposed to feel about her life or her death, and you can't fathom, logically, what any of it has to do with astrology or pop singers. And yet... there is something in this nonsensical explanation that calms you.

Perhaps not all is lost, or perhaps it is ok to hold onto the comfort of stars and signs, even if just for a little while. You smile at Ali, and say, with just one flick of the finger—

I understand.

*

Thursday evening, the last couple of days of half term and you are going to Deaf pub. You have seen Ellie every day since Saturday, but have had no discussion about how you will act with each other back at school on Monday. You tell the niggling voices in your head to leave you alone.

When you get to the bar you buy a beer and stand for a moment watching the room. You were sensible enough to arrive later today, and the place is full of people. Deaf people signing with each other at full speed, entire filmscapes being created and evaporated in a matter of moments, hearing people watching on with baffled faces. Alex is one of these Deaf people signing at full speed, telling a story about somebody at work eating his lunch, morphing from one character and one emotion to the next with fluid ease. Pete, one of your oldest friends, and the nicest person you know, is watching the story but he is also watching the hearing people trying to catch on. He keeps track of their faces and catches them up when they look lost, without the slightest trace of annoyance on his face.

As you watch, one of the old men, the hard core Deafie approaches the bar.

You tap him on the shoulder, *how are you?*

He sighs and points to his knee, *me old, knee hurting* he signs.

I'm sorry, you sign, sounds hard, want orange juice?

He seems grateful and surprised by the offer, and you wait with him at the bar, free to leave, but choosing to stand with him for a few moments. He tells you that he is anxious, that his benefits are changing but he can't understand the forms, that he keeps getting letters with big, red writing through the post that he doesn't know what to do with, that he doesn't have anyone to ring for him. He tells you that he never met *the one*, and that he is lonely.

You think about the way hearing people ask each other how they are, walking past each other on the street, calling back at each other *fine thanks how are you*. You think about how embarrassed you were by your parents when you realized that the way they were with people, honest and open, wasn't the way that they were supposed to be.

Then the man asks how you are and you take a moment to ask yourself.

You think about Ina, and how her death was like a rug pulled from underneath your feet, how this expression is exactly how it feels, how this is what is most unfair; that there was no warning, and that now the awareness that this could happen to anyone, at anytime, sometimes stops your breath. You think about Ellie, how she is honest and bright and how so much of you is filled with fear about fucking it up before it has even begun, and how Ina's voice in your mind says *soften*.

You tell the old Deafie about all of it.

*

Later that evening, as you are getting your coat to go home, you get a text from Ellie:

Meet later?

Yes...come to mine?

See you at the station.

It is five to midnight by the time you get to Barking tube, and a memory comes to you of the first time you stayed up late enough to see the days change over, the bizarre fascination you found in watching the date change on your Nokia 3310. As you wait for

Ellie, you watch the sky, the stars hidden behind the city glare, but something comforting about the darkness of the blue.

When you get home, taking Ellie to your room, you see Ina's bike isn't in the hall and a pang of panic hits you.

One minute you tell Ellie.

You go into the living room, turning on the light, and feel a tap on your shoulder as you start to look around.

Ellie points at the wall, *nice bike* she signs.

Ina's bike is hooked onto the wall, centered perfectly, a giant splash of yellow against white.

Yours? Ellie asks

No, friend you sign and you gesture for Ellie to go ahead to your room.

You turn off the lights and allow yourself a moment in the darkness before following her down the corridor.

Why We Are Here

She had arrived in a period of flux or at least that's what she had been told, cracks that were barely being papered before pulled apart completely. Zennor had arrived straight from her final exams, had barely scraped these together as it was, but as she would come to learn, all of this; age, experience, exams, were irrelevant here.

'Are you planning on staying more than a month?' she had been asked by a girl with paint-splattered dungarees and a clipboard on arrival.

'Of course,' Zennor had said, surprised.

'Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant,' the girl had said. Whether this was praise or an expression of manic relief Zennor couldn't work out. Either way, Zennor had been shown to a caravan and told she was a manager now.

The warehouse was her domain and so she spent her days re-organizing the distribution of feet and hands, creating patterns from the placement of boxes filled with toiletries, bin-liners of clothes. Zennor had always been able to visualize things, real things: floor plans of buildings, how paint in a pot would look on a wall. She could move objects around in her head and see what they looked like there, move certain bits slightly to the left or right. Her dad had once tried to get her to use this method with essays: imagine all the parts and move them around in her mind. Daniel had been an innovative kind of guy and a teacher too, so looking back Zennor suspected this had probably been a good idea but, in the end, Zennor just didn't care. Moving words around for an essay was flimsy, intangible, pointless. What could be done with the result of this endless grasp for intellect, this repetition of scrawled red pen in margins; *don't think this is quite right, unsure what you mean here, spelling?* Now language was about clarity only; every sentence she uttered was in a rotation of clear instructions:

New underwear here, sorting table there, can I have ten hands up for the kitchen, we don't keep size large trousers or size fourteen shoes, please does anyone have anyone have an Ipod to plug in?

And when Zennor spoke people listened; she watched in amazement as people moved to her instructions, as if she were a mother in charge of musical chairs at a birthday party.

These were her days. Her nights were spent passing a spliff and packets of crisps around the fire with the other long termers, the volunteers who had been here months, or years. There was a certain level of peace to be found in this containment, after a day in which so many objects and people moved around, it felt important to spend the evenings in this singular area around a fireplace, staring into a pit and watching the flames flicker.

The short termers would be down at the bar in town. There were several bars, but there was only one that had made it clear that they were ok with the influx of European visitors that had recently taken over their hostels and campsites. Whether they were ok with the visitors from Libya and Afghanistan that had flocked to their ports and railway bridges was an issue best not pressed upon. Zennor had spent her evenings at this bar when she first arrived, wasting her precious funds on crap pizza and wondering why the long-termers never came. After she had spent a couple of weeks there, listening to the same earnest conversations replay themselves in varying accents over and over again, she started to understand why everyone stayed in their cliques. The short termers were all desperate to go to the camp, and often it took up so much energy trying to explain why chopping veg and folding clothes in the warehouse was more helpful than wandering around befriending people. There was only so much politeness it was possible to muster when yet another well-meaning hipster stated that they were a documentary making, podcasting social influencer, and so needed to get straight to the camps. The other long termers sighed and made sarcastic comments between themselves. *We want to show the world that these people exist!* The filmmakers said. *The world knows they exist*, the managers repeated each day. *The world already knows.*

*

In the last few weeks her routine had become peppered with the night food distribution. She was partnered with Antoine, a weathered French hippy of indeterminate age;

dreadlocks, tied in a piece of coloured felt, reached all the way down to the end of his skinny back.

Antoine's English was better than Zennor's French, but that wasn't saying much. Zennor had spent her French classes sitting at the back with the boys and drawing genitalia on the desks.

'I'm not very good at languages,' Zennor had said the first time she had travelled with him in his musty van that smelt like a mixture of sawdust and some sort of fruit— oranges perhaps?

'Moi non plus,' he had said, and they had smiled.

'Where are you from?' Zennor asked.

Antoine had pointed out the window into the distance, 'mountains, come here... few weeks,' he gestured to his mouth and then out as if giving out food, 'then go back, must work. Work me, er...' he moved his arms back and forth as if sawing wood.

'Carpenter?' She asked.

'Oui, charpentier,' he said, satisfied.

They had stuck together as unofficial distribution buddies from then on. It had been her he had rang at one am two weeks ago when the second camp had set on fire. All night they had driven around to find people walking along the road in the dark. Antoine and Zennor had given them a 'travel pack'— muesli bars and fruit, as if they were children going on a school trip. *Where can we go now*, some had asked. But most had just nodded a muted thanks and kept on walking.

When she had got back to the caravan late the next day, physically trembling with the cold and exhaustion, Zennor had considered leaving herself, packing up her backpack and going back to the warm bed and safe future always waiting for her back in Cornwall. *Why are you here?* she had been asked by one of the men tonight. *You are English, you are young, this isn't your life.*

The camps had been overcrowded, cold and subject to weekly intimidations by the police, but they had been a focal point for community. The refugees had somehow

materialized restaurants and libraries; there had been distinct places for women and families to build shelters. Now there was nothing, just a few tents in a tiny stretch of woods next to a car park. Those who were fit enough spent their nights walking endlessly around the town, trying to avoid the police. Chaos didn't feel the right way to describe the situation, but she didn't know what word would be. She knew what it felt like; it was like attempting to walk while you were falling asleep or trying to keep hold of water with no container.

Since the fires, there were team meetings twice a day, where they sat in a circle and took turns to give their views on what should be done by passing around an old shell. Antoine was never at any of these meetings. Instead, a few days after the second fire, he had turned up in the kitchen one evening and stated that he was going to do nighttime distributions at the car park in the woods. It hadn't been passed through as a suggestion, or even mentioned before as far as Zennor was aware, but the kitchen volunteers at the time had let him have the food, and he had been allowed to continue since then without any evident fuss.

A group of Eritrean teenage boys were the main recipients of the cardboard boxes of vegetarian curry and rice. She knew there were women and families in the woods, she had heard that a baby had been born in them a few days ago—but Zennor hadn't seen them, and a cowardly part of her was relieved- somehow, she could still distinguish the refugees as different or tougher to some extent if they were older than her. With children this fallacy fell away entirely and she couldn't deal with it.

As a result, she was dreading tonight; Luc was in bed with flu and Eloise had asked Zennor to be on station duty. This meant accompanying her to the station and waiting for anyone to arrive that they thought looked like one; a migrant and two; under eighteen so they could offer to take them to the police station, where in theory, the authorities had a legal duty to look after them. Zennor knew it was never this simple- often the kids' ages weren't believed in the first place, or it meant that they were stuck forever here, when they had family to be reunited with in neighbouring countries. There were stories too, about them being rounded onto buses on the promise of been given a new life somewhere, only to be taken to the middle of nowhere to unsanitary

accommodation. But the alternatives, of wandering the camps alone with only the danger of weekly police raids and daily attempts at smuggling themselves in lorries, was scarier- to Zennor at least.

Eloise knocked on Zennor's caravan door at seven and drove them to the station in her rainbow coloured 2CV. American Rock music belted out of the radio and Eloise somehow managed to sing along in her French accent whilst chain smoking Marlboro out the window. Zennor searched for her baccy and realized she had left it in the caravan.

'You want one?' Eloise offered, only half willing.

Zennor shook her head- the smell of straights made her queasy, and it was mingling with the crate of curry boxes they had packed onto the back seat in a peculiar manner.

In the station car park they waited inside the car, on look out. Nobody came at all for over an hour, and it grew darker and colder while Eloise talked at Zennor about her estranged mother and her irritating lover, and sighed, while Zennor mostly worried about what was going to happen, if anything. Finally, suddenly, Eloise said, 'ok, we have someone- let's go' and they were out the car and walking towards a teenage boy with a backpack clutched nervously in front of him in his hands.

'Hello,' Eloise said with a big smile, and put out her hand 'I'm Eloise and this is Zennor.'

Zennor waved and tried to look as friendly as possible.

The boy shook Eloise's hand apprehensively 'hello,' he said.

Zennor wasn't sure of his accent- she guessed South Sudanese, but her guesses were unsophisticated.

'We are volunteers here- do you have friends to meet you?'

The boy looked blank so Eloise switched to French and he seem to relax slightly, and within a few minutes he was in the back seat of the car, the backpack at his feet and the box of curry replacing it, equally nervously clutched in his hands. Zennor hadn't been able to follow much of what they had been saying- only his name- Tesfay- and that he was sixteen. She sat in the back with him as they drove to the police station and tried

to make conversation in her pidgin French, but he only gave half smiles and nods. She noticed her hands were flaying out all over the place the way they did when she was trying to overcompensate for her linguistic incompetence and tried to steady them- she must look mad. His own hands still sat neatly on top of the unopened curry box.

It was late by the time they entered the police station, and the place was deserted, only a rather bored looking man behind the desk. Eloise approached him with a smile that seemed bordering on fake, perhaps it was, and gestured for Zennor to sit down on the bench with Tesfay.

'You can eat here, you must be hungry,' Zennor told him, and then when he didn't answer, 'mange, mange', which perhaps sounded like an order because he tentatively opened the box and started to eat in small spoonfulls.

Eloise came back with a pile of forms, dumped them on Zennor's lap, and went back to talk the policeman.

Zennor smiled encouragingly at him as she stared blankly at the forms in front of her, obviously all in French.

She gestured to hand them over 'you do?' she asked, noting her bizarre switch to pigeon English.

He shook his head and pointed at her.

'Ok, we will do them together. Name- Tesfay, yeah? Second name?'

He took the pen and wrote it down and then handed it back to her, a slight shy smile acknowledging this game of back and forth.

'Great- and your age- seize ans, right?'

'Oui, seize ans.'

'Um, do you have ID? Er passport, driving license?' she asked uselessly, miming a camera taking a photo.

He took out a phone, confused. 'No work, no charge,' he said , displaying the black screen.

'No, I mean papers, papier? That says you, vous – seize?'

'Non, rien.'

'Don't worry, Zennor said brightly, 'Ok next question Your country, er- pays?'

He gestured for the forms and again and wrote *Sénégal*.

'Do you have family here ?' Zennor asked, going off track slightly 'Famille ici ?'

'Non, mais un uncle en Angleterre. I want to go there.'

Oh shit- Zennor didnt know how to explain how this would be difficult if he reported to the authorities, or whether she should. Eloise was coming back to them now, and Zennor excused herself.

They went into the corridor and Zennor told Eloise what Tesfay had told her.

Eloise sighed. 'Zennor, Im not having any more children hanging about those car parks in the night ok ? He managed to get himself here- if he wants to get to the UK, he will do it.'

'No, but he won't be able to get in if he's already been registered here, will he?'

'Do you not think he knows that ? He won't be able to get in anyway, and this way he might have two years of safety first. Anyway, it's too late now, the policeman already has all his details', she added and went back to Tesfay.

'Tous bien ?' Eloise said, the giant smile back on and Tesfay nodded.

They chatted in French for a while Zennor looked on awkwardly and then Eloise nodded decisively, 'alors, bonne chance ! Let's go, Zennor.'

Tesfay stood and shook Eloise's hand, and then Zennor's.

His hand was rough and felt small in hers somehow. 'Good luck', Zennor said, copying Eloise's words along with her smile, as she couldn't find her own.

'Thank you friend,' he said, before they walked out on him.

The weather had suddenly changed this week, the days long and warm and with it the sensation that things change to, a sense of hope that was evidenced in the faces of those around her. Zennor's sister was coming to stay for the weekend, the first visitor Zennor had had, and while she was unsure how she felt about the disruption to her bubble, the emergence of sunshine had made this too feel much lighter. She had taken the weekend off, and was planning on arriving at the coach station as Ellie arrived, but had been waylaid by some new volunteers who were wandering around outside the warehouse looking bewildered. So in a return to their standard dynamic, Zennor ended up running most of the mile distance to the coach stop and arrived sweating and breathless, whilst Ellie looked like she'd been there for hours, anxiously pretending to look at her phone. Zennor could tell she was pretending because her head kept popping up too quickly for her to have read anything. She looked like a meerkat. Her eyes lit up when she saw Zennor and did a little shy walk towards her, grinning goofily. Zennor wrapped her arms around her, as Ellie had her obligatory little cry.

'What's up you muppet?' Zennor asked, as if she was surprised; Ellie cried all the time- when she was happy, when she was shocked, when she watched adverts with stirring music.

'Is your bag heavy?' Zennor said, 'it's a bit of a walk.'

Ellie made a face and Zennor lifted it up. 'Jesus Ellie, you're staying three days! What the fuck is in here?'

'Mum sent me some food to give to you.'

Jools showed her motherly affections primarily, verging on solely, through food. Which was ironic because she was a terrible cook.

'Why would she send food to you, why not send it straight to me?'

Ellie threw up her shoulders. 'I think it's just pasta and chocolate.'

'Does she think you can't buy those here?'

'Maybe she thinks you don't have any money?'

They kept walking. Zennor lit a rollie. Ellie blew the smoke away.

'Oh, sorry,' Zennor said and took another drag.

They walked back along the motorway to the warehouse and Ellie told Zennor about her flatmates and her job and her friends, while Zennor tried to work out where they would put Ellie's stuff and how they were both going to stay in the less than a single caravan bed. Her ears pricked up slightly when Ellie said she was moving in with this guy she was seeing.

'So it's serious then?' Zennor asked

Ellie blushed.

'I hear wedding bells!' Zennor said because she knew it would wind her up. Ellie rolled her eyes; she looked just like Jools for a second. She also looked the kind of stupid happy that only meant one thing.

'You're in love, aren't you?' Zennor said. It came out more accusatory than she meant, but Ellie was too doped up to notice. She blushed again, and smiled a particular lopsided grin unique to those either newly in love or unhinged.

Ellie stopped smiling when they got back to the caravan and sat on the bed. She was flicking her head back and forth as she looked around: a distinctly worried meerkat now.

'I did warn you,' Zennor said defensively.

'I didn't say anything.'

'You didn't have to.'

Ellie lay back, stretched out on the bed, her long dancers limbs drooping over the sides like a plant outgrowing its pot. She started giggling.

'We'll have to sleep on our sides.'

'Yep. Sardines in a sweaty little caravan tin.'

'I can't believe you've slept here for five months.'

'It's fine on my own.'

'Sorry, I thought you wanted me to come.'

'Of course I did. I'm happy you're here.'

'I don't want to disturb your normal plans.'

There was a pause.

'What do you get up to every day here?'

'Well I'm one of the warehouse managers so—'

'Manager! Blimey sounds very fancy.'

'Yeah I guess.'

'Who made you manager though?'

'*One* of. I don't know it just sort of happened I guess. There aren't many long termers here.'

'Long termers?'

'People who are staying more than a few weeks.'

'Oh right. Sounds like a prison analogy.'

Zennor ignored her. 'So what do you want to do?'

Zennor showed Ellie around the site, the other caravans and the warehouse, and then they queued up for the lunch.

'Is it ok to have it for free?'

Zennor shrugged. 'Usually people put in a donation if they're not here for long.'

'You didn't tell me that!' Ellie said, feeling in her pockets. 'Shit— I left my wallet in the caravan!' She looked comically stricken.

'Don't worry about it.'

Ellie shook her head, 'I'll put extra in tomorrow,' she said as one of the volunteers dolloped a ladle of vegetables on their colourful plastic plates.

The sun was out so they headed outside for somewhere to perch on the patch of grass around the back of the warehouse. Zennor was looking for somewhere they could sit alone; everyone she knew was in a meeting, and she didn't want to sit with the short termers. But Ellie headed straight for a couple that looked around their age and sat down right next to them, grinning her wide dimple grin. Fretting over a lunch queue one minute and marching up to strangers the next: Ellie was such a peculiar mix of anxiety and confidence.

'Hey,' said the girl, who was poking around the black beans on her plate with a fork.

'How do you like the food? Its proper hippy isn't it?' asked her boyfriend. Zennor noticed he was running his hand through his fluffy blonde hair, and wondered whether this was to reassure himself it wasn't of hippy length.

Ellie laughed. 'Probably— we grew up on a lot of beans and rice though didn't we, Zennor?'

Zennor smiled and lit a cigarette. She wasn't hungry.

'So why did you decide to come?' Ellie was asking them.

'Why would you *not* come?' The bean poker said. 'If you see that people don't even have, like, basic stuff and you have everything; why would you not come?'

'True,' Ellie said, nodding.

Zennor put her plate down and leant her head back, feeling the sunshine on her face. She could close her eyes and fall asleep in this position; the way children do, the murmur of background voices protecting them.

'How long are you here for?' she could hear Ellie saying.

'Oh just the weekend. But we're hoping to go visit the camp straight away after lunch. We want to really get to know the people there, you know?'

'Oh cool— maybe we can go with you?' Ellie said turning to Zennor now, and touching her on the arm.

Zennor begrudgingly opened her eyes. 'You won't be able to visit anyone if you're just here for a weekend; you'll be in the kitchen or the warehouse.'

'Oh, I didn't realize that,' the bean poker said but the guy put down his plate and shook his head.

'I've come all this way; I'm not going to leave without seeing the camps.'

Zennor stared at him. 'Why?'

Ellie chewed at her lip. 'It's natural people want to visit the camps, Zennor.'

'Well, you *can't* go to the camps because they both burnt down weeks ago.'

'Oh, that's awful, we didn't know—'

'Well maybe you should do your own research— we're talking about people's homes, you're not here to go on poverty safari,' Zennor said, although she was unsure exactly where the words had come from.

'Wow, that is quite an accusation— and who are you, exactly?' asked the boyfriend, and Zennor could see that his body was shaking. Zennor could feel her own heart racing under her t-shirt.

I have no idea, Zennor thought, but she picked up her plate and left before she could risk saying anything else out loud.

They were back in the caravan. Well, Ellie was outside the caravan, sitting on the little metal step. Obviously, she was crying. Zennor had calmed down as quickly as she had fired up, and now she felt embarrassed.

In lieu of being able to make her a cup of tea, Zennor had poured Ellie a cup of *Coke Zero*.

Ellie wiped her eyes. 'I don't drink coke.'

'Oh right.'

'I'm surprised you do— if you'd done your research you would have known what an awful company they are.'

Zennor came and squashed herself next to Ellie on the step. 'I'm sorry, Ellie. I was a bitch. I'll find them and apologise later.'

'I'm just here for a weekend too— do you think I'm on poverty safari?'

'No course not, you're here to see me. Or that's what I thought.'

'I am. But would it be so wrong if I wanted to see what you're actually doing here too? I do care, you know. Just because I haven't given up my life to come and live here, it doesn't mean I don't care about what's going on too.'

'Ellie, I wasn't talking to you. And I'm sorry; they were just really obnoxious.'

'You only spoke to them for five minutes!'

'That was enough to know what they were going to be like; believe me.'

'Right.' Ellie started picking at her nails.

Zennor stood up and sat on the grass in front of the step, twisting a blade of grass with her fingers. Zennor knew Ellie shouldn't have come, she always ended up upsetting her somehow; it was too much, this mixing of worlds, she knew it would be. She should take her out tonight with Antoine for a meal run, Ellie wouldn't get in the way or ask stupid questions, she knew that. She should apologise again. Instead, she said; 'I haven't 'given up my life' to come here, actually. This is my life.'

'I mean, its not going to be forever, is it?'

'Probably not this same place, no— but I don't plan on this being some 'gap yah' before I come back and get a job in an office.'

'Is that what you're implying that couple are doing or something?'

'Why are you so obsessed with those two? I said I'm sorry, didn't I? And no, obviously, you cant have a 'weekend yah', can you?' She tickled Ellie's knee with the blade of grass, trying to make her laugh.

Ellie pushed it away. 'You are ok, aren't you, Zennor?'

'Yes, Ellie Belly. I'm fine. Are *you* ok?'

By way of an answer, Ellie stood up and pushed Zennor over.

Zennor looked up at her sister's outline against the blinding sunshine.

'Let's get drunk,' Ellie said.

*

'The thing is', Ellie was saying 'we're a family of dropouts.'

Zennor was lying on Ellie's lap as Ellie took a swig from the bottle of cheap red wine they had bought from the newsagent on the way to the beach. It was dark but there was a full moon and Zennor could see Ellie's cheeks were flushed. Ellie turned red from a homeopathic amount of alcohol; she took after their dad, whereas Zennor had their mum's constitution in more ways than one. Jools could drink a crate of wine and then go fix a window. Admittedly, this had only happened once, and she had also broken the window as a result of playing Frisbee after said crate of wine.

'You know what I mean though, Zennor?'

Zennor shrugged and took the bottle back off her sister.

Ellie re-adjusted her legs and Zennor was thrown off into the damp sand. 'Think about it— mum dropped out of Oxford, Oxford for God's sake— I dropped out of dance school, now you—'

'I didn't drop out; I never went anywhere in the first place.'

'Exactly! That's what I mean, you're treading the un-trod path, that's what I'm saying— 'the path less travelled', you know?'

'No? What are you actually trying to say?'

Ellie considered it. 'I'm not completely sure.'

Zennor put her head back onto Ellie's legs and closed her eyes, trying to listen to the waves. She wanted to hear their steady rhythm, but Ellie kept talking over the top of them.

'Did you know I started to go to counseling?'

Zennor opened her eyes. 'No, when?'

'A couple of months ago.'

‘To talk about dad?’

‘No, not really— I mean we have talked about him, obviously. I was just feeling a bit, you know, anxious.’ She let down her hair from her bun, and started playing with a strand. The rest of her enormous mane was covering Zennor’s face.

Zennor sat up again. ‘You’re always a bit anxious.’ She stroked Ellie’s arm to show she was only teasing.

‘Yeah, I know, but you know, anxious, anxious, like panic attacks. Couldn’t get on the tube, couldn’t sleep.’

‘Oh, shit. I didn’t realize. You should have called me.’

‘What and said, ‘hey Zennor I know you’re out volunteering with people who’ve lost their entire families, but I can’t breathe because I have too many choices?’

‘It’s not a contest you know.’

‘I know, I know. Anyway— I’m not entirely sold on the whole therapy for anxiety thing. I get so anxious before I go, trying to think of things to say.’

Zennor laughed ‘I don’t think therapy is meant to be some sort of presentation, you know. You don’t get points deducted for lack of planning.’

‘I know, I know. Anyway, a few weeks ago I had such an intense thing.’

‘Yeah?’

‘I was talking about you, and what you were up to—it was just after that phone call we had where you were telling me about that young guy you had picked up from the station— do you remember?’

Zennor nodded.

‘Well, I was telling this woman about our phone call and I just started crying and crying... yeah I know I cry a lot—but it wasn’t those kinds of tears, it was basically pouring out of me.’

‘Oh, Ellie. You’re so empathetic.’

'No, no it wasn't like that—it wasn't me thinking how awful for that boy— I can't explain it.' She looked up into the sky, as if gathering her thoughts from the moon.

'I said to the therapist it was like a bodily reaction, like they weren't my tears. The therapist, she said— well she asked about mum's dad being a refugee, that maybe it was something passed down you know?'

'I mean, I don't want to invalidate what you feel. But that sounds pretty trippy.'

Ellie nodded, as if she had expected Zennor to be underwhelmed.

'Doesn't mean it's true, though,' Zennor said. 'You were always more in touch with that sort of stuff than me— remember you had that dream before Dad got diagnosed?'

'Maybe...but why are you here, Zennor? I mean, why do you think you came here?'

'I dunno,' Zennor said, picking up a stone and throwing it into the sea. She listened for the *splosh*; onomatopoeia, she couldn't spell the term but she liked those words: *bang, crash, whoosh*, she thought all communication should be like that, a direct representation of what was happening. *Thump, whack, boing*.

'I just wanted to make an impact. I don't mean 'make an impact,' like they use in adverts for getting into teaching, I don't think I'm going to change anyone's life, not really...I just mean in my daily tasks— packing bags, having a chat with someone, whatever— I just want there to actually... be a point, you know?'

'Yeah, I know,' Ellie said.

*

Knowing when something had happened before anyone had told you was a sort of sixth sense that you developed quickly working here, and Zennor felt the sense of foreboding as she walked through the gates of the warehouse site after dropping Ellie back at the bus that Monday. The pop songs belting out from the warehouse, and the laughter of the group of this week's volunteers dancing as they folded clothes briefly tricked her into thinking she had been mistaken, but then she spotted Antoine and Luke huddled in the office speaking in whispered French, Eloise next to them on the phone looking white

and drained. Antoine beckoned Zennor over, unsmiling just as Eloise put the phone down.

'Oui, c'est lui,' she said and Luke took her hand.

'What's going on?' Zennor asked.

'You know Tesfay, Senegal boy?' Antoine asked.

'Yes,' Zennor said.

'They found a body in one of the lorries last night- we just confirmed it is him.'

Zennor didn't recognize the sounds that came from her body, a sudden eruption of uncontrollable noises and shaking- afterwards the noise haunted her, the undignified, uselessness of it. The shame as she remembered Antoine's arm on hers, trying to comfort her and how she had collapsed into him, like a child.

*

As far as Zennor was aware, nobody in the camp had even met Tesfay but the news spread instantly, the way it did here and the refugees had been writing his name all over town with whatever they had: chalk, felt tips, some spray paint. Each time Zennor drove into town she saw a new paving stone or wall where it appeared. Tesfay would not have a funeral; this was the thought that kept returning to Zennor. There would be no speeches made about him, no way of putting his life and his death into words- they wouldn't know what to say even if it were practical. So of course, they wrote his name on the streets at night, what else was left?

*

On the days immediately following news of Tesfay's death, the car-park had been almost deserted, and at the volunteer briefing they heard that a large amount of people had suddenly decided to take the buses the authorities were providing, the ones that promised only to take them somewhere that wasn't here.

Tonight, Zennor and Antoine had arrived to a modest queue, some familiar faces amongst the new. After everyone had taken a meal, a few of the teenagers stayed around, chatting with Antoine, bumming papers and tobacco off him; he never refused, he had never cared about boundaries or the blurring of them.

Zennor watched them from a distance as she packed the empty containers back in Antoine's van.

He watched her, crooked his head to one side like a cat, curious, concerned. 'You are tired, Zennor? You want to go home?'

Zennor shook her head. One of the boys beckoned her over.

'You smoke, sister?'

'Yes,' she replied.

'Come, sit'. He held out a hand to her. 'My name is Fikru— you know what this means?'

'No?'

'It means, *my love*,' he said putting both arms on his chest.

His friends creased up laughing. 'It's true, it's true', they echoed.

'That's a great name,' Zennor said.

'I am great,' Fikru said, and he winked.

Zennor smiled, 'I'm sure you are.'

'You know what?' Antoine called over to them 'it's time for a party!'

He headed to the car, turning on the radio.

Zennor walked over to him 'Antoine, is this ok?'

'What is ok?'

She gestured to the radio, and the boys. 'We're not supposed to be doing this.'

Antoine put up his arms, palms facing her. 'One song, one song; ten minutes we go, ok?'

Zennor looked over at the guys. They were smiling and beckoning her over, starting to move their feet around to the music. Antoine grinned at Zennor and danced his way over to them, elaborately throwing out each limb, shaking his dreadlocks back and forth.

The song was old, something her parents used to play at dinner, not a party song at all.
Heart of gold, that's what it was called.

I want to live,

I want to give,

I crossed the ocean for a heart of gold.

Good People

The marriage was for visa reasons of course, but that doesn't mean I didn't love her.

Well, what is it, my sister had asked, for love or a visa?

Both I had said, why can't it be both? Think outside the box, babe.

Over the telephone I could hear the sound of her forehead creasing.

I only get twenty days off a year; I need to know whether it's worth using one of them for. Why didn't you make it a weekend?

I had laughed. More expensive.

Hmm.

She had come, obviously, although she wore a dress that was daringly close to white and left as soon as the service was over. Kate and I went down to the beach and met our friends Harry and Tobias. They brought us a picnic of gourmet standards, which we gorged before becoming recklessly drunk on champagne. It got dark and Kate dared me to strip off and run into the sea with her; that's the kind of thing that Kate likes to do, make a challenge and see if you'll rise to it. But this was when I still found this kind of behaviour fun, and gauche in an endearing way.

We'll stay here and protect the stuff, Tobias and Harry had said, gesturing to our pile of empty Tupperware, and then promptly falling asleep. The beach was deserted; it must have been two, three am.

I'm sure it was cold, but cold is fine, it's a kind of pain that you can only feel at the time of the event. I remember we swam out quite far and I was shouting, my wife, my wife!

My husband, my husband! Kate was shouting back at me.

*

So you're British? The boy is asking Kate. Well, teenager, he has just turned eighteen— 'young man'? His name is Soban and he has an Aussie accent, which confuses

Kate somewhat, makes her feel disorientated. He is from Afghanistan but Kate has never met anyone from Afghanistan so she doesn't know what the accent is like.

So do you know why British people hate Muslims? He is saying now.

Perhaps there is an undertone of somewhere else, after all.

Kate laughs nervously. We don't? I mean, we have lots of Muslim people living there.

So why do they have a 'Punish a Muslim day,' then? Look, he says showing her his phone.

Oh god, Kate said, averting her eyes as Soban scrolls through the images.

Well look, I haven't lived there for ages, and I have no desire to go back.

You left because it's a racist country?

Well, I mean, no. But it doesn't make it an appealing place to go back to.

Why not? You are white, how will it affect you?

Kate realizes she has half her hand in her mouth and that the pain in her thumb is from her own teeth. She takes it out, and stretches it casually, as if Soban might think that eating one's hand was just a typical British custom.

Maybe we should talk about something else? Get to know each other. What are your hobbies?

He shrugs. I like motorbikes. You?

She racks her brain frantically. You know, to be honest I haven't really thought about my hobbies in so long. I like listening to music and watching films.

What kind of music?

Er, I never really remember the names; I just listen to whatever Spotify recommends. By the way—you know Australia is also very racist!

He looks at her. Yes, of course I know. I was in one of their detention centers for almost two years.

Right, yes. Of course, I just meant—

You felt bad because I said your country is racist.

No, sorry. I don't know why I said that. So, what made you sign up to do this—to meet up with me?

Jane—you know Jane— she's my caseworker. She said I should do it. But I didn't know I was meeting you— I thought I would meet a man who was young like me.

Kate laughs nervously again, until today she'd had no idea that she had a nervous laugh. I'm not that old you know.

He looks her up and down. Ok.

I'm thirty.

That's almost double my age.

I mean, not really...

Basically. And you, Kate? Why did you want to do this? You felt guilty about your racist country?

She looks at him carefully; is he taking the piss out of her?

He raises an eyebrow. I am only teasing; relax Kate.

Kate grins manically back at him.

Mike also laughs at her when she recounts the meeting to him later that evening.

You had fun, then? He says slyly, gloating over his piles of beautifully arranged vegetables, organized into exact order of entry into the pan. Kate always wonders if he has some sort of point to prove with this meticulous level of scrutiny his ingredients are subject to. She simply whacks a knife around a few times and shoves them all in, it does exactly the same job.

You don't think I should do it then? She is asking him.

Do what, babe?

Volunteer! Befriend refugees or whatever.

The 'whatever' was mostly referring to the old person Kate had signed up to befriend a couple of years ago. They seemed to have been 'matched' based entirely on their shared nationality, but still Kate was, she felt, very charming with the blind nonagenarian they had assigned her to—hunting down a box of English Breakfast teabags especially, bringing a cake she pretended to have baked herself, enthusiastically feigning interest in countryside walks and antiques. Only for the lady to say in her pompous Cambridge accent at the end of the first visit, I don't think this is going to work out, do you?

Kate had cried all the way back home to Mike, who had just laughed at her then too.

I didn't say anything about you not volunteering anymore, did I? Mike says now. All I mean is you can't get upset if you don't make best friends immediately—you have friends already, that's not really what you do voluntary work for.

I am aware of that, she says and puts one of his perfectly manicured carrot pieces into her mouth.

There is a pause and Kate struggles to know what to say next. She remembers the beginning of their relationship, the excitement that came with not knowing each other. The eagerness to unbury opinions, childhood traumas and moments from their day as if they were interchangeable, and equally exciting, treasures to discover. Now they know everything there is to know about the other, and yet there are moments when she looks at him and it is like looking at a stranger.

She was so young when they met; had barely stepped off the plane from London. Mike had been a regular at the bar she still worked at now. He had conspicuously drawn out every order before he had finally asked if she wanted to go for a drink sometime.

Not really, she had said, gesturing around at their surroundings.

Fair enough, he had said, how about a shag?

Kate hasn't been back to the UK in a long time. She tries to keep on top of what her family are doing through Facebook; her brother Ed doesn't have much on there, but her parents have always been over-sharers. She knows that they have painted the kitchen orange, that they were very upset when the cat died and that they are very proud of Ed for being a teacher. She imagines they would have shared photos of Kate on her wedding day if she sent them any, but it wasn't that kind of wedding, and she hasn't really done anything to make them proud since then.

She hasn't spoken to any of them for a long time either. It was hard to find the right moment, what with the time difference and working odd hours, and then after a while it just became awkward to get in contact. It's not that they are 'not talking' to each other; it's just that they don't ever talk.

She was only ever on a years working visa and the time had evaporated; just as she had the beginnings of a life set up, it was time for it to end. When she thought about arriving back to London, to her parents cramped flat and night-buses back from work in the cold, a future felt impossible, blank. It was Mike who suggested they get married.

It's just a bit of paper, he said. Why end something that's only just beginning for the sake of bureaucracy?

Because we barely know each other—what happens if it doesn't work out?

Then you get the choice to stay in the country you have made your home. And I get the satisfaction of having done something good, he said.

In the end Kate had decided it was good getting married in this way— straightforward and business like, no over the top proposal or self-searching reflection. It took the angst out of the whole thing. Kate had told her parents but hadn't given them much notice, and she knew they wouldn't be able to afford the flights even if she had. Ed had still been away at school, doing his GCSEs.

Are you sure? He had asked when Kate had Skyped to let him know.

Nobody can be sure about the future, Ed, she had said, composing her face in a manner that aimed to suggest the imparting of wisdom.

She and Mike haven't had sex in four months now and she wonders if they might split up. It had been very fun for a long time, until it wasn't. Sometimes, there are moments where she feels like a stranger to herself.

*

There are other moments I look over now, moments where I presumed Kate to be joking where now I'm not so sure. Maybe I put it down to her being British, that droll humour they can often possess, a certain facetiousness that I presumed was behind some of her more random-seeming comments.

It is super early into our relationship; we have been dating for maybe four, five weeks, although we never really dated, we just started hanging out. I don't know whether we are going to be a 'thing' or not but I don't really care. Kate is stunning, the kind of beautiful where it's not even a matter of opinion and we make each other laugh. My memory of this time is just laughing, basically.

What do you like about me? Kate asks.

The question comes out of nowhere it seems to me, we are laying on my couch in what I presumed was a mutual contented silence.

I assume she is being funny and mime a fishing rod, strain with the weight of the imaginary catch.

Somebody's fishing, I say.

I mean it, she says. Is it just the way I look?

I'm taken aback. Woah, I say.

She is drunk; we both are, but still.

She shrugs, I have eyes, you know. But I don't care about that— I want to know, what is it about *me* you like?

You make me laugh, I say. And I think you're intelligent, and witty... and sexy of course. Is sexy allowed?

She nods. But do you think I'm a good person?

I laugh, maybe I think it's a joke or maybe I just want to believe it is.

Of course I do, I say.

*

A week after Kate moved out of Mike's flat, she received a call from the befriending organization; Soban was happy with the match and wanted to give it a go— could they pass on her details?

How do you mean? Kate asked.

So, from now on we will be on the end of the phone if you have any urgent questions, but essentially it's just an arrangement between the two of you; just like any other friendship.

Oh, Kate said. It had been over a month since she had met Soban, and she had presumed he wasn't interested in meeting up again. If she was totally honest, she had almost forgotten about him entirely; her mind, like her belongings, was all over the place.

Are you happy with the match, Kate?

Sure. It's just I kind of got the feeling he wanted someone you know, cooler. I mean younger and maybe more...less of a woman?

The woman laughs. We don't get many young men signing up sadly, so it's kind of you or nobody at this point. Are you still happy to go ahead?

Uh-huh, ok. Yes, I mean yes.

On autopilot, she had rung Mike for his opinion; where should she go with Soban next time to make him like her more? What were some good motorbike-style activities? Preferably ones that didn't involve actually getting on a motorbike, which she definitely did not want to do.

He had picked up instantly. Kate, is everything ok?

The urgency in his voice reminded her that they had a pact not to speak for a month, unless it was an emergency.

Yes, sorry. I rang you by accident; butt dial, she said.

Oh, right. He sounded irritated, like he was at work. Maybe take my number off your phone for now? I mean; I could do that too.

Kate felt like she was going to cry; her period must have been coming.

I don't mean to be unkind— we should just follow our rules, right? Mike was saying.

Sure, of course. Goodbye then, Kate said.

*

Two days before the wedding, my sister had telephoned to tell me that it wasn't too late to stop the whole thing.

You know marriage is a big deal, right? You can still call it off and nobody will care.

Thanks.

I'm not trying to be rude.

I know, I say, because I did. Anna was never trying to be anything, she just was.

Imagine if you die; everything you own goes to her, someone you've only known a few months.

I mean—one, I'll be dead, so...and two—I don't own anything.

Yes, but when you do.

I work in care— if we're still together by the time it takes me to save enough for a deposit, we will have proved ourselves very worthy of our marital status.

That's not entirely the point.

Well, what is then?

That I don't want you to end up like mum, she says.

It would be an impressive feat if I ended up pregnant and alone, I say. And last I checked Kate hasn't started drinking in the mornings yet.

I wasn't talking about the *specifics*, Mike. I just mean I don't want you stuck in a relationship with somebody you don't love. How do you know this is the right one?

I breathe in deep. I don't, Anna. But if we don't get married now then we don't even get the chance to see if it could be.

*

Kate drafted and re-drafted multiple WhatsApp messages to Soban. She wanted to sound enthusiastic, keen and caring but also un-pressurizing, fun and woke.

She eventually settled on:

Hey Soban! Fancy meeting up again sometime soon? You choose what we do.
Kate. (Befriending person) x

As she sent it, she saw Soban was online and the message immediately showed as read, and that he was typing.

He wrote 'OK' and then went offline.

At 1am her phone went off with a location pin from Soban. Meet me here tomorrow 2pm?

It was for a coffee house in town. Kate resisted all urges to write 'Sure! But we can go and do something more exciting if you like (!)', to stay away from multiple emojis and exclamation marks or to suggest motorbike riding.

She settled on 'sure' and used just one smiley face.

*

We had definitely agreed that there was no point in going through the rigmarole of divorce, not yet anyway. But when Kate eventually came over to collect the rest of her belongings, she seemed to have changed her mind.

What if either of us met someone else? She asked.

Surely it only matters if we want to marry that person? We'll sort it out if it comes to that, but I presume neither of us is going to hurry into that this time around?

She flushed red, a sign she was about to say something that she thought would make me cross. It's not exactly very appealing for anyone who's looking to date either of us though is it—being married?

I didn't realize you were so keen to get back on the dating scene, I said, listening to the bitterness in my voice, and silently noting that she had been right— I was cross. You get all the paperwork sorted then— I did all the work last time, I snap. And, I add, lets not forget it was all for you.

*

You know I am surprised you haven't asked me why I left, everyone always ask me that, Soban asks Kate almost five hours into their second meeting.

They are at a different café from the one they met at, and in this time they had mainly done a lot of sitting and aimless wandering, interspersed by Soban asking questions about local monuments and Kate frantically googling on her phone. About an hour ago he had told her to stop. I was finding it funny, how panicked you look every time I asked you a question, but now I just feel cruel. Clearly, you know nothing.

Kate had been mortified. Is there something else you want to do?

I have nothing else to do but go home and wait. Walking with you is fine.

Kate wondered whether this could be considered a compliment.

Now, at Soban's question (was it a question or was it a statement—an accusation?) her mind is whirring again.

Oh, no I would never ask that, she says quickly.

Why?

She feels her insides twist. The main reason was that the organization had repeated emphatically not to ask their 'befriendees' anything about their past or their journeys here—you're not therapists, trauma experts or border control, ok?

Because... I imagine it's a traumatic experience and you know, I wouldn't want you to have to think about it.

Think about it?

Obviously you do think about it—I meant, talk about it.

Soban looks suitably unimpressed. But I have to talk about it all the time. As soon as I arrived in this country I had to explain everything about why I left, what happened in my country, what happened to my family, why I am here, how I got here. I talk about it over and over with my lawyer every week, with my therapy group, everyone.

Totally... I mean, exactly. But, I'm not your lawyer or the border control or anything, we are just meant to, you know—have fun.

All I am thinking about is whether I am allowed to stay or not, how can I have fun? And all the time I'm seeing in the newspapers and Facebook people saying we are coming here to steal jobs and benefits.... How can I get them to understand that I don't even want to be here?

I don't know, Kate says uselessly. I'm really sorry...but you know I believe you—you don't have to prove anything to me, you know?

Yes. But then, it is not you who decides my application.

Well if I was 'Boss of the World', Kate says, trying to sound light, I would let anyone go wherever they want to go. I don't think you should ever have to prove why you left somewhere anyway. Then, remembering some article she'd read in *The Week*, she says casually, Borders are a social construction.

Soban looks at her blankly. What does that mean?

It means, like, who decided these lines on a map?

Your people did, mostly.

Well yes... but what I mean is they're not real.

He rolls his eyes. For you, maybe.

Oh god. No, yes of course— sorry! I don't mean the *impact* of them is not real, I'm saying they are arbitrary.

And what does 'arbitrary' mean?

Er...like random, stupid?

He nods blankly, and she wonders whether he has finally given up on her. But after a pause, he asks her in a softer tone, And what about your country, Kate? Will you go back?

She expects the image of London to come to her in the way it always does; a flash of grey; but in this moment it appears lighter, more expansive somehow.

Oh. Well I'm not sure—yes I suppose, one day I will. But this feels like my home now.

Because your husband is here? He says.

Mmm, she says which is technically a noise not a word, but at least it was neither a yes nor a no.

What about your family, are they still alive?

Kate is shocked. Yes of course, she says, and then — sorry— I mean, yes, they are still alive. They live in London.

And you don't miss them?

She swallows. I guess I don't really think about them too much.

He nods. I try not to think about my family too much either. He was looking down at his empty coffee cup. They were good people, he murmurs.

Would you like another coffee? Kate asks, hoping that he did because that was all she had to give him. A thought pushes her way into her head: *You could give him your space in this country* and her stomach lurches once more. She immediately pushes the

words away. That wasn't how the world worked, so there was no point in thinking about what she would do if it were.

It is three am on a beach in Melbourne, Australia.

A man and a woman have just got married and are swimming naked in the sea.

Across town a teenager sits in a detention centre doing an indeterminate amount of time for an indeterminate crime. He has lived many lives in his not many years, and it is a daily task to try and compartmentalize them.

To think of his first life, his only home, is impossible and so he doesn't let himself, not yet.

He works hard also on keeping his mind blank and yet agile; the way he will honor his homeland, his family (although he cannot think of that word in its entirety yet) will be to stay sane, to keep his mind.

Back at the beach, and the couple are still swimming, laughing and kissing, delighted at each other and at themselves. Many would describe the couple as young, but this is a relative term. To outsiders, the couple appear to be in love, but this too is a relative term.

They are in love the same way that they are in the sea; they are enjoying it for now and in the moment it feels adventurous, wild even, but they are close to the edges where they can reach the shore at any time they like. They have never got out of their depths; have never even contemplated whether they might drown.

Here they are now, in a break from kisses and holding each other's bodies; they are pointing into the distance, and saying

Look out there; the horizon. How beautiful.

Ina

To get to the farm, Ina had taken a plane, a ferry, a coach and hitchhiked a lift from the side of a deserted road. She had a printout of an email the woman had sent her with written instructions and a map half blurred from the cheap printers at the Internet café in Lewiston. The coach driver had squinted at the map.

‘That’s just a dirt track there, honey,’ he had said, looking concerned. ‘You got somebody coming to pick you up, right?’

Ina had nodded and when two hours later he had dropped her off, waited until the coach was out of sight to put her thumb out. She had the phone number of the farm, but there was no signal, and she was here a day earlier than she’d thought she would be. There weren’t many cars coming, and so Ina sat down for a bit and ate a banana that had gone brown inside her bag. She counted two cars in forty minutes, and then the third one stopped. The driver was a woman who smelt of sea and sweat and had an accent Ina couldn’t place.

‘You going to help out our Alice, are you?’ The woman asked as Ina wedged her backpack in between her legs. Ina sat up front with the woman; the back was filled with logs, the view completely blocked by them, and every now and again the woman would stick her head right out of the window to see if anything was coming. Nothing ever was.

‘Yes, just for a few weeks,’ Ina replied.

The woman chuckled. ‘That’s what I said almost nineteen years ago. Now my son is off travelling too, he just turned eighteen, grew up here his whole life. I told him: I had to travel round the world to find my place to call home, maybe you’ll be back in a month, maybe you’ll have to keep going until you find what you’re looking for. But there isn’t any place quite like this.’

‘That’s nice,’ Ina said, too tired to find another adjective. The woman didn’t seem to mind her being quiet; she kept happily chatting away whilst Ina looked out the window and wondered why it was bothering her that she couldn’t pinpoint the woman’s accent.

‘Yep, his dad doesn’t approve, wants him to go to university right away, but he isn’t ready yet’, the woman was saying.

‘Oh, well that’s fair enough,’ Ina said.

The woman beamed. ‘Yes it is, isn’t it! Alex has an untamable streak in him he has, and his dad blames me for that. I said—you can blame me all you want; I’m not going to feel guilty about it! You know why?’

Ina shook her head, although it was unclear if the question was aimed at her or the man that the woman had a son with. Perhaps Ina was able to play a part in a conversation the woman hadn’t been satisfied with in real life.

‘Because that’s what got me where I am today, that streak of...yearning, you know what I mean? You must do, otherwise you wouldn’t be all the way out here. I’ve got no disrespect for those folks who want to go to school, go to an office, buy a house etcetera,’ the woman said, using her hands to reference each activity, ‘no disrespect at all’.

Ina kept her eyes focused on the road each time the woman’s hands left the steering wheel.

‘But, well anyone, who’s got the—gumption— you know that word gumption—to get themselves out here, that’s my kind of people that’s all I’m saying.’

The woman dropped Ina off at the farm and asked when she would be coming over for tea. Ina thanked her several times for the lift and didn’t directly answer her question. A woman that Ina presumed was Alice came walking down towards them when the car pulled up. She looked younger than Ina had imagined, with a lot of wavy ginger hair, out loose down to her waist, and a stern expression, like she had been interrupted whilst doing something important.

‘I see you met Mathilde,’ she said by way of a greeting.

‘Oh, I guess so, yes,’ said Ina.

‘You don’t ask people their names in England?’ Alice asked.

‘No I just...’

'I'm Alice,' she said, sticking out a tanned hand, so quickly that Ina barely had time to shake it.

'Ina.'

'I should hope so. Dump your stuff here,' Alice said, gesturing to a grass bank, 'I'll show you around'.

'How long are you planning on staying?' Alice asked, after she had given Ina a cursory tour around the farm, gesturing and reciting bullet points of information whilst Ina hurried after her, and tried to focus. It was hard not to stand and stare off at the ocean and the mountains in the distance. Ina wanted to be in both of them all at once, and to be here too, unpacked already and out on the land. She also wanted to sleep.

'A few weeks?' Ina asked, reflecting the question back to Alice.

Alice nodded. 'I have a two-week minimum policy; it takes time explaining how everything gets done here. You ever done farm work before?'

'No, but I'm a fast learner,' Ina said, although she didn't know how anyone knew whether they were fast or not. She was a conscientious learner, that's what she remembered from her school reports. *Ina is somewhat dreamy at times, but very conscientious.*

Alice gave her a look that Ina couldn't make out. 'Well, welcome. I hope you like it here.'

The agreement was that Ina worked in the mornings in return for bed and board, and had the afternoons to herself. Ina thought this way of travelling would be good for her; it was important to have some sort of structure; some way of knowing she wouldn't lose herself in the elasticity of space and time. This type of getting lost had happened to her before when she travelled; everything had fallen away too quickly, meaning had become soap in her hands. Each morning she rose with the sun, threw on her shorts and t-shirt and went to water the lettuces. She liked the way they looked, neat rows of them in the earth, how their leaves glistened in the sun after she had watered them. It took a long

time, walking up and down with a hose, but everything was done by hand here. Either Alice's hands, or one of the volunteers that had stayed over the years, all sleeping in the cabin that Ina was staying in now.

At night the silence was so deep Ina was sure it had a sound, the same way the air was so fresh that breathing it in felt like consuming a meal; both the silence and the air filled her up in some deep way, left her un-wanting of anything more. When the owls hooted the first night Ina had woken up with a jolt.

'You didn't get spooked, did you?' Alice had asked her as they sat and ate their sandwiches at lunch the next day.

'No,' Ina had said truthfully.

'You do get some that are,' Alice said. 'A few years back, I got a kid from New York, was convinced something was going to happen to him here, get eaten by a bear, I don't know. Lasted two nights; third day he was gone. I went into the cabin and all his stuff was packed up. Didn't even leave a note.'

'Is he ok? Did you ever hear from him?' Ina asked.

Alice shrugged. 'Must have gone back to the big city. Hope he didn't get shot.'

There weren't many people who lived here, so everyone knew each other. Ina observed that as a collection of people they resembled more family than friends or neighbours; they seemed to put up with each other with the same kind of understanding— this is who they each had, like it or lump it.

'There's no public transportation that's worth thinking about,' Alice had told Ina, 'and I haven't got time to be driving you around, so if you want to get anywhere but the mountains or the beach, you better make friends quick.'

When Ina had finished up the next day, Alice had come into the cabin; she had knocked but hadn't waited for a reply. Ina was dressed only in a towel, about to go to the shower, but Alice didn't seem to notice. The shower was out in the open anyway, just an old head connected up to a hose behind the cabin so maybe privacy just wasn't a thing here.

'Hester wants to meet you,' Alice said, as if Ina knew who Hester was.

'Ok,' Ina said, although she wasn't sure if she had been asked a question.

'So when you've done getting washed up I'll give you directions,' Alice said, turning and walking away without closing the door.

Hester lived in a wooden house at the edge of the forest, overlooking the beach. Ina had followed Alice's instructions, an envelope with a series of lines with 'r', 'l' 'up', 'down' next to them, with some drawings of trees around, and a wiggly squiggle that was meant to be the sea at the end.

'If you get lost, just scream. Always somebody hiding about somewhere,' Alice told her.

Just as Ina was wondering whether she might have to, she heard someone call her name, and a tiny old woman appeared, walking steadily up the hill whilst a tired looking dog scampered after her.

'We don't get many Asians around here,' Hester had said, after she'd made Ina a cup of tea, 'are you a Hindu?'

Ina shook her head.

Hester looked puzzled. 'Muslim?'

'Sort of.'

'How does that work?'

'Well, my family sort of dabbles in a bit of everything, I guess.'

'Oh no dear, you're not one of those 'spiritual' types are you? We have a lot of them here. 'New age' they call themselves.'

Ina laughed. 'Well, I am going to go to an Ashram after I've finished working here.'

'An Ash-ram? What religion is that— yoga?'

Ina smiled and sipped her tea; it tasted like curdled oats. She already liked Hester; it was hard not to be charmed by her sweet smile and the contradictions between her views on hippies and her possession of vegan milk. Lately though, Ina had been thinking more about these types of questions from people she liked. *Where are you from*, that was the question that got inside her; it was the implied simplicity of it that bothered her, the apparent innocence of the questioner.

Hester touched Ina's arm. 'I'm only teasing; it takes all types to make the world go round doesn't it? That's what I would have told my children, if I had ever had them.'

'You have a beautiful house,' Ina told her, partly to change the subject, but also because it was. It was just the kind of house that Ina would have liked herself, if she ever had her own place. Just the right size for one, with stripped wooden floorboards painted in different colours, chunky ceramic mugs, art on the wall.

'Thank you love. Dear Martin bought me this, I think it's my favourite of my houses.'

'You have others?'

'Yes, only two more. David bought me the little apartment in New York, and then there's the cottage in St Ives, in the UK, that my Rachel left me. I try to visit both of them when I can but I've got some friends' grandchildren living in them at the moment. They send me pictures on the SMS sometimes, all kept in good order; that was the condition of them staying there of course.'

'That's kind of you, to let them stay.'

'Why would I not, when I can. I don't need the money, can't take it with you, can you?'

'No.'

Hester opened a packet of biscuits and split them equally between herself and Ina. Ina felt slightly daunted by the height of the crumbly tower besides her mug.

'So, what's life like for you back home then, do you have a boyfriend?' Hester said, between mouthfuls.

'Not at the moment.'

'Well, he is out there for you waiting, you don't know who he is yet but he's there, just getting on with his life. That's kind of a magical thought, isn't it?'

Ina nodded. It was a sweet thought.

Ina had never had a boyfriend, and whilst people had probed and teased her about this when she was younger, once she passed twenty-five it seemed to stop. She hadn't been in one place for very long at a time, perhaps people thought she was too busy, or perhaps they had marked her out as an 'independent woman'. *That's sexy*, she remembered a guy telling her at a party once, *that whole independent woman thing*.

Ina didn't know what the man had in mind with this identification; she had only been seventeen at the time, had still been living at home, having her washing done by her parents. She had been vaguely aware that most girls her age were apparently preoccupied with getting a boyfriend but she had just figured that when it happened, it would happen. It hadn't happened, whatever it would be, but her life felt full and free.

A few times over the years friends had told her that they were in love with her, and she had always found it fairly shocking, as if something that had felt equal had been a ruse, that they had just wanted something from her all along. She had had sex a handful of times and it had been ok, but she had always felt as if she had lost as much as she had gained from it.

'Do you have a...partner now?' She asked Hester.

'Oh no, I've had such generous lovers in my life but I'm quite happy being with just myself. Of course, when I was young it was very odd not to have a husband, everyone thought I was a homosexual. Do your parents not mind, you being out here, just travelling around?'

'Why would they mind?'

'Well, they might want you to settle, start a career.'

'Oh. No, they just let us do what we want, really.'

'We?'

'Me and my brother.'

'How lovely, one of each. Are you close?'

Ina considered it for a moment. She didn't feel close to anybody in the way people appeared close in magazines, or in television shows. She had never had anybody that she would make contact with every day, or say *love you* in that easy way that she had seen women do with their friends, and sometimes with their families. Ali had always been around though, a steady constant in the background. A few times, they had got high together and talked about their childhoods and what they thought life was for.

'Yes, I suppose we are. He's very kind.'

'Well, that's lovely that is. Now—tell me— do you want a ride on my motorbike?' Hester asked.

Ina had seen the motorbike outside and presumed it must have belonged to a husband or son. She didn't know how old Hester was, but she was definitely in the 'old' category. Her face was almost entirely creased; part wrinkle, part smile.

'Don't worry; I'm in perfect health. Twenty-Twenty vision,' Hester said, leaning heavily onto the oak table to lift herself up.

'I'm not sure... ' Ina said but Hester was already collecting her leathers from the coat hook, and throwing Ina a helmet.

Hester drove them to the beach, where Mathilde and Alice were preparing a BBQ for dinner. Ina had spent the last forty minutes with her eyes closed, trying to imagine herself outside of her own body.

Mathilde was already on the beach, making a fire. 'Ina! How was the motorbike ride? Isn't it amazing, feeling the wind in your hair?'

Ina's legs were unsteady. She sat down, touched the sand. She wanted to lie flat on it. 'It was very beautiful,' she said.

Hester gave Ina's back a little thump. 'She did great. A natural. Where's Alice?'

'Still swimming,' Mathilde said, opening a packet of Hallumi.

Ina squinted at the sea; she could see a tiny speck in the distance.

'Tempted to go in?' Mathilde asked, watching her.

‘Not right now, it’s a bit chilly,’ Ina said.

‘Chilly! Oh, I love the way you guys say things. What’s that other thing— Hester! What’s that other thing that Brits say that I love?’

‘To the loo,’ Hester said through a mouthful of French bread.

‘That’s it! *To the loo*,’ Mathilde repeated to herself, giggling softly.

Alice swam back towards them and, when she got out, Ina tried to focus her eyes so that they neither appeared as if they were looking at her nakedness, nor that it was an unusual sight for them to see.

‘You better get dressed quickly,’ Mathilde shouted over to her as Alice shook out her hair onto the sand like a dog, ‘you don’t want to get *chilly*.’

Alice either didn’t hear her or didn’t care to answer, it was hard to tell with her sometimes, Ina had noticed. She came over in a towel and sat next to Ina, sand sticking to the under parts of her legs and nodded at her.

‘You found Hester alright then? I didn’t hear any screaming from the woods.’

‘Yep, she took me on her motorbike.’

Alice raised an eyebrow, ‘Wow, you’ve been fully initiated then.’ She took her towel off and pulled on a sweatshirt and some shorts in three quick steps: one, two, three. Whenever Ina had been to the beach with her family as a kid, her mum had insisted on standing next to her, holding the towel around her like a crap tent, whilst Ina fiddled about trying to pull her knickers back onto her damp legs. Alice went over to the grill, took out slices of marinated aubergine from a Tupperware and placed them onto the heat. Ina felt useless, wanted something to do with her hands.

‘Help me with this salad, love?’ Hester asked, as if reading her mind.

Ina gratefully took the cucumber and tomatoes Hester offered her.

‘There’s a lot of women here, aren’t there?’ Ina said, slicing tomatoes. ‘I haven’t seen many men about the place, I mean.’

‘Were you hoping to find a husband?’ Alice asked.

‘No, just—’

'A shag?

Hester tutted. 'Be kind, Alice.'

'It's just unusual, that's all,' Ina said.

'Don't worry, we haven't killed them off!' Mathilde said, 'It's an unusual place to live, eh? Lots of people who grew up here leave for the city and I suppose it's just been the way that those who've come here and wanted to stay have been women.'

'Not everyone can deal with being out in the sticks like this. It's a place you either get or you don't,' Alice said, and Ina heard a challenge in her voice.

When the food was made, they sat and ate, whilst Mathilde and Hester drank beer and told increasingly raucous stories, egging each other on to the next one, all of which Ina suspected had been told many times before. Ina savoured the feeling of warm food inside her belly and the breeze on her back, the salt of the cheese and the smell of the sea and remembered to laugh at the right places. Alice just drank her beer and shook her head every now and again.

When it got dark, Mathilde and Hester got up to leave.

'I'm staying for a bit,' Alice told Ina, 'You can walk back with Mathilde— I wouldn't recommend a ride with Hester right now, not this early into your life,' she said as they watched Hester fall over, to both her and Mathilde's delight.

'Should she really be driving back like this?' Ina asked, slightly horrified.

'There's nobody else on the road; Hester's eighty- four— if it's her time, it's her time,' Alice said.

'Right. Well, I think I'll stay for a bit, if that's ok.'

Alice nodded. 'It gets cold, but the stars are real nice.'

The shrieks and laughter faded and then stopped completely, signalling that Hester and Mathilde had succeeded in leaving the beach, and Ina said a prayer to herself that they got home safe.

Ina and Alice sat in silence a while and then Alice said, 'I guess it felt like something new to be around all these women...fulfilled something in me maybe.'

Ina was learning that Alice mapped out conversations in the same way that she wrote directions; it took a kind of abandonment of expectations to follow.

'It was just me and my dad growing up,' Alice said, by way of an explanation.

'Can I ask what happened to your mum?'

'Why wouldn't you be able to ask?'

Ina didn't reply.

'Sorry. She got a bit funny in the head, after the birth— after giving birth to me. Threw herself off a car park.'

'Fuck.'

'Yep. Fuck.'

There was a silence and then Alice said; 'It's a funny sort of grief, when you don't know somebody, but they made you. Guess you can grieve for all that you didn't have, but its not the same.'

Ina thought back to scattering her grandmother's ashes. They had travelled to Scotland, which her grandmother had had some deep affinity with that Ina couldn't completely understand the history of, had spent the whole week there, mostly arguing with her family, with an occasional interruption for a walk, undertaken in passive aggressive silence. Ina had got stung by a jellyfish, Ali had stormed off on his own and come back covered in ticks and their mum had freaked out, convinced that he was going to get Lyme disease. Her parents had argued every night when her and Ali were in bed. They rented a boat to scatter the ashes and nobody could start it for ages... The one moment of peace was when they finally made it out onto the water. Pouring the ashes into the loch, watching them fall. Ina had had a series of obvious yet revelatory thoughts, in those minutes that had stayed with her. These ashes were not her grandmother but everything that her grandmother had been was possible because of a body that was now these ashes. All she had loved and been and done, all she had gone through; the babies she had grown, the many countries she had travelled to, the people she had loved, the racism she had faced... it had all become this.

'You know that thing when you have to do a presentation and people say imagine your audience naked or having a shit?' Ina said.

Alice looked at her. 'No,' she said 'I don't really live a presentation giving kind of life'.

'No. Well, me neither. But it's a thing people say, when you know, you feel intimidated by people. It must be to do with remembering that everyone is just a body, like you know, vulnerable. But when I feel angry about these people with the power and how they just don't seem capable of imagining themselves in anyone else's shoes, I do this thing now where I picture them as ashes. How all of us; rich, poor, refugee, celebrity—we're all going to dissolve into this little identical pot of ash. And I just look at people in their suits, or whatever, and I see them falling into ashes and dissolving into the sea. And it makes me calm.'

Alice took a long drink of beer.

'It must sound a bit weird,' Ina said.

'Well, a bit, yes,' Alice said but there was some hardness in her voice that had gone.

'You must have been close with your dad though, being just you two I mean?' Ina dared to press.

'It wasn't just us; I have an older brother. But I suppose me and my dad are as close as a pot-smoking queer and a Republican can get.'

'Right. So is it you that's the pot-smoking queer or...?' Ina said, with her best impression of Alice's blank-face.

Alice stared at her moment and then let out a short cackle. 'Funny,' she said and Ina concentrated on not losing her cool.

'I have a brother too,' Ina offered 'also older.'

'Yeah? What's he like?'

'Kind,' Ina said 'and maybe a bit lost.'

Alice shrugged. 'Everyone's a *bit* lost. A bit lost is ok.'

'He plays a lot of video games. I asked him to come away with me, actually. I think it would have been good for him to see a bit of the world. But he wouldn't.'

'He'll do what he's got to do. Life is long.'

Ina smiled. 'I like that. Yeah, I guess it is.'

They sat in the stillness for a while, listened to the waves roll, the trees blowing in the wind. The beach at night; there was something about that.

'Nick, that's my brother, he has bipolar. Its alright between us, he knows he can talk to me straight. But my dad treats him like he's from some sort of other planet.'

'Is that... because of your mum?'

'Nah, there was nothing different about her, from what I hear. My dad and her, they were high school sweethearts, had their good and proper conservative life all planned out, until I came along and blew the whole thing out of the water. 'Freak accident' that's what my dad called it. Took me until I was almost grown to work out what had happened.'

'That's hard,' Ina said.

'Could be a lot harder. We get by alright really.'

Ina picked up a shell next to her, ran her finger across its smoothness.

'Ali is deaf; uses sign language', she said, 'my parents never learnt. It's not that they didn't care... but you know they were already different, not being from here, I mean England. They were really into the good immigrant thing you know, fitting in. So they wanted that for us; they didn't want Ali to stand out anymore than he did. So I think they tried to sort of bring him up as if he were hearing. But I think it makes them sad now— that they can't really sign. Because in the end, they've missed out on a lot of who he is.'

'Can't they learn now?'

'Maybe ...but I think that would mean admitting to themselves that maybe they should have done it a long time ago, thinking about everything they missed out on. So maybe it's easier to just not think about it.'

Alice didn't say anything, just went on drinking her beer, but Ina could tell she was

listening from the quality of the silence. Ina looked at the sky. All those years in cities not being able to see the stars, forgetting they were even there. That was something that Ina found hard to think about.

‘Apparently there’s kids in Maine that have never seen the sea; grow up right next to it I mean, but never got taken,’ Alice said.

‘Really?’

‘That’s what I read somewhere.’

Ina lay down on her back, the sand was cold, but the air was still warm.

‘We’re pretty lucky, huh?’ Alice said.

Ina nodded. They stayed there without saying anything for a while, and then Alice lay down next to Ina and kissed her. Ina noticed the colour of Alice’s eyes for the first time; they were brown, but dappled with flacks of yellow. Ina kissed her back, eyes closed now, and made a note to look again tomorrow; she wanted to see how they changed in the light.

*

Ina didn’t know if Alice was deliberately ignoring her, but for the next few days she couldn’t find her anywhere. She could tell she was somewhere on the farm, because the jobs had been done and there were crumbs left by the sink where she had made her lunch, but she didn’t come to get Ina when it was time to stop like she usually did. Instead, Ina stopped her tasks when it was time, went into the house that was open as usual, and made herself a sandwich, taking it outside to eat on the grass alone. In the afternoons, she went down to the beach and swam and sketched the seals on the rocks. She had found a cove down a cliff path that she had to herself, and she swam naked for the first time in her life; the seals looked at her in the same curious way that they always did.

Ina bumped into Hester on the way back from the beach one afternoon, who insisted she come back to her house, where she plied Ina with more biscuits (she put them in bowls now), and endless cups of tea. She showed Ina photo albums filled with pictures of her and her lovers throughout her life. Ina couldn’t quite get a grasp of the tangible parts of Hester’s life: what job she had done, who her parents were, where she

was actually from; she seemed to have danced through life as a type of glamorous nymph, eliciting delight and generosity all over the world.

When she got back to the farm, late that night, she saw that Alice's car wasn't in the drive. In the morning, Ina began to plot her next moves. She booked the dates at the Ashram, looked up transport there. She was contemplating packing up and going over to Mathilde's house to ask for a lift to the nearest main road when Mathilde herself appeared in the drive way.

'Hey there love! I've come to help you today,' she called out the window, whilst reversing into the bins.

Ina walked down to the drive and put the bins upright again, waited until Mathilde was out of the car, and greeted her with a hug. It was so good to see her.

'Do you know where Alice is?' Ina asked.

'She's gone to town today, asked me to help out whilst she's gone. Didn't she tell you?'

'No.'

'Oh, that Alice, she is terrible sometimes.'

'I haven't seen her since Monday, I didn't know what had happened.'

'Monday! She just rang me this morning!' Mathilde made a tutting sound, 'Alice, Alice. I've told her so many times; she needs to learn to communicate. In her own world she is.'

'Do you know when she's home?'

'Well, she did say tomorrow.'

'Ok.'

Mathilde looked at her kindly. 'You poor thing— you must have been freaking out here all alone. But its all good for that inner resolve, you know— resilience!' Mathilde said, turning towards her and crashing backwards into the closed porch door.

Alice did appear the next day, although it was late into the evening before she knocked on Ina's cabin door

'You alright?' she said.

'Not really,' Ina said.

'What's wrong?'

'I haven't seen you for days; I had no idea where you were until Mathilde came over yesterday.'

'I left you a note.'

'Where?'

'In here.'

Ina looked around, pointlessly. 'I didn't see one.'

'Well, you don't keep the cabin in the best shape; stuff is all over the place in there, probably got lost under everything. Anyway, I'm back now. Had to go to town.'

'I was alone in a strange place with no idea where you were or when you would be back,' Ina said, overcome with shame as her voice started to break.

'I'm sorry,' Alice said, looking embarrassed for a second. 'Look, I was in a bit of a funny space, needed to clear my head.'

'Oh. Do you want to talk about anything?'

'No thank you. I'm fine now.'

'Right', Ina said, 'well— glad you're feeling better now.'

'Yeah.'

'Well good night then.'

'Yep,' said Alice, turning and walking away.

Ina sat on her bed and cried until it stopped feeling like a release, until she felt nothing at all. The silence all around her was overpowering, she suddenly felt as if she were in a complete void of nothingness. She was nothing, really. The sum of her parts was not

enough to make her whole. She could float away right now and perhaps it would make a news headline or two, her parents would grieve, but nothing would be disrupted. The animals and the birds would still be there in the darkness as they were before, breathing and hunting.

There was a knock on the door, and then it opened before she had a chance to say anything at all.

‘You’re supposed to wait for a reply you know,’ Ina told Alice as she stood in the doorway.

‘I’m sorry,’ Alice said.

Ina shrugged. Then— ‘But you can come in.’

Alice looked at the floor, and Ina followed her gaze. She hadn’t gotten around to putting away her boots yet, and the indecision around staying or going had led to a bit of a trail of clothes in general.

‘Sorry,’ she mumbled, as she went to clear a pathway.

Alice stepped towards her. They stood, next to each other by the bed, not saying anything, as if waiting for something.

‘I don’t know you,’ Alice said.

‘I guess not,’ Ina said.

‘I’ve liked you being around though. I like the way you...you know.’

‘I don’t know.’

Alice gestured uncomfortably, her hands moving up and down, into the pockets of her overalls, out again. ‘The way you make sandwiches,’ she said.

Ina laughed out loud. ‘Right.’

Alice suppressed a smile, bit her thumb. ‘And I like the way you water the lettuces, how you bend down to each one. You take ages, like a real long time, but you look like you care about them. And I like those shorts you wear, those tatty hippy tie-dye things. I like your legs in them. And I like your butt.’

'I like your lips,' Ina said, kissing her.

'I'm not a relationship person', Alice said, kissing her back.

'I don't know what I am,' Ina said, pushing her onto the bed.

In the morning, Ina awoke to Alice already dressed in waterproof overalls bringing her a cup of tea and a piece of jam on toast in bed. She placed the mug on the floor next to Ina's mattress and handed her the toast on a piece of kitchen roll.

'Better have this and get up, rains coming in soon,' Alice told her.

'Right ok,' Ina said.

'Supposed to be heavy for a few days so I might get you to do some stuff in the house for a bit. Wood work, if you fancy it,' Alice continued, sitting down on the mattress.

Ina looked down at the puddle of jam on her toast. 'When you...weren't here, I booked my dates at the Ashram. I'm supposed to be there on Monday,' Ina said, as the tea burnt the back of her mouth.

Alice nodded. 'Oh right then. When will you be leaving— this weekend?'

'If that's ok?'

Alice laughed. 'I'm not your mother, you do what you like.'

'I mean because... because it takes time training people up you said. I can wait until Monday; help you with the house stuff over the weekend? I can be a day late.'

Alice shook her head. 'Mathilde is driving to Oguincuit on Saturday; it will be easier to travel on from there. No point you hanging on just for the weekend.'

'Ok. I can come back, afterwards.'

'After what?'

'After the Ashram...its non-refundable so I have to go now.'

'You saying you don't want to?'

'I don't know.'

'It will be good for you. Been to one before myself, makes you see life a bit differently. Just don't get sucked up by it...well, that's me. Maybe you'll want that to be your life.'

'I don't think so. I think I'll just be a few weeks. Do you have volunteers booked in for next month?'

'Not yet.'

'Ok, well I'll keep in touch.'

'Do what you like, come back if that's what you want. But there's other places to see. Keep going— that's my advice'.

*

Hester also decided to come along for the trip to town, and her and Mathilde's continuous background chatter accompanied Ina all the way to Oguincuit, giving her time to follow the web of her own thoughts. During the drive Ina felt a swell of gratitude rise inside her towards both of them; for the continuity of their characters, for the amount of visitors they must have put at ease in their lives. It really was a skill, this ability to just talk, without necessarily having anything to say. When they dropped Ina off at the hostel she had booked for the night, Ina was wrapped in an all-enveloping hug by them both.

'You take good care of yourself, ok?' Mathilde said 'and you know, you've always got a home with us.'

'Thank you so much, both of you. You've been so lovely to me...'

They waved her compliments off. 'Don't be silly,' said Hester 'Now—tell us. What are you going to do with yourself this evening?'

'I think I'll just hang around in the hostel; get some sleep before the journey tomorrow.'

'Oh you must get down to the beach while you're here,' Mathilde said as Hester nodded vigorously, her oversized sunhat bobbing up and down.

'Ok then, I will,' Ina said as they embraced her one last time.

'See you somewhere along the road, honey!' they shouted out the car, both of their heads out the window, their faces beaming, hands waving furiously.

*

Ina checked herself in, dumped her stuff on the floor and lay on the metal bunk bed, trying to summon the energy to get down and see the beach. She would need to pick up something to eat anyway. She plugged her phone in; she hadn't turned it on in a few days. There were messages from her parents: *Ring us Ina! We hope you haven't been abducted*; her dad's idea of humor.

And from Ali; *What's up? Miss you.*

A couple of friends had messaged her too: Nadine, from school, and Ed, Ali's housemate. She read them all over a few times, allowed herself to absorb the knowledge that she was cared about. Alice didn't have a mobile phone, and it brought a certain comfort, to know Ina wouldn't be waiting for something she would never get. She had enough. Her life was full, and free.

Ina left her phone to charge, she would reply to the messages later. She grabbed a towel and her purse and headed off to have a last swim before the next part of her journey.

The Interpreter

Are you deaf or hearing is such a standard question amongst deafies that Andrew often forgets its weight but today he is feeling the heaviness of his hearing status, the dis-ease of his accidental power. Andrew is at a deaf school, interpreting a meeting at what seems to be a disciplinary meeting for some parents. They are hearing, the parents that is— all of them actually, there is just one deaf guy, youngish, the class teacher.

Andrew doesn't know anything about child protection; he doesn't really know anything about anything, he is just a breathing translation service, but he is experiencing an intense feeling —is it intuition or just picking up on the bad vibes— that he is struggling to get a handle on. Whatever it is it is clear to him that one: the parents are quite clearly abusive, and two: nothing is going to change as a result of this meeting. He really feels quite nauseous, a deep unshakeable feeling of dread, as it occurs to him that actually everybody in this room already knows this, but that nothing will change.

It is not his place to pass judgment of any kind, passing judgment is not usually what he has any desire to do, but he has an overwhelming sense that he wants to stop the meeting and say — *excuse me, can you not see what is going on here?* Actually he has an overwhelming fear that he is really going to do this; he can see himself standing up and shouting, with the same vividness with which he occasionally sees himself standing up and jumping off the side of the underground platform. He doesn't stand up of course. It is only an hour and then the meeting has ended and he leaves the school, as quickly as he can.

*

For a long time, Andrew didn't live anywhere; or he lived everywhere, depending on your choice of semantics. He had been 'an adventurer', as he liked to describe himself in his head, or 'a bum', as his grandma liked to describe him to his face. For three years now though he had lived in the same flat in north London with a flat mate called *Jorge*, which is how the Dutch spell *George*. Jorge is very direct and has a permanent smile on his face, even when he is saying things like 'the politicians in this country are really bastards, no?' and 'hey mate, your shit is all over the floor, please clear up ok?'

Andrew had met Jorge through a flat share site, shortly before he met Sabine on a

hook up app. Sabine was also very direct and foreign, although German, not Dutch. Andrew liked Sabine a lot but he didn't particularly like that they had met online. He still found it embarrassing when he had to tell people and he would have much preferred that they had met somewhere interesting and romantic. It was especially annoying because Andrew had been to many interesting and romantic places and had never met anyone that he was as interested in being romantic with as he was with Sabine.

She had messaged him first; apparently unusual for a woman in these places, (if dating apps could be considered places), but Sabine was unusual.

Are you deaf? Sabine had written.

Andrew had been immediately creeped out— what exactly did these apps know about him? Had they been recording his conversations? He had deleted the app instantly in disgust, and then remembered that British Sign Language was one of the things he had listed under the 'interesting things about me' section. He had reinstalled it and written:

No. Are you?

Sabine was not deaf, but she had been as a baby, when she was given up for adoption and grew up with deaf parents in her small hometown. It transpired that it was childhood deafness, a condition that can be grown out of, and so she had lived between the hearing and deaf worlds. Sabine had the sort of life that someone might make a film about and the sort of reason for learning to sign that made a lot of sense. Andrew was the kind of person who had to be described for several minutes before anyone knew who he was, (oh *that* Andrew), and if asked what made him learn to sign, generally mumbled something like *oh I just like languages, I guess*.

He often felt tempted to allude to a family member or even a mysterious stranger that had touched his heart, but he really did just like languages. Perhaps he enjoyed the certain level of secrecy or the suggestion of exoticism that multiple languages allowed. Mostly though his love of language was intrinsically connected to his love of travel. To say that he *loved to travel* felt infantile, reductive, like saying he liked chocolate; who didn't? But there weren't many people who had spent the best part of their career-defining years moving from place to place. The majority of people that Andrew had observed in his many years of odd jobs and dirty hostels had become visibly unhappy and aimless after a few months, but Andrew had just kept on going. So he knew that not

everyone loved travelling to the extent that he did. That not everyone felt the same intense sense of purpose and joy when sitting on a train heading somewhere unknown; nor the same thrill when picking up phrases in a new language. For Andrew, to travel was to fall into the gentle oblivion of another self, like falling into water, fully submerged in its protective softness. He had of course, at times, been aware that serious things were playing out over at the shore, but none of them had ever had anything to do with him.

The catalyst for his initial return, the reason he booked a plane ticket out of Vietnam, was his mum having a health scare— it turned out to be a false alarm, but he was already back by then. Really though, something had already begun to turn inside of him. Things on the shore had started to become louder, he had felt the need to move between places more quickly than he had usually done, yet had felt dissatisfied when he arrived. So he had stayed around at his mums for Christmas, the first he had spent in the gloom of four pm darkness for over a decade, and then a friend had offered him some work, then he had found this flat-share. And then, a lonely, hangover inspired impulse to download the dating app on New Years Day led him to meeting Sabine.

Their first date was at a pub he had pulled from a Google search, and his heart had sunk when he arrived. He was oblivious to sporting events so had no idea that tiny men would be running around inside the giant TVs all over the walls, or that real life ones would be jumping up and down and shouting at them. Sabine kept saying *what please* and frowning, and they had eventually resorted to communicating in a rudimentary mixture of British and German sign language. This had been quite amusing, in a way, but still Andrew had thought he had clearly blown it. Yet somehow he ended up back at her house, where they had sex on her sofa.

Afterwards, she had brought him a chamomile tea, perhaps an inverted form of nightcap, and told him that she had spent her youth bringing up her daughter and she wasn't interested in anything *serious*. Andrew had nodded and sipped his tea, concentrating on translating the Goethe quote on his mug. *Zwei Dinge sollen Kinder von*

ihren Eltern bekommen: Wurzeln und Flügel; there are two things parents should give their children: roots and wings.

'Do you understand?' Sabine had asked him.

'Sure, I understand,' Andrew had replied.

It had been almost three years since that time on her sofa now, a fairly serious amount of time, but Andrew supposed their relationship had always lacked sincerity in the ways that mattered: they didn't live together, neither marriage nor children were, or ever would be on the cards, and Sabine made her own plans for the weekend before asking what he was doing. Andrew felt cared for in other ways, though. Sabine was a potter and psychotherapist (Andrew enjoyed the semi- alliteration), and on birthdays she would present him with a new mug or a bowl that she had made especially for him. When he ate his porridge or drank his coffee from them it was like having her in his kitchen with him, almost. Sabine had such a *solidness* to her, and Andrew was sure it was translated into her creations; they had a certain chunkiness, as if they wouldn't break if dropped (although a mug had, once, and almost reduced Andrew to tears), and they always had just the right proportions so that placing his hands around them felt satisfying. As for the psychotherapist thing— he had to admit there was definitely a slight irritation in being analysed. It wasn't so much the times where she did it explicitly, but more the general sense he felt sometimes when he was talking; that she was mentally ticking notes off a checklist. But there was a difference in being analysed and being judged.

Mostly, he loved to listen to Sabine talk. At first it had puzzled him how captivating her thoughts were despite her manner of delivery; so often she spoke about such emotional issues, in such a detached and unemotional way. Later, he began to realize that this was part of what made listening to her so easy for him. Andrew's parents had broken up when he was four, but apparently they had once been very in love— *madly*, his auntie had told him— *they used to just stare into each other's eyes for hours*. He found some solace in this version of his parents, but in a similar way he had once found solace in Father Christmas or the tooth fairy; he could imagine what they might look like if he really tried, but deep down he didn't really believe it was true.

If there were a list of skills Andrew could compile from his parents' divorce,

knowing how to avoid difficult subjects would be number one. He could sense a dangerous topic approaching from the slightest change in intonation, could work out several stages before a subject was raised how it could end up there, and how to throw it off course before it did. If he were a more strategic or competitive person he might think of learning to play chess.

When Andrew had come back from his travels he had decided rent payments probably warranted some form of regular job, and so he had finished off the sign language exams he had done in half-hearted dribs and drabs in between trips abroad. Finally, a few months ago, he had received his certification as a registered interpreter. Sabine hadn't said the words 'I'm proud of you' but she had made him a carrot cake, and drawn a thumbs up in icing.

Andrew liked that Sabine knew what his job actually involved, that she had some insight into the Deaf community. Usually people he told either thought he was 'that little person on the side of the telly' or, even worse, that he must be a 'really good person'. The truth was that Andrew was endowed with no particularly strong moral compass; sometimes he would sit and have a chat with a homeless person, and once he had taken a hedgehog he found in the street to the vet... he hadn't been able to pay the bill though. He did feel a strong pang of guilt about that every so often, but the longer it went on, the weirder he felt it would be to turn up at the practice with the cash for what he imagined was now a naturally deceased hedgehog.

Anyway. Most of his days were spent listening to opinions he would feel obliged to disagree with were they presented outside of work, and it was an immense relief to know he was expected, quite specifically, to let them roll over him, to simply pass them across to the intended recipient. Really he was a glorified postman, delivering letters with no right to interrogate the contents.

'We have similar jobs in that way,' he had told Sabine once, quite pleased with himself for the observation. 'You must have to listen to clients you don't agree with at all, but you can't let them know that.'

Sabine had listened dutifully with her respectful therapist face.

'Perhaps', she had said evenly, 'but my job doesn't translate into my private life. You on the other hand', she said pointing a slim finger at him- composure lost slightly, 'whenever anything remotely political comes up in *social* situations, you leave the room.'

'No, I don't,' said Andrew, knowing he did.

Sabine shook her head. 'Last week, when Sam started his ranting about 'benefit scroungers,' you disappeared almost instantly.'

'I needed the loo,' Andrew said.

She rolled her eyes. 'Well, on any of the multiple occasions your dad makes some entirely dubious statement, do you ever try to convince him that perhaps some of his views might be totally digested from those raggy papers?'

Andrew laughed. 'Raggy?'

'Oh, whatever they are called.'

'He's old, there's no point.'

Sabine sighed. 'Well, you are suited to your job, that's not a bad thing,' she said in a tone that made him suspect that in fact she thought it was.

'My dad's different,' Andrew said. 'I'm not close to him; you know that. But my mum, I do, you know, make more of an effort to challenge her on stuff.'

'Like what?'

'The Germany thing', he said uncomfortably. 'How you know, she was a bit funny about Germany.'

'Was? And anyway, that is something I find quite understandable, as I told you,' Sabine said.

The *Germany thing* was that Deborah had been rather disconcerted when he told her he was dating Sabine. She didn't say anything but she didn't have to; she had never been good at keeping her thoughts separate from her face. Of course she would never have said *I don't like German people* but in her youth she had travelled almost as much as

Andrew had, and had never been to Germany. Any interaction that she had with a German person always seemed to be, apparently coincidentally, negative- they were always very bossy, or mean; ‘terrifying’ she called a woman who moved into the same village as her.

‘But she isn’t a bigot— far from it,’ Andrew had tried to explain to Sabine, the first time they had discussed their families in any detail.

He had downed several pints before he had attempted this explanation and his thoughts had become hazy.

‘I just wanted you to know, it’s nothing personal if she is a bit *off* with you,’ he had said. ‘She’ll love you once she gets to know you’.

‘Well, that’s unsurprising,’ Sabine had said, not remotely flustered as she broke the top of her *crème brulee* with a spoon.

‘How do you mean?’

‘Andrew,’ she said, ‘your mother is a child of holocaust survivors. What makes you think she would be dashing off to try sauerkraut and schnitzel?’

Andrew had squirmed in his plush chair. It was early days and they were at an uncomfortably posh restaurant—Sabine’s suggestion— (she would never have admitted it, but she definitely made efforts to impress him in those first couple of months.)

‘She loves sauerkraut, actually; bit of a staple of my diet growing up—not so much the schnitzel, but that was more of a vegetarian thing than the German thing,’ Andrew said.

Sabine smiled politely at his non-joke.

‘But, you can’t just go around disliking all Germans for what the *Nazis* did,’ he continued, whispering the word *Nazis*. ‘I mean, isn’t that kind of racist in itself? Not that my mum is a racist,’ he added quickly.

‘Not rationally you can’t, no, but trauma isn’t rational. And it doesn’t sound like your mother has ever said that she actually thinks all Germans are to blame?’

'No, of course not! She would never say that...but I've seen her almost *shudder* when she hears German being spoken,' he admitted.

Sabine ate her desert and nodded calmly. 'Yes, sounds very typical, very ordinary. It would be good for her to visit Germany one day; managed well, it could be quite a healing experience for her.'

'Maybe,' he said doubtfully.

'Why don't you suggest taking her?' Sabine said.

Andrew laughed. 'What, clubbing in Berlin?'

'I think you're both a bit old for that, don't you?' Sabine said with a wry smile, her face crinkling slightly, despite itself. 'Anyway, just an idea. In the meantime, I am in no rush to meet your mother,' she said, in her Sabine manner— *blunt as a pencil* his mother would say, when the two of them would eventually meet.

In the meantime Andrew's mother started to become increasingly curious about Sabine.

'And how is Sabine?' She would ask, every time Andrew went to see her.

'She's well thank you— very busy,' Andrew would always add, perhaps to make their not meeting appear simply a mundane infortune, a clashing of diary schedules.

'Yes— that's the thing of today isn't it, being busy,' Deborah would reply, with disdain— and then—'but I suppose I'm just jealous. What have I done in the last fifteen years since you left home? Nothing. All I can remember is walking endlessly up and down the stairs.'

'It must have been very strange for Sabine, growing up with deaf parents,' she had commented another time.

'What do you mean?' Andrew had asked.

'I mean, for her sense of identity. I realize now that that was part of the reason I married your dad, you know.'

Andrew didn't know. Deborah had sighed, perhaps to indicate that Andrew was being slow.

'I *mean*, because he was Jewish in the same sort of *not really* way that I was too—I suppose I must have been drawn to him because of that. I suppose you must have been drawn to Sabine because of the' — she had wiggled her hands and face around—presumably to indicate signing.

'I guess so,' Andrew had replied because he wanted to keep the peace, but it made him feel pretty depressed to think that relationships could be boiled down to lists of incidental similarities. He may not be able to quite believe that his parents used to spend hours staring into each other's eyes, but it seemed even more outlandish that this apparent infatuation was because of them both 'sort of' being Jewish.

He could list things he liked about Sabine, of course he could, but he felt that each of them were generic and silly, really, when put into a list: the sound of her voice on the phone, how she couldn't pronounce the words *regularly* and *prejudice*, the way her eyebrows always shot up before she presented an argument, the dimple in her right bum cheek. *You cannot describe the taste of sugar*, his dad liked to say.

*

'Marriage is a legal contract,' Sabine had said when he asked if she would be his date at his friend Henry's wedding next month, 'a legal contract invented for men to own women. If people want to continue with this tradition for some kind of tax purposes, then fine— but why do they need an audience?'

Andrew had nodded, and tried to push an image of Sabine in a wedding dress out of his mind. He would find himself imagining similar images more and more often now; often it was the two of them kissing in front of his friends, or sometimes him making a speech and everyone applauding.

'Sure,' he said, 'you're right. But there will be really good food and I would really like your company, so will you come?'

'I don't want you to be lonely,' Sabine had replied, 'so I'll come to this one.'

*

Andrew had very little to do with Sabine's daughter, Martha. She had just turned fifteen when they met; that gawky, self-conscious stage that made Andrew feel physically quite

uncomfortable to be reminded of. He had not enjoyed being a teenager himself. Martha had finished her A-levels in June and the last few months were probably the most time Andrew had ever spent around her. He had, albeit guiltily, been quite literally counting down the days until she left for university. She had spent this limbo time seemingly physically attached to the sofa, her legs dropping over the edge, her hand half way between her mouth and the giant plastic bowls on the floor, filled with a revolving selection of over-priced vegan snacks. Andrew was not used to her presence in the house, and he had to admit that he found it deeply irritating to watch her, and her various assortment of sprawling, long-limbed friends, draped over each other and doing whatever it is they did on their phones: texting each other from the same room, or *memes* perhaps.

‘I’m letting her have her freedom,’ Sabine had said firmly, sensing his annoyance. ‘Youth is very short, you know.’

Yes but Martha is very tall, Andrew thought.

Sabine had left Martha’s dad when Martha was four; Sabine had said she found it *noteworthy* that this was the same age as Andrew was when his own parents separated.

‘Parental break up is not a single act of course,’ Sabine had explained once, ‘not for the child and not for the parents. They are tied to each other through their children, even when their children are no longer children themselves— even when their children have children. A break up without a child, you can normally get over this within a relatively small period of time,’ she continued, ‘but when there is a child, the parent is forever bound to re-visiting this moment of trauma.’

The casual way in which Sabine used the word ‘trauma’ made Andrew’s stomach twist. He knew what trauma could be and it wasn’t parents living in separate houses. Yet it was helpful for him, to hear Sabine’s explanation of divorce in such clinical terms. It made it possible for him to see his parents as people who had simply become caught up in a phenomenon that was bigger than either of them, and within whose clutches had acted entirely normally. What had always followed him round like some un-namable illness, a secret shame, became simply a set of symptoms with a perfectly rationale cause.

*

Since Andrew's mum had retired, her thoughts seemed to have travelled back increasingly to her past. They went further back than her time with Andrew's dad, and even past her own childhood, right back to her parents, and beyond. Often they seemed to be still connected with her ex-husband's family history, as if the two of them, so broken for so many years, were nevertheless connected; were so even before either of them was born.

When she gets in these states, often she will ring Andrew; frequently when he is on his way to work, or about to have a shower, and he will say *Hello; I'm just in the middle of something right now, I'll call you later* and she will appear not to hear, to be driven by whatever it is that has been pressing on her mind for days. Seemingly whatever it was, it had such strength that she needed to share it, this particular thing, and right now. Like this time a few weeks ago, when he was on his way to interpret at a care home.

'I was just thinking about your dad's family in Switzerland; did you ever hear about his cousin Peter?'

'I don't think so?' Andrew had said, walking down to the landing, zipping up his coat.

'He wrote to your dad's family in Switzerland to ask, well beg, for help. They said they would take his children but not him or his wife; do you know why?'

'No?' He said, balancing the phone on my shoulder as he unlocked the door.

'They didn't have any money—the relative in Germany that is—not the family in Switzerland. He was a bit like you were for all those years; just sort of floating around; they were 'arty types', you know?'

'Right,' Andrew said, walking down the street, trying to eat an apple quietly. Deborah had told Andrew before she found it very irritating when he ate on the phone—*would you like to listen to the sound of someone slobbering in your ear?*

She was full flow now, so Andrew muted her briefly to have a quick look on his maps.

'And of course you couldn't get out without money,' she was saying when he put her sound back, 'there was nowhere that would take you unless you had really quite a

lot of money—or rich connections. But the one thing they had going for them was that they didn't look Jewish—you know, no black hair or hooked nose.'

Andrew had jumped on the bus, found an empty seat near the back.

'So they took jobs doing whatever they could...and what he could get was as a photographer. And this photographer job; it was taking photos of other Jewish people, for their ID cards'. She paused. 'You know what I mean by this of course?'

She had his attention now. 'He worked for the... *Nazis*?' Andrew said, looking around the bus. Everyone was safely engrossed in a headphone stupor.

'They would have been living on a *knife's edge*. But the family in Switzerland, they said he was a traitor. I don't think he was a traitor; I think he did what he had to do to survive. Don't you think?' She said.

'Yes,' Andrew said.

There was a pause on the line and then Deborah said, 'it just makes me rather sad, when people don't use what they have, when they have it. Do you know what I mean?'

'Yes,' Andrew said.

*

'How are you feeling about Martha leaving?' Andrew had asked Sabine the other evening, as it suddenly occurred to him with a pang of guilt that she may not be feeling as excited about her sofa being vacated as he was.

'Fine,' Sabine said. 'Do you want to watch that terrible capitalist program you like?' she asked and switched on *The Apprentice* without waiting for an answer.

*

It was Friday but Andrew had no bookings today; he was half expecting something to come up that morning but by half nine nobody had called him and so he switched his phone off and claimed the day as his own.

He made a flask of tea and cycled over to the Heath, locked his bike up near the men's ponds and walked up to the top of parliament hill. He only had trainers on and the grass was wet with dew; he could feel that the water had seeped through to his

socks by the time he reached the top but he didn't mind. Being out in a public space during a working week, being free to wander aimlessly, it was almost like travelling. He felt a little thrill in his stomach as he sat on the bench and looked across the skyline. Two women in running gear walked past him, and one of them said to the other, *do you know how much I would love to live my life like this all the time?*

He sat and drank his tea and when he was finished wandered in a loop through the woods and back across the fields. A teenage couple were sitting on a bench, the boy's arm draped around the girl's shoulder. The girl was laughing in the sardonic manner that only teenagers can, and doing an impression of her dad, *he was like 'my daughter my daughter' and he lay on the bed crying*, she was saying. As he walked past them a man shoved past him, beer cans in a plastic bag, cigarette in mouth.

Sonder—that was the word someone had invented recently; from the German - special- and the French- to probe. *The profound feeling of realizing that everyone, including strangers passed in the street, has a life as complex as one's own.* Andrew was sure that people watching was akin to listening to music, or lying on the ground. He felt it did something similar to his nervous system; perhaps because all of these activities reminded him of being a child and the dreaminess of the summer holidays. Whilst his schoolmates had boasted of hotels and flights abroad, Andrew didn't see another country until he was eighteen, when he had seen them all. Until then, he had passed his summer days lying in his back garden, following ants carrying food and spiders weaving webs with his eyes, whilst his ears listened to the conversations from the neighbour's gardens. In those moments he felt like a passenger to each of these worlds: the busyness of the ants, the skilful industriousness of the spider, the everyday dramas of each of his neighbours.

As he walks back up— to get just one more look down from Parliament hill— it dawns on Andrew that travel for him had been a way of trying to understand everything, whilst simultaneously avoiding it all. As if by passing through he could capture the world by osmosis. Had he really believed that by always being the visitor, never the expert he could understand it all without...what? Risking anything? But what had been the risk from the start; that was what he couldn't yet unravel.

*

As he dials the number, he is shaking but he puts two feet on the floor as if it will ground him. He imagines what the woman on the other end of the line looks like, her voice is calm and neutral; he feels very young ringing her, although he is not, and she doesn't sound old. Perhaps she is the same age as him, or she could easily be younger, of course.

'I don't want to waste your time, it's probably nothing,' Andrew was telling the woman, 'but I just can't stop thinking about it.'

'You're not wasting our time, Sir. What would you like to tell me?'

How long had the woman been taking these kinds of calls? Was it long enough to make guesses about what was serious and what was paranoia? What about the harrowing stories she heard, did they become real to her, did she take them home to her dreams, or did she leave them at the desk, facts typed into a computer?

'It's just I was working at a school on Monday— I'm an interpreter— and I just had a feeling, and wondered if... I think it needs to be investigated. Just in case.'

*

They normally spend Friday evenings together, but Sabine is driving Martha to university today. Andrew told her that he could have dinner made for when she got back from the drive but she said she would get something en route.

'I'll be knackered after that ridiculous drive,' she had said, 'I'll just want to get into bed.'

When he gets home, he heats himself up an M&S ready meal in the microwave and settles down in front of *Master Chef*.

Just as he is contemplating the acceptability of going to bed at nine pm, Sabine rings him.

'Hello?'

'Can you come over?' A small voice that sounds only marginally like Sabine says.

'What's happened?' Andrew says, his chest dropping into his stomach.

'Nothing *happened*,' Sabine says, sounding more like herself. 'I just came back from dropping Martha off and—'

Her voice faltered.

'I'll be right over,' Andrew says.

He knocks on the door but there is no answer, so he uses his key, the one Sabine had explicitly told him was not an invitation to '*pop over*', and calls out her name. The small-almost-Sabine-sounding-voice acknowledges him from the living room, and there she is: the woman he loves, in pint size; on the floor, under a blanket, arms wrapped around knees.

He crouches down besides her.

'Sabine?' He says; 'can I get you anything?'

'Just hold me,' she whispers.

So he does.

In This Place

Without the liberation of women within society, no society can call itself free. "Jin, jiyar, azadi!" you'll hear the Kurdish people shout. "Women, life, freedom!"

Meral Duzgun, Galdem

I tell my sister that I spend my time learning Kurdish, growing vegetables and writing my diary. This isn't a lie— this is how I spend a big part of my days here; dancing too, lots of dancing and singing and laughing with the other women. We are very busy and constantly aware of the fight that is all around us, but somehow there is always time to find joy. That's one of the reasons I love this country, these women; they understand that there is always beauty. Yesterday on my walk with Yara we came across the most amazing bundle of puppies just chilling in an olive grove! Everything is so real here, so close and important and tangible but also- totally mad! Puppies in an olive grove! I sent Ellie a photo of them all, cuddled up and licking each other in the evening heat. But she only replied as she always does- *Are you safe?* When she senses I am avoiding the question, she asks it again so I texted back *Yes!!!*

I am writing a diary now— yes, me, whose school report for English read, 'she tries very hard but she is not a natural wordsmith.' But why would I want to go to university and read books on the revolution when I could be here actually fighting for it, living it?

I remember bringing that report home, and my mum laughing it off, *who gives a flying fuck about spelling darling.*

Poppycock was what my dad had said; I remember because that was one of the last conversations I had with him, and also because that was the last time I ever heard the word *poppycock*.

I know why I started writing, because I had a need to record all this somehow— not for me but for the future, so people know why we were here. If I die then I suppose this writing will also be for my family, for mum and Ellie; perhaps they can know a little more about my life here than I am able to tell them now. I never wanted an ordinary life.

My name from before is Zennor.

Jools wanted to call me *Siren*, but my dad didn't like it so they chose Zennor as a compromise; the village is famous for a medieval painting of a mermaid.

As a child I was afraid of the sea, I hated the way waves could sweep you up so unexpectedly, used to have nightmares of being submerged entirely. My dad's response to this was to watch *The Little Mermaid* with me on repeat, making Ellie and I jump around the living room to *Under The Sea*. My mum would always look on in disdain; *mermaids are not passive hopeless ditzy girls, waiting for their prince charming; sirens are powerful, autonomous.*

Zennor is a Cornish village, and because I grew up nearby, when I was born people presumed it was a reference to a birth- place, which royally pissed off my mum. '*Oh, is it like what those Beckhams did, with their Brooklyn?*' Jools had mimicked.

All my memories of my mum as a kid I see through the shadow of embarrassment; every story Ellie and I tell of her comes with an eye roll, sarcasm. It's hard to look back over my childhood now, from this great geographical distance as well as the distance of time, and wonder whether this attitude has been fair. Jools does get cross about stuff, sometimes things that are hard to pin down; bad design for one— or anything she decides is bad at least— and her patience for indecision or tears is definitely low. I remember her striding into parent's evenings, cutting off anyone who tried to tell her I might be struggling with my work. And she's a gossip too; she would happily admit this. So there is some truth to my sister and I calling her angry, fiery, snappy. But maybe it was also in comparison with our so overly soft dad, the one who quite literally wouldn't hurt a fly; he would stand upon tables to try and catch them gently in a jar whilst Jools would yell out *for God's sake Daniel, just squash it!*

But I think with time she has become less angry— or maybe since our dad died, as if she needed to at least try to be a bit of him for us. And when I said all of the many times that I was leaving, from one crazy place to another, she never yelled at me, only rolled her eyes, the way Ellie and I roll ours at her.

Besides, what, actually is so wrong with anger? Women have always been told not to be angry, but we are entitled to our anger. Yes, we are. Anger is fuel.

I can enjoy a short paddle now, but never did really get over my fear of the sea. I am aware there are multiple ironies in this. But perhaps it makes sense to be afraid of something so vast; perhaps I am just more aware of the ocean's power than most. Every fighter here gets given a new name, so Zennor is not my name anymore.

I know Ellie still holds hope that I will come home, seemed so genuinely shocked when I said I was coming here, which is funny really, I just mean considering everything I have done until now. Where did she think I would be going next— the Cotswolds?

Jools, though— well I think Jools started the process of grieving me a long time before I came here. She will reply to my texts, pick up when I call, of course, but she will never ask me if I'm keeping safe, will never tell me to come home. When I told her I was coming here, she carried on making the tea and when she sat back down, she said *is there anything I can say that will get you to change your mind?*

No I said.

And she nodded and said; *do you still smoke?*

I had been thrown off—was this the time to tell me off for smoking?

Yes, sometimes.

Do you have any now— weed I mean?

I had in fact, a tiny amount in my rucksack, the one I carried my life around in, between the different houses I slept in the months before I came here. *Your tortoise bag*, Ellie had called it.

Anyway, so that night we had sat in my mum's patio with her funny collection of badly-looked-after pot plants and shared a spliff. I can't remember what we talked about. I remember my mum had laughed at a joke I told her so much she started crying, though I'm not sure it was very funny, and that I had gone to the local Nisa for crisps— Pringles, the sort we were never allowed as kids— and that my mum had demolished them all.

It's all rather boring here I had told Ellie once— *don't worry.*

And she had laughed, although I'm not sure I believed that laugh.

If it's so boring why don't you come home?

I guess I like the hummus they make here too much, I said.

I want to be clear; I did not come here in order to die. This trip, if that's what you can call it, is not a suicide wish. I love life. It's not possible to feel the world as others feel it, but I do honestly believe that I feel this love with more intensity than most. I am not aiming to die—I am *willing* to, for this cause, for the world that we are building here. That is a privilege, to find something that you are willing to die for; I hope that one day my family will understand this. I am here for the reason that every other woman is here; to be part of building up a beautiful world.

I thought I would never agree with any form of violence, I have been on more anti-war protests than I could possibly count. Perhaps you won't believe me when I say this is different; isn't that what everyone says? Yet I know it to be true that we are not attacking, only defending. If we ceased to defend, even more of these people would be wiped out and with them this vision of a different future. Yes, we must fight but this is not a violent movement. We fight like women; we think about the children, we think about civilians, there is no such thing as 'collateral damage.' Here, women are equal to men. No— women are ahead of men; women lead.

Ellie, you asked me before I left if what I was doing was illegal, but you already knew the answer to that, didn't you? We are listed as a 'terrorist organization'. But I know that someone as smart as you can see that legality has never been the barometer for morality, and it never will be. Ask yourself who has determined these categories in the past and who has torn them down. Decide for yourself which of those groups of people have served in your best interest. You and I Ellie, we would never have existed without

those who tore them down; now it is my turn to be that person for others. Terrorist? They named Mandela a terrorist. They can label me that if they must: it is just a word, and words have no power over me anymore.

I have always struggled with language; now I see it as a metaphor for the way I experience life— this burning for more was always too big to contain in the rigidity of words. I once overheard my mum answering the question *what do your daughters do*, it is one of the rare times I have ever heard her sound unconfident. She started with Ellie, and then she said *well, Zennor is an activist I guess*. So I'm an activist I guess, but that's what they call those people who are paid to post an inspiring quote on social media. I don't identify with this form of activism; physicality is surely inherent; you must actually be active; a movement must be embodied. When I found so-called activism as a teenager, it was my first experience of being among similar people, and this brought me a sense of relief, for a while. But the extent of change I wanted to be a part of, the intensity I felt was never fully matched. The people I have met over the years at protests, or volunteering in refugee camps, the people who stand out in the rain to feed homeless people; all of those people are important, needed, worthy. There is no hierarchy of 'virtue'; I don't believe in martyrs, I don't believe in an afterlife. But I crave more. I can no longer find meaning in mopping up the overspill from a tap that was intentionally broken. I can't stomach pensioners donating their last remaining fivers to the homeless whilst tax-avoiding billionaires are cheered for posing for a photo. I just can't. I was so tired, Ellie. Here I am physically tired, but before I was drained: it is so draining to be told that you are too political, too angry, too much. Here I have all night discussions but never have to explain myself; I am surrounded by people who just...understand.

Do you understand?

Perhaps what I am saying sounds heavy, but I feel so light now. There is joy in being where you are meant to be. Women have been *too much* for too long, it is a way of undermining us, of taking away our power, and our joy; our complexity. But here we know that anger and joy can coexist together.

The other women talk often about their emotions, they check in with each almost daily, they talk with such candor about how they are feeling, I admire it so much. Yara asks me tonight about my family and how I am coping with being away from them, and with the guilt. We are sitting on the colourful rugs covering the floor of the barracks, chopping aubergines.

'I'm not sure my family will ever really understand...the most I can ask for is that they respect my decision.'

'Yes,' Yara says, but then she points a finger at me teasingly 'but you have not answered my question- how are *you*?'

I stick my tongue out at her, 'I am fine,' I say, smiling my biggest smile to show her it's true.

Yara laughs her sing-song laugh and continues to chop, 'you are so English sometimes,' she says.

I am fine though, I am more than fine, I am so happy to be here- how could I not be happy to be where I am meant to be?

Later that evening, as we are all eating outside around the fire, Ellie rings me.

I walk away from the group, try to find some privacy and some signal.

'Zennor?' she says 'I have some news- I'm having a baby in April.'

I sit down, brush my hand across the earth, feel the curvature of its sun-hardened edges. I count months in my head.

'That's so soon-why didn't you tell me until now? I mean, that's amazing- wow Ellie.'

She goes quiet and I wonder if the signal is still there. 'Ellie?' I repeat, 'hello?'

'I couldn't bear the idea of it not being enough to bring you home,' she says.

I can't think of the right words to respond and then the line keeps breaking up and I walk around the courtyard trying to find signal. I find some on the top of a look out post, but the sound will still only come in repetitive waves.

Ellie? I say over and over, *Zennor, Zennor?* She says.

I haven't heard that name said in months, it is odd to have it repeated again and again. I stand up and shake the phone up and down as if it were a magic eight-ball, as we repeat each other's names two thousand miles away. Then the sound cuts out completely and I sit for a while looking out over the hills, feeling the warmth of the air as it brushes against my cheeks. I close my eyes and picture the baby growing in my sister's womb, and for a moment it is too much. But then the other images come to me, the ones that brought me here in the first place, the bodies of children, mutilated and bloodied in the dust, the same dust that my feet stands on now and I take in a breath and walk back inside.

I was thinking the other day about the first time I came across the idea of self-sacrifice. I was sixteen and doing my GCSEs when I read that Hassan Ali Akleh had walked out into the main street where he lived, soaked his body in gasoline and set himself alight. I was on the way to an English exam when I saw the article. I spent the time in that sweaty gym hall trying to work out what would bring someone to do that to themselves, as the words on my paper danced about in front of me like sparks.

I am not comparing my sheltered life to his desperation, but I can understand now, I can understand how the faith in something bigger can engulf you.

You could say his actions changed nothing; that *The Day of Rage* that followed resulted in more pain. But it was one spark in a chain of events towards a huge movement for freedom. Real freedom, not what we have been conned into thinking freedom is in the West either; that's capitalism disguised as freedom. Freedom doesn't mean doing whatever we want; real freedom means the ability to think freely and make our own choices.

Anger is fuel. This movement is utopian.

So, the day has come, as it were. I have been in the safety of this shelter and this education long enough now— tomorrow, finally, I am leaving with the other women to do what I came here to do all along, to take action. The mood in the camp has been

different these last few days, quieter, serious. Each of us has gradually consolidated our already few belongings into something smaller still, and one by one they have gathered by the entrance of the barracks. We give out small nods as we watch each other lay down these belongings and retreat back to our own space.

It has taken months of begging, frankly, to get me to this point. Of course I needed the training, the education, all of it, but I never had any intention of coming all this way just to stay here, like some sheltered western girl all over again.

You will be a target, the chief had told me, and in any case we need your connections, we need you to get the word out back to your country, to the West.

Words have never been my friend, I told her, and they have never been yours either. My country has given you empty words for years; they are worthless. Let me give you action.

I use this time to be outside, to be alone and to walk. I walked for almost two hours today and found a spot nestled below a tree, my back supported against the solidness of its trunk. From here I rung my mum and described my view of the hills to her, and held the phone up so she could hear the francolins calling. I didn't tell her where I was going tomorrow, she had no reason to know. She told me about the flowers in her garden, and the tadpoles that were turning into frogs. I told her that I was writing a diary.

I can't believe that you're writing a diary she had said; you really must be bored there. The baby is due tomorrow, she said, you know that right?

I had forgotten. I rang my sister but the connection wasn't strong enough so I wrote her a text.

Dear Ellie,

Mum reminded me that the baby is due tomorrow. She said first babies are always late, and I reminded her that you were three months early and she got a bit huffy, haha. Anyway, I'm sure the little bean will come when they need to, and that u will be amazing. We're off somewhere tomorrow where unlikely will be able to contact you for a while, but plz don't worry. Remember that thing about trees, what dad told us about how they pass water along their roots to each other? Don't laugh at my crap metaphor

or whatever it is, but I feel like that's what we have. You know, we may not have always been able to be in contact (my fault, I am sorry) but I feel like we have always known when either of us needed the other. Like the way trees know where to send the water, sensing where the earth is dry. I love you, that's what I mean, and I'm so happy for you.
Z.

That little red exclamation mark keeps bouncing up at me, saying the message hasn't been sent, but I will keep trying.

In Paris

There had been a time where she had just woken up and stayed with the memories of her dreams; she still had a sense of how that had felt in her body. These days, scrolling past each of the horrific things that had happened during the night was an automatic part of her waking routine, a reflex.

Jools had brushed it off when Ellie had told her she was scared of having a child, that she felt guilty at the thought of bringing a life into this brave new world. *Every generation thinks their future is the bleakest*, she had said. *Your father was going on about the environment when you girls were born*, she told her, as if this were comforting, as if Daniel's worries had clearly all been proven delusional now. As if the fact that there had been indicators that this level of shit was about to hit the fan thirty years ago made it any more reassuring that Ellie was no longer shocked by images of drowned children. Everyone was becoming numb; the newspapers knew it— their headlines became more crass and loud by the day, increasingly desperate to find something, anything, that still shocked anyone.

You just need to relax, Jools kept telling her. She wasn't the only one. Apparently when you told people you were having trouble conceiving they automatically became an expert on the correlation between bath bombs and pregnancy. Also, unless Ed had just been hiding it from her, it didn't seem like anyone was telling him he just needed to relax. Maybe it was her fault though; maybe her body was reacting to all her fear.

Of course it's not your fault darling, Jools had said, and Ellie had momentarily thought she was going to actually say something sane and comforting.

But I'm sure there is a mind-body connection. Remember when you were little and had that really peculiar spot on your bum? There it was. I took you to the doctor and you refused to let her look at it and she said she'd have to if it hadn't gone away in the next month. And then it just disappeared!

What? Keeping up with her mum's conversational peculiarities was difficult at the best of times, and these were undoubtedly the worst of times.

It had been there for years, Ellie, and you were so freaked out by having someone look at your bottom that you just willed it away.

No. Ellie just didn't have the energy. Why did she keep talking to Jools about this stuff? Because she loved her. Hopelessly. That damn mother-daughter bond was strong.

Jools' own mother was losing her mind— an actual medically trained doctor had diagnosed her with dementia. Marie, Ellie's Parisian *Grandmere*, who had moved back to France when Ellie was little, had always been something of an enigma to her. Not quite as much as her grandfather who she had never met and of whom she knew nothing more than his name, *Eli*, that he had been a Jewish refugee, and that he had left when Jools was a baby.

No, he didn't leave— he was never there in the first place Jools had corrected Ellie, aged eleven, sitting at the dining room table and trying to write a school assignment on the Holocaust.

Jools herself had only met Eli once— when Ellie's own dad was dying. Daniel had used his deathbed card to blackmail Jools into tracking Eli down. Ellie remembered listening outside her parents' bedroom after Jools had come back from London to meet him. Jools had been crying. Jools never cried, not in front of anyone but Daniel in any case. It had taken many years for Ellie to realise that Jools was not as unflinchingly strong as she liked to present herself as being. Now Ellie knew that the whole 'give-no-shits, I'll talk about anything' persona was actually 'I'll talk about anyone *else's* business'. Whilst Ellie had always thought this was because she was too no-nonsense to entertain any of her own demons, she could recognize now that of course this was not true; Jools' deflection was her defense. It was challenging to have a mother who apparently had no difficult emotions when you were someone with a lot, but it had taken some of the sting away to come to this conclusion, this possibility, that Jools may actually be more fragile than she seemed.

Perhaps her sister Zennor had always known about this fragility; she was ahead of the curve in most ways. In any case it was Ellie, not Jools, that Zennor had contacted to let know that their grandmother's dementia was not, as their mother kept insisting, just another case of 'the medicalization of old age'. Zennor was in Paris, on one of her protests, or 'actions', Ellie found it hard to keep up with her younger sister's endeavors. At twenty-seven, the amazing Zennor still subsisted off nothing but pranayama and her overdraft, living from one kind-hearted hippy's bedroom floor and one country to the

other, involved in activities that she was increasingly vague about. Ellie didn't have the guts to ask if they were legal. And amongst all this, she had apparently also managed to fit in visiting her Grandmother for tea and macarons.

'She's gone totally nuts,' Zennor had told Ellie when she called. She appeared to be in an exceptionally grim-looking flat, even for Zennor's standards, and the signal kept cutting out— her tanned, piercing filled face freezing every few minutes. She was clearly rolling a spliff mid-call, and there was at least twenty seconds where Ellie was just watching a frame of her sister's glistening tongue.

'What do you mean, nuts?' Ellie asked as her sister's eyes came back into view again.

'Well, she keeps going on about how she's really worried about Georges Bidault for one— that she thinks he's not earning enough to live on.'

'Who's that?'

'French prime minister in the fifties or something, had to look it up. Then when I said I was pretty sure he was dead now, she looked at me like *I* was mad. And she keeps talking about Eli, you know Mum's dad or whatever.'

'I know who Eli is.'

'Sorry.'

'That's normal for old people to think about their past.'

'Yes, but not to think they are actually *in* the past. Anyway it wouldn't matter if I thought she could still function properly, but I don't think she can. She offered me dinner, and then gave me a plate of chocolate biscuits. And her flat is filthy.'

'Oh God.' If Zennor thought the flat was filthy it must have been absolutely disgusting.

'Anyway, I don't want to bother mum too much about it yet, she'll totally freak out— she's her only family isn't she.'

'We're her family.'

'Yeah, but you know what I mean. Parent.'

They left that one hang for a moment. Zennor took a long drag. Ellie had a sudden pang of regret that this spliff existed only in virtual form; she hadn't touched the stuff in years, not since her teenage years passing cold summer nights on the beach, pretending to like the taste. But right now, in this moment, she would have liked to put her hand through the screen and feel that foggy peace come over her.

'Anyway,' Zennor cut through Ellie's fantasy, 'I will keep checking up on her when I can but I thought seeing as its the school holidays soon you and Ed could come over for a few days? Thought it might be good for you, to have a little break—you know... *relax.*'

*

It is the first time he has been to Paris and this seems to be a source of shock for everyone he tells. His colleagues looked jealous and wistful when he mentioned that this is where he would be spending his holidays.

Oh Paris.... So romantic they had said and he had nodded and smiled and tried to keep an open mind but now he is here he is still struggling to find its romance. Perhaps he has misinterpreted the word. Supposedly romantic films always end with a very public declaration of love so perhaps it makes sense that a place filled with people is the setting for romantic display. Personally, romance is something he has always associated with a more private setting—the countryside or the beach: wide open spaces, empty lakes and under stars— away from other people. He finds it hard to see how visiting another city with an underground and poverty and the relentless demands to buy things is romantic. *Lucky Ellie*, his colleagues had said, assuming that it was him who was taking her away and implicitly implying both that he found Paris a romantic place to be and also that its romance was not for him; that romance was uniquely a woman's interest. In any case, it is irrelevant because this particular trip was simply a practical task, something he could, in theory, have left Ellie and her sister to sort out amongst themselves. But he knows that this would have made Ellie sad and Ellie is already sad right now.

It lingers between her and him this sadness, with the simultaneous solidity and flimsiness that only silence can hold. The air is thick with the unspoken reasons, which seem to be so many and of such transient nature that conversation becomes a type of

dangerous game; less treading on eggshells than something that feels far worse, landmines perhaps, or at least triggering Ellie to talk about something as bleak. Yet it is important to remember to talk nonetheless, to keep her in the grounded world of language.

There is more. It is difficult to explain. And he doesn't, not to anyone.

There was a long time in the beginning of their relationship where he spooked himself with a conviction that he could feel everything that Ellie felt. It was different *from knowing her better than he knew himself*; the feeling wasn't a cerebral thing. The only way he could describe the sensation was that it was like quite literally carrying two people's worth of emotions around at all times, but still having a distinct clarity about whose was whose. This admission freaked him out and made him cringe in equal measure— like saying that he believed in fate or an afterlife. But when he told Ellie she only smiled and said *of course, when love somebody— normal— feel like one*.

Now he is less convinced that this is something to do with true love, and more a combination of basic human compassion and Ellie's inability to hide anything she is feeling from her face. Anyone with any degree of awareness could tell something was up with her, had been for over a year now— no— longer. He is not convinced he has the same transparency; he is pretty certain that he is better at hiding emotion. Even so, Ellie has always listened to him, responded to his needs more intuitively than anybody else he has known. Recently (when? he cannot get a hold of the time, but perhaps it is longer than he wants to admit), his feelings for Ellie have shifted, and he hopes that she is too wrapped in her feelings to have noticed. It is not that he doesn't love her— he must do, because he worries about her, hates to see her sad. He doesn't want, at least he doesn't think he wants to, leave; he cannot imagine a him without her. And yet...this feeling persists, becomes bigger. Sits in his throat, his chest. He is not brave enough yet to look at this feeling directly but he is aware it may be something like these things: fear and doubt, and sometimes a bit like: suffocation, a lack of free will. Or maybe it is this: loss...of youth, of the excitement of a future still unknown.

The irony is this: there is nobody who he could attempt to put this into words to, nobody who he could trust to actually listen without judgment to this explanation, apart from Ellie.

*

It was sweltering; the kind of weather where the only time sweat wasn't a permanent extra layer was in the shower, and even then, really, there was no way of knowing. Ellie and Ed were staying in Marie's spare room and arguing each night about the air conditioning.

Air-conditioning so loud— with on, sleep won't. Must switch off.

Room is so hot, if off, will die.

Ellie has been waiting until Ed falls asleep, and then sneaking out of bed to turn it off. The whirring stops but her thoughts seem to grow louder and when she does fall asleep it is only to be confronted with nightmares, and, in the morning, a very sweaty and pissed off Ed. Tonight she has promised to leave it on and to *imagine noise like waves*. This has the effect of making her think of water and she gets up to go for the first of several toilet trips.

On the way to the bathroom she passes Marie's room. The door is ajar and Ellie can hear Marie saying her prayers, muttering them under her breath. The memory of a childhood visit to Paris comes suddenly and vividly to Ellie; she remembers arguing with Zennor over who shared a bed with Jools and who shared with Marie. She remembers that neither had wanted to share with Marie because she was old and strange to them. Jools had made Ellie do it because she was the oldest, and so she had curled herself up as small as she could on her side of the bed as she listened in the dark to Marie's whispers. Ellie wonders now how she had known they were prayers when she knew no French but she had. When she thinks about this memory it comes with a distinct yellow glow around it; perhaps the experience held significance because Ellie's only prior contact with religion was the local street preacher in Penzance. Ellie was rather fond of the old man who so industrially spent his Saturdays to let the good people of Penzance know that *Jesus was coming*. Ellie had always been dragged away by Jools before she had had the chance to find out what would happen when he arrived. Nine - year- old Ellie had often lain in bed and thought about how another day had disappeared and how it scared her that she didn't know where it had gone, and that she couldn't explain this in a way that her parents understood. But in Marie she had found someone who was much older even than her own parents, and who had created a way

of marking each day by saying thanks for it each night, and it had calmed Ellie. Now she is twenty-nine and Ellie will never have a religion but she is often searching for faith, and she crouches down outside Marie's bedroom. She rests her back against the wall and listens to the murmurings of her Grandmother's prayers, the way she had when she was a little girl, and hopes for something of the same calm to come to her.

*

They are watching the television again. Zennor has a few days off from whatever it is she is doing, and they had grand plans. Plans however, along with time and their grandmother's thoughts, seem to evaporate in this flat. Television served a practical purpose; it had a unique ability to absorb everyone's attention away from the endlessly circular conversations with Marie. Marie's English, her once perfect second language, seems to be drifting from her now, as did her ability to remember what she has said moments before, in either language. They are watching the news, where the horror *du jour* is the leader of the free world grinning amongst an impossibly large auditorium of people shouting 'Send them back! Send them back!'

'Back where, for fucks sake? They were born in America!' Zennor shouts at the TV, whilst translating for Ed. She has never been around in one place long enough to properly take lessons but what her sign language lacks in technicality is compensated for in exuberance and will.

'In America, everyone is an immigrant. So stupid,' Ed signs and Zennor rolls her eyes in agreement.

Ellie can't find a way of putting anything about this situation into any form of language. For a moment she is floating above the room, has left her body altogether. When she comes back, and made sure to look around the room and touch the velvet of the sofa she is sitting on, all she can think is— *nobody will ever be able to say we that just didn't know.*

She turns to her Grandma who is trembling and instinctively puts her hand over hers. 'Shall we watch something else, Marie?' she asks her but Marie is not listening.

'Non, non, non,' she is muttering.

'It's ok Grandma,' Ellie says.

'He is a terrible man,' Marie says, her eyes still fixed onto the TV.

'Tell me about it,' Zennor says.

But Marie clutches Ellie's hand suddenly and stares into her eyes, '*Caches, hide,*' she tells Ellie.

'He's not coming for us, Grandma, it's ok. He's not in France'.

'Yeah don't worry Gran, they don't come for us white people' Zennor says bitterly.

But Marie still has her eyes fixed onto Ellie's, 'please believe me. You are *unconnu*; he will come for you, you have to get out— understand me? Get to England— they will come to get you here.'

'Nobody is coming to get us, Marie,' Ellie tells her, but Marie's blue eyes are so sure and so fearful that Ellie has to look away.

*

Ellie is having nightmares; she wakes up in the early hours of each morning and he can feel her next to him, stiff as a board, as if she has stopped breathing.

He strokes her hair and asks, *what happened?* As if it were real, because he can see on her face that it is.

Under my skin, maggots crawling she will say or I killed someone or someone chasing me or you, you so angry with me, you shouting, shouting at me- then you left, she will say and he will put his head on top of hers and continue to stroke her hair.

*

Ellie can only do an Irish accent if she uses the phrase *top of the morning to you*, can only recite her alphabet correctly if she sings it, can only remember the sound of her dad's voice when remembering certain things he said:

Jiminy crickets.

Ell-ie! What have you been up to, cheeky?

Truth, please.

Truth had seemed straightforward as a child— had she been mean to her sister, had she taken the last biscuit? Perhaps the bending of the truth had started when Daniel was first diagnosed— nobody had told her the truth, even though *she knew they knew*, and in turn she had started to pass on these miss-truths, these little edits to her younger sister. When she was saying the words *daddy is going to be fine* at first it had given her a knot of discomfort in her stomach, but after she said them enough times, she had started to believe them herself. In any case, what really was the truth— surely it wasn't a definitive thing? When she had started teaching, Ellie had found it hard to stay apolitical; to keep her strongly felt principles to herself. But it was amazing how quickly it became normal, freeing almost. To be able to let go of her need to be *right*, and to simply say: *these are the facts and dates— make of them what you will*.

These are some facts about some things that have happened today in some first world countries: It was revealed that the youngest person to be imprisoned for illegally crossing the border is eighteen months old. *The thing is*, says a TV presenter *the thing we need to remember is, we're not talking about American children here, what we're talking about are alien children*. Alien children. Say it enough times and Ellie can almost start to believe it. Perhaps these children are not like the children she loves, the ones she teaches, the ones she hopes to birth in the future. Perhaps they are different, marked somehow; perhaps they have green skin and antennae.

Keep to the facts, Ellie.

A politician suggests the death penalty is an appropriate penalty for abortion:

A child is precious from conception, he said.

A report is published stating that humans have wiped out sixty percent of animal populations within the last fifty years.

The imprisoned baby died. An inquest is looking into it.

Marie and Ellie made a vegetable casserole. It tasted delicious.

*

He has left Ellie.

No, he has not left her, just gone into the city alone for the day but it felt like something, to have asked for that. Perhaps he shouldn't have lied; he said he had some friends of friends that wanted to meet with him, and the Deaf community is both small and large enough that without a doubt there would have been friends of friends ready and happy to meet if he had asked. But he does not want to meet up with anyone at all, and this had felt too difficult, too strange to tell Ellie. Why do the words *solitude* and *alone* appear so sad in nature, connote such *loneliness*. He craves *to be alone*, as if it were a place he could enter, or a separate state of being; he feels the need for it like thirst. Euphoria comes over him on the metro; he has to cover his face to stop himself smiling, although he would fit in well with some other characters that stagger up and down the train.

Despite his anxieties, Ellie had not seemed sad or surprised by his request. She had plans to make a casserole with her grandmother, seemed excited by this task.

Meet friends where? Do what? she had asked and when, having planned only as far as leaving the house and being alone, he came up with no satisfactory reply, she wrote him a list on an envelope and put it in his jacket pocket with a kiss goodbye. He looked at the list as he walked to the metro, she has given him the stop, *Puteaux*, a word he struggles to understand how even hearing people know how to pronounce, and the first place is a bookshop called *Shakespeare and Company*, which makes him laugh. Is this what she imagines a good place for a group of strangers to meet? But when he arrives at the bookshop, which is cosy and cramped, where book nerds outweigh tourists, it occurs to him that maybe she didn't believe his lie, maybe she wrote the list just for him. A bookshop is one of the best places on earth to be, and Ellie knows he think this. He wanders around, enjoying the well-worn dance of looking, leafing, browsing, the respectful weaving in and out of readers.

When he has finished, a single paperback satisfyingly snug under his arm, he walks across to the square to look up at the Notre-Dame, walk around the outside. A little boy is crying— standing being scolded by his mum, a dropped ice cream next to his feet. She pulls him away as a flock of pigeons come and fight over it. Ellie loves pigeons, another one of her oddities that he has adopted despite himself.

Pigeons? Rat birds, he had said when she had told him this, too soon into their relationship for an admission of this sort, too late for him to change his mind about her.

No! So cute, so chubby. Start watching them, believe me. Travel together, in twos, when think nobody is looking, sit in pairs snuggled up, like this, they fall in love. She had tears forming in her eyes, the ones she got when she thought of something she found sweet, had brushed them away.

You weirdo he had said, laughing, but he can't un-know something once Ellie has put these things in his mind, and whenever he sees pigeons now a little bubble of happiness rises in his chest...*ridiculous.*

He gets his list out; 'Galeries Lafayette' is next. His phone battery has died so he takes the envelope to an ice cream parlour off the square and mimes *where* to the woman behind the till. She starts to talk in accented English, but he puts his finger against his ear and shakes his head, and she gets a pen and draws him a map on the back of a serviette.

Merci, he says, and follows her drawing to the outside of a shopping mall.

Really Ellie he thinks and checks her list again ROOF, OUTSIDE she has written next to it. He goes inside the mall, and looks up. The roof is stunning certainly— impossibly high, both regal and holy with its stained glass and golden arches but there is something amusing about it too— such grandeur for a shopping mall. Oh so Parisienne.

He follows arrows to the lift, get inside with an old lady who smiles at him and says something that he nods and smiles back at, and heads for the top floor. When he gets outside to the roof garden, with only a handful of people spread out its grounds, calm floods his body. He walks to the edge and there is the whole of the city waiting for him. He stands and stares.

He doesn't want to end his day underground and so he decides to walk. Somewhere on the way back to Marie's he passes a building, and there is nothing particularly interesting about it so he doesn't know why he stops walking. The lights are off everywhere except in the basement, where he can see a small group of women sitting around a table, talking, serious. One of the women has an expression he knows; a

particular kind of focussed attentiveness that he recognises as Zennor's.

He turns and walks away before she sees him, or before he tries to work out what it is she may be listening to so intently. Time has taught him that with Zennor, the less known the better.

*

Dream bad again? He asks Ellie.

The sunlight is coming through the blinds. He looks at the time, 6am, later than usual.

They were trying deport mum Ellie signs; *so many big men, came house. Me, Zennor stood, we try block door. Said her visa application, not filled properly... dinosaur egg section filled in wrong.*

Dinosaur what? He asks.

Ellie giggles, tears in her eyes, the ones she gets when she makes herself laugh at her own jokes, the ones he hasn't seen in what feels like a lifetime. *Dinosaur eggs— they said that bit wrong. Now Dinosaur eggs hatched — little dinosaurs everywhere, running around kitchen.*

Little dinosaurs?

Yes, she signs, still giggling, so small, so cute. We fed them, tiny pieces bread with what? Balsamic vinegar!

She continues to giggle and then lies her head on his chest and closes her eyes.

Amazing, he signs to himself.

*

They were running out of museums to visit, the flat was getting too cramped and Marie appeared to be getting irritated. She no longer seemed to be worried about the president coming to take Ellie and Zennor away, or hadn't mentioned it for a while at least. It was obvious even so, that she couldn't just be left, however. Ellie had clarity about this now; she had woken up yesterday morning and the ridiculous nature of the situation became apparent. She and Ed couldn't stay here forever; they had jobs to get

back to soon and things to do in England before then. Marie needed proper long-term help and they didn't have time to be pussyfooting around Jools' denial in order to set this up. She rang Jools and told her this, in so many words, and perhaps Jools was so taken aback at her daughters' rare assertiveness that she booked a train whilst on the phone.

Zennor was leaving again, off to Greece or something. No maybe not Greece, Ellie couldn't remember where it was, she had been so wrapped up in things lately and to be fair to herself, Zennor had been typically vague, but even so Ellie needed to make more of an effort. So tonight Ed was going to stay in with Marie and Ellie was going to take her little sister out for dinner — in *Paris*— and they were going to drink wine and Ellie was going to eat *steak frites* and Zennor was going to use her charm to get the waiters to understand what vegan meant and Ellie was going to really listen to her.

Zennor's attempt to explain the concept of veganism was met with less bafflement than previous years, but it amused them both that the waiter had listed almost every type of vegetable and grain they had in stock, much to Zennor's obvious enthusiasm, only to bring her a plate of chopped tomatoes and bread.

'Do you want me to complain?' Ellie asked Zennor as she guiltily started cutting up her steak.

'Nah, its fine— I like tomatoes. So when is Mum coming?'

'Monday. Ed is going to go back to London this weekend, means we can all have some time together.'

'I might have to leave before then.'

'Oh. I thought you were going to stay for a bit and help us sort out Marie's care? I can't deal with mum for more than a couple of days — she'll drive me up the wall you know that.'

Zennor sprinkled salt onto her tomatoes. 'Look I need to tell you something and I need to you not to freak out and also not to tell mum yet ok?'

'Tell me what?'

‘Promise me first.’

‘No— how I can I promise before I know what it is?’

‘Ok. Well I have to leave on the weekend and you just need to trust me then,’ Zennor said calmly.

Ellie looked around, whispered ‘You’re doing something illegal aren’t you?’

Zennor laughed. ‘Ellie, I’m always doing something illegal.’

Ellie finished her glass of wine, waited a moment for it to hit her. ‘Ok, fine. I promise.’

Zennor leaned in. ‘There’s this... group, and they’re incredible. I’ve been talking to them for a few months now, I’ve been doing a lot of research and they are the most intelligent, progressive group of people, *women* you could imagine.’

The deliberate calm that Zennor had been trying to project had gone, her eyes were shining now, her voice had risen. ‘It’s a once in a generation thing; they are going to change history. But the situation is dire— they need international support; fighters. And they have agreed to me going over to help them.’

‘Going over where?’ Ellie asked, keeping her voice steady.

‘Syria.’

‘No, Zennor. You’re not actually serious?’ Of course she was actually serious; Zennor was always actually serious.

‘Zennor, I know you always put the rest of humanity before yourself and I admire that so much, I honestly do but what about your life? You could be *killed*.’

‘I could, yes. But I’m not planning on it.’

‘How does not planning on being killed have any relevance if you deliberately take yourself to a war zone!’ Ellie hissed over her untouched plate of meat.

‘I know it’s hard for you to understand, but it’s not something I’ve decided on a whim. You have to trust me.’

'No! It makes no sense when there are literally thousands of things you could be doing right here, in Europe. Campaigning, volunteering— you could — you do anything Zennor. I know you have that thing about not being smart but you're so clever and it's different now—you could do a foundation year, re-train. You could be a doctor, really help people here, or— or a politician — you'd be amazing at that. Change the system from inside.' She was pleading now, her voice had gone high and desperate, she could hear it.

'I'm an anarchist, Ellie. We don't believe in there being a system.'

'Well sorry but that's just ridiculous. I might not believe in 'the system' either so that's why you change it. Do you think me and Ed would be able to help kids the way we do if we just dropped out because we didn't 'believe' in it?'

The waiter brought over more wine and they both turned and smiled at him in unison.

'I'm not going to argue with you,' Zennor said 'Maybe it would have been better not to tell you; I think it would be best if we don't tell mum.'

'Great— so she can find out when you're dead?'

Ellie meant to sound bitchy and angry— she was so fucking angry right now— but of course, as always, her body betrayed her and her voice stuck and tears came.

'This is my life,' Zennor said softly, 'I need to do what I think is right — what is right to me—with it.'

'It's not just your life! What about mum, what about your friends? What about me?' Ellie asked, and felt about three years old for asking it.

'You will all be ok. This is something that is bigger than...it's just bigger. I don't have time to explain this all to you Ellie. I don't want to spend this time we have left arguing.'

'Time we have left?'

'I mean before I go.'

Ellie stared into Zennor's eyes. Zennor had incredible eyes; they were crystal blue, with black, curled lashes and ever since she was tiny people had always commented on how

beautiful they were. Ellie had been jealous, once, but then she started to take pride in her sister's beauty, enjoyed the satisfaction of showing people her photo, in introducing her—*look at my beautiful little sister*. Ellie was the big sister; it was still supposed to be her role to tell Zennor that everything was going to be ok. She had looked into those eyes and told her that she would get better at spelling, that their rabbit had gone on a little trip to the farm, that their dad was going to be fine. It had felt like a long time since she had felt like the eldest. When did everything change over? She felt she should have been able to have mark the day.

'Promise me you won't die.'

Zennor laughed, looked right back at her sister. 'You know that none of us can promise that.'

*

He has been dreaming. When he wakes up he rolls over and stroke Ellie's hair, he wants to tell her before he forgets.

There was a child, our child.

She turns over, smiles. *Boy or girl* she asks.

Not sure...neither, both. Didn't feel important.

She looks disappointed. *Didn't feel real, the child?*

He strokes her arm. *Yes felt so real*. He closes his eyes a moment, gathers the dream back into his body, tries to work how to explain this feeling, this child that he met. He sits up, he signs *confident*, a sign that brings its namesake in making it *but inside, know you?*

Ellie is content, smiling. *Look like who?*

Look like them, you sign.

More, more! Describe me— what else like?

Happy, he signs.

*

When she gets the call, it is early in the morning but she is already up with the baby. She has stopped looking at the time when he wakes, it is better that way, time is elusive now in any case; there were only moments of light and moments of dark. She couldn't think about the future otherwise her head started to spin. But she knows it is early regardless, too early for the phone to ring.

It is Jools, it is their mother. The only word she says is 'Zennor,' but that is enough and Ellie is proud, so very proud of her mum.

We're coming over, she tells her, calm and steady; where has this calm and steadiness come from?

Make yourself a cup of tea, sit down, stay warm, we're coming.

Her first thought is to run upstairs, charge into the bedroom and wake her husband, but the baby needs feeding so she feeds him. She sits in the armchair in the living room, looking out as the sun starts to come up.

She knows when the feed is finished she will have to go and wake her husband and tell him and the news will be true because she would have said the words herself, she would have signed them, with her hands and her face and there will be no going back then, only forward— onto her mums and then telling more people and a funeral and then the rest of her lifetime without her sister. She has been here before and she knows the routine now. She will feel angry when people mistake her numbness for bravery, she will be frustrated that the tears will come later, much later, when she is buying Reese cupcakes at the supermarket, her sister's favourite, and the cashier will look at her as if she is mad. She will experience more kindness than most people will ever know.

But she cannot think of any of this now, because the future makes her head spin and her son needs feeding. So she takes this moment with the armchair and his brand new tiny hands and brand new life so entirely dependent on hers, and the sunrise, signaling a new day. She sits with this moment for as long as it needs to last.

On A Bright Day

These days he leaves the house early so that he can walk to work along the beach. Today he moves steadily, deliberately, allowing himself to feel the breeze against his bare legs, and the knowledge that people are around him. The posh schools must have broken up for the holidays already and the Emmets have arrived. A few small children are already jumping around in the sea, animated and squealing, their parents hovering anxiously behind them, clutching at little towels. Daniel feels a wave of relief that his own children are past this stage of dashing around quite so manically. He has a sudden desire to go up to one of the parents and tell them not to worry so much, that it will pass, but he stops himself. It would seem inappropriate, coming out of nowhere like that. The usual locals are here too; the dog walkers and the all-year-round swimmers, marking their place.

The sand is wet and glowing, the air is full of morning sunshine and it is connecting him to these people; the sunshine is in all of their lungs and he feels sure that they have all remembered this together, at precisely just this moment. Everything appears simple suddenly. Yes, he has known these moments before and he will know them again. Give us a bright day and just like that everything comes alive. He is thinking about the poetry reading he went to recently. Ever since this thing, this *diagnosis*, his wife Jools has insisted that they take up new activities. Daniel was happy enough to go along with this if that's what she wanted, but really he was fine with the old activities. Even so, he tried to go with an open mind, but it seemed that there was an accepted way of reciting poetry, a very particular tone of voice that made the words all run into one another. As a result, Daniel couldn't understand much of what was really being said. Depression and heartbreak and some clever allusions to famous literature he had never heard of, he suspected. It was hard to stop his mind from wandering off; composing emails, making notes for a paper he planned to write. It was a pity because they must have all put a lot of work into these poems. Daniel would have liked to have had a copy of each one to read beforehand in silence; if he were braver he would have suggested this to one of the organisers after the event. But now he is thinking, maybe he had it all wrong. Maybe it was more like music, something to be experienced rather than understood. It must be wonderful to be able to sing, he has always thought that. Jools has a beautiful voice; he loves to listen to her sing in the shower, or on the somewhat rare and always slightly nerve-wracking occasions that she cooks. But he couldn't be sure, about the music idea.

Daniel admired artists greatly from afar but being in close proximity made him uneasy. Art was so slippery; there were always hidden meanings that he was not privy to.

Jools, as Daniel had rather expected, had of course hated the entire event. 'Pretentious fuckery' she had called it, which Daniel thought, guiltily, would have made a fitting title for a couple of the poems.

*

As he walks onto campus he goes to his pigeon-hole, greeting Helen, the office manager.

'How are you?' he asks, as he does every day.

'My life is just a nightmare', she says whilst laughing, as she does everyday.

'Oh dear, I hope things get better soon,' he says, as he does every day.

He takes the pile of books his colleague Matt has left him with a post it note '*thought of you, Dan*', and walks through the grounds to his office. He passes some of his first years protesting about something on the grass. He squints at the sign— vegetables? He wondered what atrocity had affected vegetables recently; he was rather out of the loop with current affairs at the moment.

One of them, the Spanish girl, he can never remember whether her name is Lucia or Lola, nods sheepishly at him.

'What is this about then?' he asks cheerily

'We have organic vegetable box,' she says 'you want to order one?'

'Oh,' Daniel says, thrown slightly. 'Oh no thank you, I have a lot of vegetables at home already.'

Lucia or Lola smiles 'Ok, see you later.'

Daniel had never thought too much about these interactions. But since the *diagnosis*, they were becoming imbued with meaning. It was this, this *thing*, that Jools was blaming the crying on, it was the reason that his colleagues had been leaving him books and smiling awkwardly when he emerged from his little toilet breaks with bloodshot eyes,

the reason they had grouped together to stop people staring when he had started sobbing at the Christmas party. He hadn't been crying a lot, but it had been in places and times that aren't supposed to be cried in: at work, dinner parties, out in the street. *Inappropriate*, that word again, but in fairness, Daniel wasn't sure when it was appropriate to cry, when you were both a man and British. He had deduced that really there were only two exceptions to the no man no cry rule: at very specific points in funerals—perhaps when congregating at the start, during the service but not after, certainly not at the wake, when everyone knows to get back to sandwiches and small talk—and at the cinema, if you did it quietly, at the back. It didn't really seem an ideal way to live one's life, wondering when someone would die so that you can hope to time a cry for a half an hour slot in the crematorium, and it was a rarity that he went to the cinema, even more so that it was a tear jerker. Jools was a fan of loud, action type films that Daniel could never follow long enough to have an emotional reaction to. Perhaps it would be easier if they would at least turn the volume down.

Anyway, however well they hid it, or however much they may have sympathised, it was evident that this crying had of course made people around Daniel suspect he was losing the plot, but if he was honest, to him it really seemed quite rational. *Diagnosis* aside, the business of simply being alive was such that it was surely necessary, every few years or so, to let it all out. There had been so many years where he couldn't remember crying at all, so it seemed inevitable that now a small tidal wave had built up, pressing at the banks and demanding to be released.

Maureen, the head of school, had suggested in a bright and cheery voice to make it clear that it was No Big Deal that Daniel go to therapy. Daniel had actually gone as far as doing a fairly thorough web search, scrolling through each photo and staring into the eyes of each one of his potential saviours. He had never known there were quite so many shrinks in Cornwall, all as diverse as this rather monolithic county could allow, yet each one with a strikingly similar facial expression— somewhere between deep concern and self-satisfaction. He was sure that any one of them would be perfectly lovely, or thought-provoking, whatever it was that they were supposed to be, but the idea of sitting in a room with a stranger for an hour and being responsible for filling the silences made him feel quite nauseated. Besides, whilst he knew there was a lot of evidence for the effectiveness of therapy for improving mental distress, Daniel wasn't

convinced he was suffering from mental distress, and so he was yet to contact any of those sweet, concerned looking faces.

No, whatever it was that he was going through, he wouldn't have described it as a suffering, that wasn't the right word. It was more like a shedding of something, what he wasn't yet entirely sure, but he felt instinctively that he needed to work through whatever it was in his own way. Walking had helped, and more recently, and to his own slight embarrassment, he had started writing. It wasn't *poetry*, it wasn't anything that he would ever show to anyone, (god forbid a room full of strangers prone to eccentrically coloured hair), but it wasn't scientific papers either, and that was new to Daniel. It had started with the insomnia; or rather it was after nearly six weeks of insomnia, when Jools had snapped at 4am to *get out the damn room*.

'But I'm not doing anything,' Daniel had said, perplexed, 'I'm just lying here.'

'I can feel you fucking *thinking*, I can feel each one of your thoughts buzzing around,' she had hissed in the dark, 'just go and write them down or something,' and because he generally did what Jools told him to do, Daniel had.

Admittedly, he had started the writing process rather like a scientific paper, with some notes of various specifics about the nature of insomnia and depression that he wanted to research further, but at some point his pen took over his intellect, and all sorts of stuff spilled out. He wrote about the operation that he would be having soon, the one that would *cut out the cancer from a part of his tongue* and whether people would still be able to understand what he was saying afterwards. He wrote about the importance that academic success had played in his life and asked what of his self remained outside of this. He wrote things that he was scared to admit to anyone; that whilst Daniel had never seen himself as a man of ego, he had begun to suspect he was. Daniel had always told his students 'we stand on the shoulders of giants' but he had never fully realised that he wanted to be a giant himself, just a small one at least. In fact the real nub of what was bothering him was not so much the possibility of running out of time to be this small giant, but more that he had this desire to in the first place. It was rather shallow, wasn't it really. Not to mention entirely illogical of course— the great benefit of being dead, surely, was that one didn't care about anything.

Regardless, he wasn't sure how long he had stayed, scribbling away under a blanket, the cat clawing at his knees, but eventually he had shoved the pages of paper he had collected into his desk drawer, and in an almost bliss like state of exhaustion, collapsed back into bed. The next night, without prompting, he had decided to stay up and write again. *It's ok, nobody is ever going to read this*, he had whispered to himself.

Without knowing why, he started writing about a friend he hadn't thought about properly in years. Jake was a boy he had gone to school with who had been killed in a car crash the night they got their A-level results. He had been clever, cleverer than Daniel, and was going to go to Oxford with him. In the first few years after his death, Daniel would sometimes close his eyes and try to conjure how it felt to be in Jake's company, realising how it was a uniquely different sensation to every other friend. Not because Jake had been his best friend, but because he had been the only version of this friend.

Daniel remembered clearly the days after finding out, and how it was nothing like the films, or even the films that had played in his mind, the way minds play out the endless forms of everyday occurrences that could kill a loved one. Jools for example, had been killed on the way to Sainsbury's multiple times, almost every time she had been on a plane without Daniel and once she had lain dying at the bottom of the stairs whilst Daniel rushed back from work to find her in the back garden, smoking from the pack of cigarettes she promised she'd thrown away. Daniel had been so relieved to find her alive that he hadn't even been cross. In any case, all these imaginings were always very loud, full of shouting and wails, whereas the real thing was very quiet.

There was a lot of silence involved in grief it seemed, and an unspoken pull to be together with others who had loved this person too. Of course it was tragic that Jake had been so young, but there was something unique to grieving at this age, Daniel felt, even a certain luxury in the time and disposition that youth afforded to be able to simply *hang out* together. A bunch of not quite boys, not quite men, moving from one parental lounge to another, knowing the heaviness each of them carried in their chests without the adult expectation to adequately express it in words. When these meetings started to fade away, when they went back to their part time jobs and preparations for university, an anger filled Daniel like water starting to boil; it prickled and simmered at first, then started to hiss, as if his entire body's mass of water had become searing hot. All of his

language became submerged; speaking meant diving down to find each word, and it was exhausting.

'It's not fair' were the only words he could manage to place together, when asked by his father, sitting next to him on the sofa, watching *Top of The Pops*, how he was.

'I don't think fair comes into it,' his Father had said, not taking his eyes away from Morrissey. 'You just don't know what fate has in store for you. It gives you these trials and they make you. They are the creation of you.'

*

Sunlight is streaming into his office windows. Daniel should close the blinds so he can see computer screen well enough to plan his class but it feels rude to shut out the sun. Besides, it is the last seminar of the semester and he doesn't expect many students. He would have thought Lucia or Lola and her friends would come, having been spotted earlier, but if there is anything he has learnt in all his years of teaching, it is that students have very little shame. Also, that there was no way of shaming the ones who made no effort, as they always seemed to be the brightest. Life really wasn't fair. He shuts his computer down and positions his chair so that the sunshine falls onto his face, taking off his glasses and placing them on the desk. He will give the conscientious, less able students some much needed exam revision today, he will give them full rein to ask as many daft questions as they like and he will keep his patience throughout. Maybe he will even buy some chocolate to bring to class.

It occurs to Daniel that his students are only a few months older than Jake was when he died. They seem so young, and a bit clueless, but Daniel doesn't feel that he has changed at all, not really, not in the core of who he is. Sometimes he sees a group of young people out and about, and thinks 'ah, people my age are here' and then he will realise that he doesn't have any idea what they are saying, that they are speaking so quickly and with all of these words that they seem to have fabricated amongst themselves. *Heteroglossia*— is that what it is, the coexistence of different meanings within the same language? It seems important on a primal level to Daniel to be certain that if he were to meet Jake now as he was then, if he were to appear as one of his students, that they would have the same connection as an eighteen and a thirty five year old, that their bond was deeper than age, culture or language, but of course, he couldn't be sure. So much has happened in Daniel's life since that time. After Jake's death, much

was made of his wasted *potential*—this nebulous, intangible entity that glows inside everyone, but is attributed in varying quantities depending on specific conceptions of intelligence; Jake, of course, had had *so much*. But it was mostly the ‘adults’ of the time, the parents and teachers, the media, those who hadn’t really known him who had spoken about Jake in terms of this potential— his grades, his university offers and the shining career that had been waiting for him. Those who had really known him, his friends, his family, had spoken of him in terms of what Daniel could only name a *Jake-ness* — the way it felt to be around him, the distinct sound of his laugh, his silliness. This was an essence that couldn’t be placed into words of course and thus there would be no historical records of his achievements. The memories Daniel had left were understated moments; fragile and subjective, and seventeen years later fraying and faded. There wasn’t much time to remember someone you had once known as a teenager, and whose own life was surely, inevitably, filtered through the sentiment reserved for the dead.

A knock on the door startles Daniel. Was he late for his class already?

‘Come in.’

Helen stood awkwardly at the door.

‘Hi Helen, is everything ok?’

‘Yes...I just wanted to say, I’m sorry— going on about myself and my problems, when you know...’ Did she mean saying her life was a disaster? Daniel loved that— it was so refreshing.

‘Oh no, don’t stop— I mean, I like speaking to you in the mornings.’

‘Well. Ok. But... good luck with the operation next week, Daniel. We will all be thinking of you.’

Daniel’s mind had wandered off again— what was she saying? Oh yes, the operation. ‘Helen— how would you like to be remembered after you die?’

Helen looks stricken ‘You’re not going to die, Daniel’.

‘No, no, I know. Well I don’t know, but it would be very unlikely if it were this particular operation that killed me. I’m just.... researching for a paper. I was just wondering— how would you like to be remembered?’

Helen laughs 'Oh, let them forget me,' she says.

An immense sense of relief, a wonderful lightness comes over Daniel. Of course.

'That's brilliant! Thank you so much. I better get to my class now.'

When he arrives, a few minutes late, Lola or Lucia is sitting there already, but nobody else.

'Nobody come,' she says apologetically.

'Not to worry!' Daniel says, and then— 'I'm really sorry, but I'm a bit out of sorts at the moment. What is your name?' Daniel asks.

'Isabella,' she says.

'Really?'

'Yes.'

'Oh. Well Isabella— I'm sorry nobody else came, you don't have to stay here with me.'

'Please, I would like to revise for exam with you— I have a certain amount of clock that is ticking, you know?'

'Of course,' says Daniel 'Yes, I know.'

And All That is In Between

“To be a Jew then meant more symbolically than physically, although the symbolic and the physical were joined at the hip. Likewise, the deaf represent, among other things, the idea of moral spiritual deafness, an inability to hear the word of God, an inability to participate in reason, and in life.

Thus the Deaf became a new subgroup within each state throughout Europe; like Jews and gypsies, they were an ethnic group in the midst of the nation.”

Leonard J. Davis

They had met on a train to Paris. He was going on a research trip. She was going home. She is French, she asks where in England he comes from. This makes him laugh, because although he knows his accent is good, nobody has ever assumed with such certainty before that he was from England, or from anywhere at all. The place he was born was Germany when he lived there, now it is Poland. Eli will never be German, or Polish or English. Marie is a French girl, who has been on a nice holiday and now is going home. Of course they can never have a future. But he has nobody else to talk to and she is dripping with wit, and it is easy to spend a journey with her. When they arrive, she tells him she can meet during the evenings, that she will show him the best places to eat. She fills his week with so much *steak frites* that he feels he might burst and he likes to watch how her cheeks flush the same colour as the *vin rouge* that they drink. He doesn't expect to hear from her again once he has left, but it transpires that she is a rather persistent person, and one day she arrives at the house in London.

Marie is very tall with large hands and an unusual, striking face. She is confident and demanding and clever and she doesn't leave his mind easily. Perhaps if Eli had lived an ordinary life he would ask her to marry him but he hasn't and he is not looking for a savior. He cannot tell her to leave, so instead he builds a space between them and allows it to get bigger and bigger until she breaks and demands he opens up for her and he does not and she leaves. And so then it is she who has left and he can forget. Eli knows forgetting, he has been practicing forgetting for as long as he has been remembering, and he has at last learnt that when a memory persists there is work and there is alcohol.

Now she has written saying she has had a child, a girl. But the girl is almost two years old now and he struggles to understand why she has given him this information, more details to forget. She sends a photo, and he places it underneath his underwear, at the bottom of the drawer. He wires some money and a message to request that she not write again. She will be a good mother, she will find a husband and a father for her daughter; he hopes she already has.

His own mother is dying, finally. *Finally* not because he is glad but simply that it seems she has been convinced that something was killing her for as long as she came to this country, for as long as something was not, in fact, killing her. Now something has finally come: cancer '*all over, everywhere*', as she likes to remind him, and she is happy. Her entire body seems to have relaxed with the knowledge that she will be leaving soon. Eli has never known her face to be so softened, her words to be spoken with such tenderness. Perhaps it is the change of language. They have not spoken this language in sixteen years, and he had grown to fear the sound of it. But once the morphine took a hold and she started to move in and out of dreams, the change seemed natural, as if the language she spoke was not the language of the country she had left but the country of her *Kindheit*, and of her childhood self. A thought comes to him; once she was a curious two-year-old, learning to place together her first sentences.

Eli has never remembered his dreams, and the rare few that have stayed with him into the daylight were a re-living of his daily life; walking to work, conversations in the lab: never anything fanciful, and certainly not anything of the past. His father used to say he dreamt only in black and white and this has always seemed quite sensible to Eli.

In the last two weeks however, he has been waking at three am with a version of the same dream every time. It is the garden, and Arno is there, and they are young boys. He struggles to remember any words, and Arno's face is a blur, but the feeling stays with him in those moments of waking, flows through his body for a few, glorious minutes: freedom.

*

Herr Weber is making Arno recite his time-tables over and over and he can't remember the sevens, it's *always* the sevens and the whole class is laughing and he doesn't know what to do but *then*, like a slow trickle of warmth the thought comes to Arno—*I'm in a dream!* And then it was as if the thought broke the bubble open and he is awake and he is not at school but he is at home. He looks around his room, smiling to himself as soft sunlight peeps through his shutters. No school for two months! He makes his way downstairs in his pyjamas and finds Mama washing the pans; she turns around as he comes down the last step and points at the clock.

You slept late he reads on her lips.

Arno shrugs and reaches for the bread and marmalade that she has put in front of him. Why did adults care about such things? He was always either too early or too late or wearing the wrong clothes or playing with the wrong people. Only because Mama always got up at the same time every day and wore smart clothes even though she didn't have an office to go to like Papa. Eli's father worked at a university, and his mother worked as a teacher at the school. Mama said a woman with a husband and a child shouldn't be looking after other people's children. He eats

quickly, now he was up he is eager to get round to Eli's house. He dressed and went outside, getting his bike from the garden and wheeling it around the path, knocking three times on the big metal knocker that was shaped like a lion's head. Eli's father opens the door and gives Arno a big smile, gesturing him to come in. With a thumbs up and two fingers that moved from Herr Guttman to Arno, he shows him *good to see you* and Arno put his two fingers next to each other to say *same*. Eli came down the stairs, waving for him to follow into the garden. Even though Eli's garden was just next door to his own, it was much bigger and better. The best bit was the end of the garden where there was a line of pine trees, a mini forest. It was possible to climb from one end of the forest to the other, just swinging from the trees. Or you could each a climb a tree and sit opposite, passing each other things, like tools and pieces of wood for making a tree house.

This is what they had done last summer, when Eli's father had shown them how to chop and saw and hammer, and to make things with their hands. They worked together every day until it got dark; even at lunch times they were too busy to go inside to eat, so they had let Eli's mother come into the trees long enough to pass up pieces of brown bread and potato cakes wrapped in paper. When the house was finally finished, they had begged their parents to let them stay one night in it. They lasted most

of it, buried inside sleeping bags, looking at the giant sky. Then it was really cold so they had gone inside.

Today Eli's mother was making them round sandwiches with meat inside for their bike ride; they were going to cycle and cycle and they didn't know when they would ever come back. Maybe when they became really hungry and then they would probably come home for supper.

*

His mother does not like to be awoken before he leaves for work; it is too early and recently she has been spending much of the day asleep. Eli leaves bread, water and the paper, opened at the crossword, next to her bed. She stirs very slightly as he enters the room, gives a half smile, and then back to sleep. Eli has been paying Elizabeth, his mother's old colleague from the Girl's school, a small fee to come over for a few hours each day. She will make her a soup in a few hours, he hopes. He had told Elizabeth that she needed only to be in the house, but she insists on filling the time with cleaning and cooking, and he can't summon the energy to argue too much. Maybe he will keep her on after his mother has died; he has never been much of a homemaker and besides he imagines he would like the company, it is likely that the house will feel empty to him. Perhaps he will get students in too. He was less keen on this idea but while Eli was not in need of money now there was talk at the hospital of letting people go, and his research was nearly at an end. Only a fool spends savings before he really needs to.

He dresses, puts a pan on the stove for a coffee, but when it boils he realizes that there is no milk. He can't stand the taste of it black. He pours it away and leaves the house. Coffee makes him jittery anyway.

*

Dear Mr and Mrs Schmidt,

We are writing to inform you that Arno Schmidt, born November 8th, 1924, is to be sterilized in accordance with the decision of the Hereditary Health Court. We hope that you will assist us in this matter, but the law stipulates that in the case of persons above fourteen years old of age the operation may be performed without the consent of the parents and guardians and indeed that the sterilization operation may also be performed against the will of the subject.

We hope that you will gladly take this opportunity to collaborate in the improvement of the German people, which is the ultimate objective of this law.

In the words of Professor Eugen Fischer 'We must sharpen the focus of our ethical responsibilities and of our conscience with regard to coming generations. We must not only love the people of which we are now a part but also those who we shall one day become.'

I believe that it will be quite a good thing for Arno that he has no children. His life will likely be hard enough as it is.

Heil Hitler!

The letter was left on the kitchen table. Inside the envelope, but it was there for Arno to see. Maybe his parents wanted him to see it; maybe it was their own way of letting him know. Or maybe they still believed that he was unable to read anything. Arno could read; he was a good reader. But he couldn't put this letter together in his head to make a joined up meaning. Too many of the words were unknown to him. *Stipulates, conscience, sterilization*. He didn't know these words, but he had a growing sickness in his stomach. Whatever was happening, it was something bad. He waited until his parents were asleep, and took the letter in his pocket with the torch. He flashed the light three times outside Eli's window. They walked together without talking until they got to their new meeting place. When Arno came back for the winter holidays, he noticed how

Eli had changed: his face was thinner, his shoulders had widened and his dark hair had spread to his face. Arno was still chubby and hairless; he was still a boy, whereas Eli was already a man. That wasn't all that had changed. Eli wasn't allowed to ride a bike anymore, or go to the swimming pool, or to the park, and Arno's mother had told him he was no longer allowed to go around to Eli's house, so there was almost nothing they could do. The only time they could meet was after their parents were asleep, and Arno knew that if he was found he would be punished. But he would be back to school soon, and so maybe this would be the last time they would meet until the summer, and he hoped it would all be over by then. He had been praying every night. They walked with space between them and did not speak until they got to the special place they had found that had no people and no lights. It was very cold and he had been shivering even inside the house, ever since he saw the letter. He was afraid to use his voice in case it was too loud and it was difficult to sign under the light of the torch but soon their eyes became adjusted to the dark, and they found a way to understand each other. He passed the letter to Eli, who read it only once, quickly, and without expression on his face.

Then Eli had looked him right in the eyes.

Bad, he signed. *If they come and try to take you, don't let them.*

Understand? He signed, fingers quick and half lost into the darkness.

Arno had nodded.

I'm serious he signed. His new man arms began to swing back and forth, big fists clenched: *Run*.

*

It is really just final edits to do now; he could have them finished in a couple of weeks if he got down to it. But then it would be the viva and then he would have to leave. He cannot declare some great love for Cambridge, but neither can he deny a certain attachment to the place. Eli had never made a great point of needing to be liked or admired, but it was important to try and strike a balance between being overly conspicuous and making sure one was quietly indispensable. His aptitude for scientific knowledge had been a crucial factor in his own safety, but it had also brought him attention. Now it was time to leave and he knew it but the future looked uncertain again. Whilst he knew he could enquire about a lectureship, the idea of

standing in front of a lecture hall made him feel uneasy. Memories had started to come to him, interfering with his ability to think clearly. Standing in front of the school, a sea of young faces looking at him with a mixture of confusion and something else that he had never been able to place, no matter how many times the memory revisited him.

Eli Guttman will not be taking up his scholarship at the Gymnasium in September, the voice of his Head teacher echoed in his head, because he is a Jew.

Eli had no more of an idea of what this thing of being a Jew had to do with him now than he did then. When he was a small child he remembered telling his parents that they must start praying, and attending church but they had told him Church was not for *thinking people* and that Eli was intelligent enough to know better. *Intelligent enough. Be clever but not too clever.*

Sitting on the stairs outside the living room, listening to his mother address his father in half hushed shouts:

They are burning our books, Max- what are we waiting for now, how can you let us wait for it to get any worse?

Don't fret yourself so, it will blow over, Rose.

Intelligent enough. Intelligent enough to be accepted at a prestigious British school, intelligent enough not to talk too much to the wrong people. Intelligent enough to be accepted for something outside of this thing that he was, not intelligent enough to understand *what* this thing was. Where did this Jewishness reside in his body? It could not be seen in the colour of his skin, or suspected from the sound of his crisp, English accent. But it was always there, this sense of a secret: intangible yet un-deniable. *Alien* was the word written into his papers in the detention center. He wasn't sure if it this was better than the *animal* that had been hissed at him across the border.

Of course it would be wrong to suggest that he was the only one. There were others at Cambridge who were *like him* but they were nothing like him at all; they walked around together in a group, loud and obnoxious, acting superior in lectures and associating only with one another. At first they had tried to befriend him. The men had sought him out as some sort of comrade; the women had probed him to see if he were

marriage material. Eli would go out at night with anyone, he would refuse nobody a drink and the easy conversation that the night and alcohol allowed but there was a limit. Independence was the price of freedom and he would never allow anybody to take that away from him.

*

The children weren't stupid. Well, some of them were but Arno certainly wasn't. It hadn't taken long to realize that some of his classmates were going home for the weekend and not coming back again, and that all of these children were Jews. But in any case, nobody was left in any doubt after David Muller had asked Frau Mostert where his friend Hannah had gone.

Hannah is a Jew. The Jews are bad people. They are not allowed to marry, they are thieves. You will not ask any more questions about the Jews in my classroom. She had signed as she spoke, something that she never did, so that nobody could dare say they had not understood.

Arno thought about Eli every day and prayed each night. He prayed that Eli was safe, and that his parents were safe. *They are good people, God,* he said, saying the words with his lips, his hands firmly in the prayer position, in case it were true what Frau Mostert had said that God hated people to talk with their hands.

Then other children started to disappear, but just for a day or two, and when they came back they would go straight to their rooms and say nothing to the others. The deep cold hole in Arno's stomach became colder and deeper and at meal times he passed his food along to Paul, who gave him a smile as wide as his face.

He knows that they will come for him next, and he thinks of what Eli had told him but he has nowhere to go. With no money he would only be caught and brought back to a punishment bigger than whatever the doctors were going to do to him.

It is just a small cut, his mother had written on a sheet of brown paper she took from her desk. *They will give you medicine so that you won't feel anything and when you wake up it will all be over.*

But why he had signed, trying to make her look at him, *why me?*

She would not look back at him. *For a better world, she had written, we all have to make sacrifices.*

Dear God, he had prayed the night before he was taken, I promise I will go without a fuss, and I will be kind to the doctors and to my teachers, if you will please keep Eli safe.

He had lasted all the way to the hospital without any misbehaving. Arno didn't know what had come over him in the room with the nurse. Maybe it was true that he was an animal after all. For when she came to inject him, a feeling so strong and so fierce had overcome him, burning the cold pit of his stomach and filling him all the way up with such a hot heat, that for a moment it was as if he saw another Arno from the outside, leaping like a wild cat on the woman.

Afterwards, he had felt bad for the lady. He remembered that she had a kind smile and soft hands. It took two doctors to get him off of her, and after that he remembered nothing. But he knew when he woke up again that he wasn't the same Arno as he had been before.

*

He would not say the words and she could not say them for him. There was only two times that he had alluded to the event, and both times he had snapped quite sharply at her. She had referred to him as German and he had given her such a look that she had apologized before she knew what she was apologizing for.

I mean, that's where you were born, she had mumbled.

I am not German he had said and that was final. Neither would he tell her anything about his time in Germany. There's nothing to say about it, he had said. In the end, I got away scot-free.

But there were so many unanswered questions, things that didn't add up. He had alluded to his father being taken away, but another time he said that he'd died from a heart attack on a London bus.

She had presumed, from the date that he had arrived, that he travelled by the Kindertransport. *You suppose they would take my mother too?* He had asked, as if she were dimwitted— *we walked, naturally.*

When she had seen him on the train, she had such a sense of recognition that she was convinced she must have seen him somewhere in Paris before, but when she spoke to him in French, he had answered perfectly, but with an English accent. This had taken her off guard for a moment, but then everything had seemed to come together in those next few minutes. Of course he was British, like her own father! A whole future flashed before her eyes. But he was not British at all, and German neither, and the word *Jewish* felt alien and uncomfortable to her; besides, he was not a religious man. It seemed he came from nowhere and identified with nothing. Marie believed deeply in an afterlife, and in a God. It upset her to find out that he did not. *Give me evidence, he had said, if God exists then explain him. What does he look like? Where does he live?*

Marie would not explain to him that God was not something that could be understood, that God could only be felt in the quiet spaces between people. But she could not explain to someone who had such a gift with words, because he would always win at every argument, in any language. It made her so sad because she had felt so strongly that they were meant for each other, that he only needed time to see. But she could not make him love her.

*

He knew something was wrong as soon as he turned into the street; something made him drop his bags and run to Eli's house. He banged the lion's head three times and then three more and then he banged at the door with his bare fists. When nobody came he started to shout, he shouted so much that his chest shook and he felt he might be sick but nobody came except for his own Father, who grabbed him suddenly from behind, dragging him next door, placing his hand over his mouth so that Arno could no longer scream.

*

The journey had begun when they took his father. They had broken into his office and taken him, that's what the friend who had come, running, out of breath with sweat on his forehead, around to the house to tell them had said, that was all he knew. The papers for their leaving were nearly ready and they had planned to leave as a three, any time now, any day now. Instead his mother had packed a bag and said that they would leave immediately, *there is no time for tears and there is no time for questions* she had said and

they had started to walk. They had walked until they got to the sea, and when they got to the sea they had taken a boat until they got to land, and when they got to land they were taken into the detention centre and when they got to the detention centre they had waited. And when the waiting was over his mother was allowed to stay with her Aunt, and Eli was sent to the school that had been waiting too, for him. He would see his mother in the holidays and he was lucky to be here and to have an education, *you are a very lucky young man, do you understand Eli?*

And his father... his father was somewhere else, but there was no time for tears and there was no time for questions.

*

It was not sensible to be like this, but the food would simply not go down. It may have been a physical problem, something wrong with her throat. Renate Schmidt was not a weak woman; she would not be one to ever lose her mind. It had started with those people, the ones who lived next door. Why did it have to be the case, as if she did not already have her own hardships to deal with; so many years trying for a child, only for him to be defective, then to know that she could never have Grandchildren. But these extreme times called for extreme measures: for sacrifice, on everybody's part. Renate did not concern herself with politics, that was a man's position, but she was not a fool, and she knew that things would be better now—perhaps not for everyone, but for those who deserved it, for those whose ancestry was part of this country, those who would make up its future. It was not good to allow society to become chaotic, for individuals to just live their lives on a whim. There must be an order, certain rules. She was not an intolerant person; in another life, she had been on civil terms with those people, had been looking forward, even, to them moving in; another family, just one son, like her own. But she had not known then. It was not obvious from the start, but looking back there had always been signs, differences.

She would not say their names because they had gone now, and they had got what was coming to them, what was only right, decent. Indeed, she herself had been nothing but decent to those people. She had given them time, had waited as long as she could, longer than was really right, because of course she had not wanted to be the one to do it. There had been ample time for them to sort something out, or at least to lie low,

to show some respect for their place in this society. But they had still held onto that property, as if they had every right to, *he* had still been going to that job at the university of all places; at least *she* seemed to have realised that this country did not want her sort influencing its young minds. It was the teaching that really got to her; thinking of that man talking to students, impressionable young minds. It was for those young people, barely grown, that she had finally gathered the resolve to do it.

She had lost her nerve slightly, she will admit that; she could not quite manage to tell them about the child, could not quite utter the name of the address; it was so close to her own. So: they should think themselves very lucky indeed. Renate had not said where they lived, or where the child went to school. She had only stated that the man was still teaching at the university. Yes, that was the correct address.

In fact, Renate did not waste her precious time thinking about them. They were in dreams, but she got up in the night now when this happened and got on with tasks as if it were the day. There was plenty to do, plenty. Renate was a sensible person; she would never be one to lose her mind. There must be something wrong with her throat, but she would not waste the doctor's precious minutes at a time like this.

*

Arno could pedal so fast and he could feel the sun on his face and he could ride even faster than Eli, and he rode around the corner and hid from Eli behind a wall, laughter swelling up inside him. Arno watched as Eli came around the corner looking around blankly and the laughter escaped out of him. Eli saw him then and grinned, shaking a fist at Arno. Then he stopped, listening for something. *Thunder*, he signed; *a storm is coming*. They cycled quickly to the centre of town, and waited underneath a building, watching as the rain came, so much and all at once. Where had it come from? The weather was so exciting like that, how it could change so quickly. Then lightning! Lighting up the whole sky, flash, flash, flash! Other people might have been scared but Arno wasn't. Besides, Eli was there with him, and he had warned Arno about the thunder before the storm.

*

Sabine had signed her first full sentence today. *More*, she had asked, gesturing with her little hands to the plate in front of her, *me want more*. Arno broke her off another piece of soft bread, and she beamed at him, chuckling as she stuffed it into her mouth.

When she had first arrived at their home, almost a year ago now, eleven months old, chubby and fluffy haired, she wouldn't make eye contact, wouldn't smile at them, she would barely even cry.

It had been a long battle for Arno and his wife Petra to be granted the right to adopt, a battle full of incomprehensible paper work and visits from people with fake smiles who mouthed everything so slowly that it was nearly impossible to lip read more than a handful of words. After each meeting, the two of them would sit together and compare what they had understood, shaping out each sign carefully, as if it could be lost into the air; transcribing each discovered word onto paper as soon as they were decided on what it was. They had known it would be a battle and he knew Petra had lost hope many times. But Arno had a quiet knowing that they would be given back the right that was taken from them. The right to love and care for a child as best they could. Carrying a child in her belly was a right that had been taken from Petra, and nothing could compensate for this. There was a part of both of them that had been hurt in a way that could never be healed. The State had taken away the freedom of their own bodies; they had said *there is something about you that is broken, and you must not pass this broken part of yourself on to anyone else*. But neither of them had ever been broken, it was the State that had broken them. It was the teachers who had betrayed them, their parents who had believed the lies of strangers over the knowing of their own hearts.

Now there was a little girl who needed them and it had not been easy. She too had been broken by a society who had not wanted her as she was. Arno could not take this away from her and he would never shield her from her past. It was important that children inherit the truth. But he would love her like his own daughter. Above all he would let it be known that she was perfect, precisely as she was. He would allow her to be entirely herself.

*

There were thunderstorms forecast, and Eli could hear it in the distance, the rumblings of a beast approaching. He closed the curtains in his mother's room but she murmured a protest and Eli drew them open once more. She had always loved thunderstorms.

Donner und Blitz. It was his father who had been frightened of them. He would sit cowering in the corner of the room, yelling at her to close the windows as she stuck her head out, stretching her arms out to feel the rain: *But come, Max, doesn't it make you feel alive!*

It would happen any time now, he could see it on her face. He sat besides her shrunken body on the bed. He had a cloth for wiping away the beads of perspiration that continued to surface on her forehead. He would like to stroke her face directly, to feel his hand upon her warm skin but it was too late to start this sort of thing now. Nevertheless, he would miss her.

He had not asked his mother the questions that he had always thought he would ask, and perhaps this was okay. The pursuit of facts had seemed so important to Eli at one time. Science had seemed so clearly to be that place where he could find the truth. But in practice it was only guess work, a set of trials until you found a likely answer, only to know that someone in the future would replace this work with some new, better answer.

It was someone's science that had condemned him, a series of theories built over decades by multiple people, until one person used it against people that looked very slightly like himself. Soon they would come for someone else, invent another story. Eli could only hope that this was not the case, but he suspected it was inevitable. Telling stories was the only way we knew, an attempt at least to appease this aching lack of understanding. But the truth would only ever remain half whispered speculation, signs in the dark.

There was no answer that his mother could give that would ever make him understand. So in the end, not *the* end, but his mother's end, they would sit in silence and the space in between them would be where the knowing was.

Maybe the rest would be the research of a future generation; maybe it would be an easier story for them to tell.

For now, he would have to learn to reframe his own story. He would learn to re-remember, and he would start with Arno's mother. He would learn to remember her not as the woman who had informed the authorities and lost him a father, but as the woman who had been his neighbor and given him a friend. A vulnerable woman: a woman whose guilt had in the end, caused her to take her own life.

It was clear to Eli now that he would never be capable of forgetting her, so he would have to find a kind of peace with her, even if that peace could only exist inside his own, still beating heart.

After all, she too had only been told a story.

A Critical Exploration of Language, Otherness and The Role Of The Contemporary Writer.

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Introduction

The interlinking of critical and creative research

The following chapters comprise the critical component of my thesis, and as such this is primarily an introduction to these chapters, rather than to the project overall. However, given the somewhat unique nature of the critical/creative crossover in this Ph.D. programme, it seems important to outline both aspects, and the way in which they function as a whole. Whilst the critical and creative components are two separate pieces of work, and the project output is ultimately two separate strands of distinctly different forms of writing, the two are necessarily in dialogue with each other.

Furthermore, the critical chapters are also comprised of two halves— the first concentrating more specifically on two literary texts and disability theory— and the second two chapters broadening out to wider issues in regards to fiction writing in general, and to key themes in my novel outside of the scope of disability. The sequence of these topics is a reflection of my own research process, which, because of my work with people with language-affecting disabilities, started primarily with the desire to research disability and communication. At the start of my research, I was interested in communication between people with and without a language affecting disability, and in the idea of there being an ‘in between’ space. The notion of this ‘in between’ was initially quite practical in nature, arising as it did from my own translation work between BSL and English, and in communicating with non-verbal clients; I wanted to know what was lost in translation, and also what could be gained from these non-typical forms of human connection.

It was from starting the writing process of the novel, in which I specifically wrote characters with disabilities that I do not have, that I recognised the more general contemporary questions concerning the poor representation of minority groups, cultural appropriation and identity politics within literature. These concerns have a bigger scope than disability but are relevant to issues of race, borders and power dynamics; all topics that were gradually creeping into my creative work, largely because of major political events happening at the time of writing. These political matters became incorporated in my writing process and it became pressing for me to reflect on

ways in which we almost artificially separate out strands of our lives into what affects 'us' and what affects 'them'. As such, the research questions I ended up navigating in my critical work became broader than topics of disability and communication, focussing instead on the ways in which communication connects and divides people in general.

We live in a digital and globalised world, where it is easier than ever before to communicate with people, yet these opportunities are equally guilty of distracting us from 'real life' interactions as well as being increasingly hostile in nature (for example, nuance is difficult in 280 characters.) The communication that takes place in my workspaces with people who communicate differently to me is by nature difficult (I am not a native British Sign Language user, PECS (the picture exchange system) is slow etc.) and thus requires full concentration, and a capacity to be in the moment. The juxtaposition between these real-life interactions in which being fully 'present' is fundamental, and online spaces in which it increasingly appears that our goal is not to listen but, as David Baddiel states in his essay 'Losing The Game On Social Media,' to group together in 'tribes' in order to say 'I am on #TeamX' feels palpable.¹ Thus as a response to these contrasting experiences of communication in my day to day life, I began exploring ideas about human connection existing between the terms *right wing, left wing, black, white, refugee, citizen, politician, homeless person* etc.

Contextual notes on my influences

In various roles from carer to teaching assistant to interpreter, I have worked with people who use language 'differently' in order to communicate: autistic children who use PECS and non-verbal communication; children who use no form of ascribed communication at all; and deaf adults who sign. In schools, work places and homes, these various forms that are distinct from spoken and written English are used in order to perform the same role that conventional language does; for two human beings to relate to one another. It is as a consequence of these jobs that I have become increasingly interested by what it means, as a species that is defined by being (supposedly) superior to other animals by virtue of (spoken, written, state recognised) language, to form a relationship with a person who communicates outside of these parameters. In turn, these relationships serve as a reminder that all relationships,

¹ David Baddiel, 'Losing The Game of Meaning On Social Media' in *The Politics of Feeling, Granta: The Magazine of New Writing*, Issue 146 (Granta, December 2019), p.174

conventional language- using or not, also exist as genuinely in moments outside of language as they do within it.

A separate yet interlinking influence on my interest in this idea of an 'in between', is my communication with my divorced parents. Like many other children of non-amicable parents, I learnt very quickly how to navigate between opposing views and how to protect each parent from each other's upsetting words. The way that my parents communicated, through messages they would give me verbally, which I would then in turn relay with my best attempts at edits in order to least offend, is, in retrospect, a form of metaphor for the second-hand nature of all relationships. All relationships that rely on language involve a certain degree of editing to put our feelings into thought; there is always a space between what we feel inside and what we decide, consciously or unconsciously, to share with another person. Although the dynamics between a deaf person, hearing person and interpreter is different from two feuding parents and a child, and different again between two people without a middle-man, this concept of there always being some kind of space between any two people becomes solidified in the process of interpreting.

Divorce also resulted in living between socioeconomic states; with divorce comes different homes and thus different financial situations, opinions and lifestyles, and my upbringing was not particularly unusual in this regard. However, the position I occupied between these supposedly fixed class lines is intrinsic to my own interest in the numerous ways that we attribute categories to each other, and thus how we all, in various ways, exist between states of being and labels attributed to us through language.

The last way in which my own life has provoked me to think about 'in between' identities is my relationship towards my Jewishness, a theme that is repeated throughout *And All That Is In Between*. Jewishness embodies the idea of an 'in between' because it is lacking in any clear definition; Jewish people simultaneously come from every country and from nowhere specific. Jewishness can be considered a religion, a cultural and historical legacy or an ethnicity and it does not fall neatly into any of these categories. In her article 'Passing for White, Passing for Jewish', Lori Harrison Kahan identifies this in between place that Jewishness embodies, writing:

Occupying more than one position at once, Jewishness simultaneously signifies whiteness and racial otherness; furthermore, the confusion over whether the label "Jewish" refers to race, ethnicity, religion, or culture is emblematic of its complex meanings across categories of identity. As it appears in contemporary ethnic literature, the theme of "passing for Jewish" underscores the debate about whether Jewish identity qualifies as whiteness or racial otherness.²

To be white and of Jewish ancestry but not faith is to hold a privileged position; in day-to-day interactions I hold all the privilege of a white, non-Jewish person. Bar a handful of times where I have stated my Jewishness and been met with anti-Semitic comments, I have not been affected by racism in any way in the same capacity as a person of colour, or indeed (and in a different way again) as someone who is visibly practicing the faith. Yet at the same time it is also true that to be the ancestor of a long line of family members that were persecuted because of their ethnicity is to share some similarities in the experiences of generational trauma that a person of colour might. As Kahan describes, "passing for Jewish" depicts Jewishness *as* whiteness and thus as a part of the dominant culture. Once "almost white, but not quite," to play on Homi Bhabha's formulation, Jews are now "almost ethnic, but not quite."³

The ways in which I have explored Jewishness in my creative work aims to run parallel to the way in which I have explored deafness. As I will come to shortly, there are numerous ways in which one can identify as being D/deaf, and the relation between the D/deaf and Jewish identity in my work intends to highlight that there are many ways of inhabiting a certain identity, and that one can both identify and not identify with a community and a label.

Intersectionality and overlapping experience

In 1989 Kimberlé Crenshaw published a paper at the university of Chicago legal forum titled 'Demarginalizing The Intersection Of Race And Sex' in which she introduced the term intersectionality. It wasn't for another thirty years— 2015— that the term made its way into the Oxford English dictionary, which defines it as:

² Lori Harrison Kahan, 'Passing for White, Passing for Jewish: Mixed Race Identity in Danzy Senna and Rebecca Walker' (*MELUS*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2005, pp. 19–48) *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/30029610, [Date accessed 24/06/20]

³ *Ibid*

The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.⁴

The concept of intersectionality has undoubtedly been important in my own research and understanding of how multiple facets of one's identity have a bearing on life chances. To be D/deaf and female comes with a different form of systemic oppression to being hearing and female; similarly, being white and Jewish is a very different experience than being Black and Jewish, for example. Reflecting upon the ways in which different systemic inequalities interconnect has been pivotal to my understanding of individuality and nuance. It has also been key to questioning the themes I chose to interrogate in my creative work. My aim in highlighting the overlaps in discrimination between different subsections of social groups in *And All That is In Between* is not for people to decide to shrug off privilege because 'everyone has some sort of disadvantage in life'. Neither is my intention to suggest that we 'spiritually bypass' real structural problems or that we should be 'post racial.' Recognition of class, racial, gendered and able-bodied privilege is long over-due and, in many ways, only in its infancy. My hope is that alongside this recognition, we can also make space to acknowledge the multiplicities that all identities sit within, and that by acknowledging shared overlaps of vulnerabilities, even if these are not the same, we could work together more easily to find shared solutions, and to dissipate fears of 'the other.' Besides from the 1% elite, very few of us exist entirely away from a cross-section of privilege awarded by social-economic factors. By recognizing these overlaps and contradictions we can also recognize our shared humanity and find solutions.

This 'in between' therefore, is at once about acknowledging the gaps between people—through socioeconomic differences, physical place, language and hostility—and equally about the ways in which we connect. Specifically, I argue that it is precisely in these gaps that the potential for communication and emotional connection can occur. I am interested in the uncertain places, the un-fixed identities, places and viewpoints because it is here that vulnerability lies, and thus where flexibility, potential and possibility can exist; of changing fixed ideas, of finding communication and

⁴ 'Meaning of intersectionality in English', available at: <https://www.lexico.com/definition/intersectionality> [date accessed 8/09/20]

commonalities. Thus, whereas intersectionality is integral to understanding multiple axes of oppression, a theory of 'in between' aims to highlight a shared axis of vulnerability, and thus of shared desire for connection.

Primary texts

As stated, the structure of these critical chapters in part reflects the trajectory of my research interest, from its initial grounding in language-affecting disability to its broadening out to topics that became relevant as a result of this initial research. Chapters one and two focus upon the play *Children of a Lesser God* by Mark Medoff and the collection of short stories *Chattering* by Louise Stern.⁵ I wanted to use texts that were about the D/deaf community, as this is a community that is unique in its insights on the ways in which ideas of culture, identity, language and disability interlink. I chose these texts firstly because they both explicitly address issues of systemic inequality and imbalances of power, and the ways in which language use is entrenched in these dynamics. Secondly, because they also both shed light on the D/deaf community and the nuance in the ways these political structures play out in personal relationships. Another significant reason for the selection of these two texts is an important distinction in biographical detail of the authors; namely that Medoff is hearing and Stern is Deaf, which allows a manner of critical reflection on the question of how and if an author's identity affects what is appropriate or within their capacity to write. This is a topic I have reflected on deeply in my own writing process, and **chapter three of this thesis explores these questions of identity politics and cultural appropriation, using my novel as the primary text. This chapter explores the ways in which some of the problematic tropes in the previous chapter could be applied to this text and my own identity as a writer, and how my work fits into current wider literary debate about these ideas.**

Children of a Lesser God was first performed in 1979 and centres upon the relationship between a hearing man, James, a speech teacher at a school for the deaf and his romantic involvement (and subsequent marriage) to a deaf woman, Sarah, an ex-pupil, who works at the school as a cleaner. We are introduced to Sarah by the head of the school, Franklin, as someone who has a 'certain aversion to learning speech' and this power struggle between her and James and Franklin becomes the thematic crux of the

⁵ *Children of a Lesser God*, Mark Medoff, (Amber Lane Press, 1980), *Chattering*, Louise Stern (Granta, 2010)

play.⁶ This personal power struggle becomes overtly politicised when Orin, another deaf student of the school decides to take legal action against the school for not hiring any deaf staff. This issue causes conflict between James and Sarah, and the ending of the play has some ambiguity, as the audience is left uncertain about the future of their relationship. However, they agree, (in a line laden with metaphor, and its own suggestion of an in between space) that if they were to have a future, they would 'have to meet in another place; not in silence or in sound but somewhere else'.⁷ Medoff is a hearing playwright who was inspired to write the play after meeting the new wife of his hearing colleague, Phyllis Frelich, a deaf actress who explained to him how few parts there were for deaf, sign language using actors. Medoff was open about his lack of understanding of deafness, prior to meeting Frelich, stating:

I learn quickly that I don't know very damn much about deaf people. My experience runs to coughing up quarters in shopping centers for those little manual alphabet cards and somehow lumping the deaf all together with Patty Duke (a hearing actor) as Helen Keller in the *Miracle Worker*. Not exactly a comprehensive knowledge of the subject.⁸

In this regard, whilst Medoff is candid about his own lack of personal experience of deafness and initial ignorance, **the continued use of D/deaf actors are signs of commitment to respecting Deaf culture and his understanding of this importance, presumably gained from his relationship with Friedlich.** However, there are practical implications of using sign language in a play that will be largely viewed by hearing people, and the manner in which the translation between sign and speech is built into the text, and functions within the production. These implications include reinforcing, unintentionally or not, the already evident power dynamics between the deaf and hearing protagonist. Sarah's signed lines are repeated back verbally by James, creating the impression of her own 'voice' never being first hand, something I will address within the context of deafness as metaphor, in chapter two.

Chattering is told from the perspective of largely (although not always explicitly) D/deaf, sign language using, largely female and largely unnamed protagonists, and their interactions, both brief and substantial, with hearing people. The stories are more

⁶ Mark Medoff, *Children of a Lesser God*, (Amber Lane Press, 1980), p.4

⁷ *Children of a Lesser God*, p.90

⁸ Mark Medoff, 'Not so random notes from the playwright' in *Children of a Lesser God*, p. iv

character than plot driven, and Stern's characters are often introspective, ruminating on the importance and meaning of communication, specifically in relation to their positioning as D/deaf people in a hearing world.

Chattering and *Children* are of distinct genres, and these differences have an impact on those reading, or indeed watching, them. This is particularly pertinent in relation to these texts because there are very different things to consider in terms of the way that D/deaf people and sign language are represented. Deaf and hearing audiences will have different experiences depending on which of the two languages used in the play (American Sign Language and speech) they understand. In interacting with a form of literature that is designed to be read, there is perhaps more of an equity of experience; while we may not have access to the same experiences or imagination, we all have access to the same words on the page. (Although of course this can be disputed, when considering many people who find, for a variety of reasons, reading to be difficult or not possible.) In *Chattering*, these words are written in English, but Louise Stern often uses the syntactic structure of sign language when writing dialogue between D/deaf characters, which gives non-signing readers a felt sense of the language, whilst still being able to follow it on the page, such as this description of the character Eddie, in the story 'King Eddie':

He stretched out his hand into the space in front of him, reaching as far as he could as he signed the word 'future'.

- Must think future. Must plan strategy for future. Not think now all time.
- Plus, we deaf, even more must work together.⁹

Stern is herself Deaf, and from a Deaf family, and has— in contrast to Medoff — an extensive and deeply personal knowledge of deafness and never imagined writing, in what she calls 'the hearing world'. In a 2010 interview with *The Guardian*, she explains her position in more detail:

Growing up, I didn't think I would ever live in the hearing world, let alone write in it [...] I always felt so vulnerable among hearing people. The idea of becoming

⁹ Louise Stern, 'King Eddie' in *Chattering*, (Granta, 2010), p.88

a writer, talking about my work and trying to explain it to people in the hearing world was incredibly intimidating.¹⁰

However, when working as an artist she found herself ‘pigeon-holed by curators’, explaining how she ‘was patronised as this deaf girl living in a beautiful, silent world.’¹¹ As a result she started to make art that ‘aimed to challenge received ideas about silence and communication’, stating that ‘I started to think: how can I communicate my ideas more directly with the outside world? And that's when I started writing in earnest.’¹² As well as her stories portraying the ways that hearing people ‘patronise and pigeon-hole’ deaf people, they also explicitly grapple with the role that language and silence play in shaping identity. Chapter two will also explore the multitude of more subtle ways that Stern’s characters are treated differently because of their position as D/deaf, signing people in a hearing, speaking world.

Key Terms

The following key terms are integral to the full understanding of the themes and political issues explored in my chosen primary texts:

D/deaf

Whilst there is a great number of people whose hearing would, medically, be considered below average, and as such may use devices such as hearing aids, only a small minority of people identify as ‘Deaf’. The use of the capital letter is known amongst those who identify as ‘big D deaf’ to refer to a membership of a community, in which the inhabitants predominately use sign language to communicate and who view themselves as belonging to a distinct cultural and linguistic subgroup. However, a deaf person, like anyone, will not necessarily neatly fit into two categories of ‘D/deaf’ and some deaf people may feel proud of their language and cultural identity, whilst also viewing their deafness as disabling. When interviewing people with lived experience of disability for aspects of this thesis —the process of which I shall address in my methodology shortly— one of my interviewees MD, self-described as ‘big d or small d depending on

¹⁰ Louise Stern, quoted by Lisa O’ Kelly, ‘Louise Stern: ‘I didn’t think I would ever live in the hearing world, let alone write in it’, (*The Guardian*, May 2010), <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2010/may/30/louise-stern-deaf-chattering-interview> [date accessed 11/03/19]

¹¹ ‘Louise Stern: ‘I didn’t think I would ever live in the hearing world, let alone write in it’

¹² ‘Louise Stern: ‘I didn’t think I would ever live in the hearing world, let alone write in it’

situations'.¹³ She gave the example that 'at work situations I use my voice, I probably seem like small d because I probably function pretty much as "normal" but 'then with my deaf friends I'm big d because I'll pretty likely not use my voice, I'll be signing, very much part of the deaf community.'¹⁴ She concluded that 'so I wouldn't say I'm big d or small d, I'm both really' and that 'you can't really divide people into one or the other'.¹⁵ Referring to the delineations of the two terms, she argued that:

Already within the deaf community there's lots of segregation in terms of 'you wear a hearing aid' 'you wear a cochlear implant', 'you speak', 'you can't sign'. So I think already there is division within the deaf community but then to further divide people into 'you're medically deaf', 'you're culturally deaf' [...] it can be a bit of a tricky area.'¹⁶

Social/Medical model of disability

The concept of a 'social' model of disability was first defined in 1983 by disability studies scholar Mike Oliver. Oliver was responding to the dominant perception of disability as an individual, medical problem and thus what he called the 'individual model', often commonly known as the 'medical model'. Oliver himself states that 'there is no such thing as the medical model of disability, there is instead, an individual model of disability of which medicalization is one significant component.'¹⁷ He argued that the issue with this model is firstly that 'it locates the 'problem' of disability within the individual and secondly that it sees the causes of this problem as stemming from the functional limitations or psychological losses which are assumed to arise from disability.'¹⁸ Instead, Oliver asserts that:

It is not individual limitations, of whatever kind, which are the cause of the problem but society's failure to provide appropriate services and adequately

¹³ Interview 8, see appendix

¹⁴ Interview 8, see appendix

¹⁵ Interview 8, see appendix

¹⁶ Interview 8, see appendix

¹⁷ Mike Oliver, 'The individual and social models of disability' (paper presented at joint options of the living options group and the research unit of the royal college of physicians, July 1990), p. 1, <https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/Oliver-in-soc-dis.pdf> [date accessed 16/01/19]

¹⁸ 'The Individual and Social Models of Disability', p. 2

ensure the needs of disabled people are fully taken into account in its social organisation.’¹⁹

We can look at the ways in which D/deaf people are situated in society through these two distinctions. The individual medical model pities D/deaf people for their apparent plight, and attributes any difficulties incorporating into society to their personal failure to hear. In contrast, the social model recognises that if everyone learnt sign language or if D/deaf people were not discriminated against, any disadvantages would be greatly lowered.

Ableism

A related term is the concept of ‘ableism’, which is loosely defined as discrimination against disabled people, but it seeks to illustrate that discrimination does not only take the form of outright abuse. Ableism is in the daily assumptions of a society that does not take people with disabilities into account; buildings built without ramps, cinema showings without subtitles, or the belief that people communicate solely via speech, and if they don’t, they must be in some way deviant from ‘the norm’. It is, as leading disability theorist Fiona Kumari writes, ‘a belief that impairment or disability (irrespective of ‘type’) is inherently negative and should the opportunity present itself, be ameliorated, cured or indeed eradicated’.²⁰ In the context of the D/deaf community, to acknowledge ableism is to understand that rather than seek to change themselves through medical devices or speech therapy so as to appear ‘normal’, D/deaf people may want to exist, proudly, in their own minority culture.

Audism

This is a term coined by Deaf academic Tom Humphries, and it is described as, ‘the hearing way of dominating, restructuring, and exercising authority over the deaf community’ by ‘authorizing views of them, describing them, teaching about them, governing where they go to school and, in some cases, where they live’.²¹

In his book *The Mask of Benevolence*, Harlan Lane writes that:

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Fiona Kumari Campbell, *Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Aabledness* (AIAA, 2009), p.5

²¹ Harlan Lane *The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling The Deaf Community*, (vintage books, 1993), p.43

If we respect the right of people in other cultures, including those within our borders, to have their own constitutive rules, which may differ from ours (and we can refuse to do so only at the risk of being impossibly naïve), then we must recognize that the deafness of which I speak is not a disability but rather a different way of being.²²

Chapter Review

As I will outline in chapter one, education and language, and specifically the ways that these topics are deeply entwined, are prominent themes of both primary texts. Having explored this subject in depth in chapter one in relation to my chosen literary texts, I have then given it some attention as to its significance in my own creative work in chapter four. The topic of education is also a prominent theme in my novel; schooling as a topic featuring heavily in *The Dancer*, *The Teacher* and the title story, and indeed references are littered all throughout the novel. I was influenced by my primary texts, and the way in which the interrogation of D/deaf education in both texts, although specific in many ways, also act as a microcosm for greater questions about structural inequalities and the struggle for many minority groups to find autonomy in general.

The part of Sarah in *Children of a Lesser God* was designed for a D/deaf actress and has always been played by one. This in itself, whilst seemingly an obvious choice, is actually a progressive one in 2020, let alone at the beginning of the 1980s. Whilst there has been a steady increase of disabled-led theatre companies, representation in mainstream theatre and film of disabled actors is still incredibly low, with the debate continuing as to the importance of disabled people at the very least playing disabled parts. A *Guardian* article argues that the continuing trend for able-bodied actors gaining disabled roles threatens the integrity of story telling. As Frances Ryan writes:

At best, it takes work and exposure from talented disabled actors and further adds to an arts and culture that pushes disability representation— much like race, sex and class— to the sidelines. At worst, it sees non-disabled actors mimic

²² *The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling The Deaf Community*, p.21

the characteristics of a minority group without any involvement from the community it depicts.²³

Similarly, when writers from outside a minority identity decide to write from this perspective without any involvement from the relevant community, this can be equally problematic. A key reason for this argument is that a lack of personal experience leads to relying on assumptions and stereotypes, which in turn can do further harm to already miss-represented minority groups. A prominent example of these pitfalls in writing is the way in which disability can be used as a metaphor for an issue, rather than an authentic component of a character's identity. Chapter two will look specifically at the use of metaphor in *Chattering* and *Children of a Lesser God* in the context of concepts of deafness and 'silence', but drawing upon disability theorists' ideas of metaphor and disability in general. This chapter uses David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder's theory of 'narrative prosthesis', and Amy Vidali's ideas that encourage creative and artistic reinterpretations of metaphor by disability communities.

In regards to cultural appropriation within fiction writing, the author Phillip Hensher argues that 'the only thing worth saying about the issue of cultural appropriation is that it has nothing to do with identity, and everything about quality. Good writing can do whatever it feels like doing. Bad writing can't do anything.'²⁴ Similarly, author Hari Kunzru states that 'good writers transgress without transgressing, in part because they are humble about what they do not know. They treat their own experience of the world as provisional.'²⁵ Both statements make sense in theory but in practice what a 'good writer' is, is entirely subjective. I have taken the decision to write about characters outside my own realm of experience because I felt it is integral both to the aim of this project, which is to show the connections between different identities. However, making this decision in a vacuum without acknowledging the contentious and sensitive questions surrounding writing outside of 'what you know,' would be verging on both ignorance and arrogance. As such chapter three will

²³ Frances Ryan, 'Why are disabled actors ignored when it comes to roles like the elephant man?' (*The Guardian*, September 2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/sep/02/disabled-actors-bbc-elephant-man-normalised-exclusion>, [date accessed 11/03/19]

²⁴ Phillip Hensher, 'Whose life is it anyway? Novelists have their say on cultural appropriation' (*The Guardian*, October 2016), available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/01/novelists-cultural-appropriation-literature-lionel-shriver> [date accessed 08/10/20]

²⁵ Hari Kunzru, 'Whose life is it anyway? Novelists have their say on cultural appropriation'

give an outline of some key decisions I made when creating minority characters within my novel, and give detail on some of the broader context which contributed to my rationale. Chapter four will also focus on my own work, specifically how key themes in the novel, notably education, migration and grief fit into my interpretation of the ‘in between.’ In this chapter I show how these topics are linked to the key concepts of communication and connection—the in between space— that underpins the overall project.

Methodology

The sources for my research followed the trajectory of my research journey, initially starting with prominent disability theorists such as Lennard J. Davis, Mitchell and Snyder and scholars of Deaf studies such as Harlan Lane, as well as theorists such as Lacan and Derrida, who draw on linguistics. Disability theorists were integral to this body of work, but classic theories of language became less relevant as my research progressed, leading me instead to bodies of work that were a crossover of the two disciplines. Examples of these are Deirdre Martin’s *Language Disabilities in Cultural and Linguistic Diversity* that examines the way language and perceptions of disability intersect, or Oliver Sacks study of the linguistic and cultural origins of sign language in *Seeing Voices*.²⁶

The latter two texts lean towards a more ethnographic, anthropological approach to research. Similarly, Andrew Solomon’s text *Far from the Tree* was a body of research that heavily influenced my intentions for this project.²⁷ Solomon has a personalised approach to his research and writing, and undergoes in-depth interviews and ethnographic studies with his participants, who are made up of parents and children across a range of sociological ‘differences’. His work was influential on my own trajectory as I used him initially for his focus on interabled relationships, although his work expands to gender identity, criminality, sexuality and so on.²⁸ This approach influenced my thinking on the way in which these apparent divides are all connected,

²⁶ Deirdre Martin, *Language Disabilities in Cultural and Linguistic Diversity* (Multilingual Matters, 2009), Oliver Sacks, *Seeing Voices: A Journey into the World of the Deaf*, (Picador, 2012)

²⁷ Andrew Solomon, *Far From The Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity* (Vintage, 2014)

²⁸ ‘Interabled’ is a term most frequently used to describe romantic relationships where one person has a disability and the other is able bodied, but I am using it here to mean any form of relationship, romantic or otherwise.

specifically the way in which he uses his own particular experience of difference— in this case his homosexuality— to empathise and reflect so deeply on the supposed ‘otherness’ of different identities. This allowed me to do the same within my own creative work and in turn to branch out in my critical approach. Using the personal to implicitly link to wider issues of difference in society is also my intention.

However, balancing the perceptions of outside observers such as Solomon and Sacks (neither of whom have disabilities themselves) with works from people with disabilities felt obviously important, and the critical essays of disabled writers specifically in collections such as *Stairs and Whispers: D/deaf and Disabled Poets Write Back* kept me from forgetting the power dynamics involved in minimalizing the importance of people with direct experience, however well intentioned.²⁹ In order to underpin any research of mine, including my own ethics procedure in regards to the undertaking of interviews, seminal texts such as Thomas G. Couser’s *Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics and Life Writing* and Linda Alcoff’s ‘The problem of Speaking for Others’ informed my initial awareness of the ethics of writing about other people’s experiences, particularly when there is a structural power imbalance.³⁰ This issue is of significant contemporary relevance and of ever broadening and expansive debate and critique, and as such the use of less formal sources such as broadsheet papers and online opinion pieces were, I felt, of equal importance to this particular topic of on-going conversation.

At this point it feels fitting to give a note about my own intentions for any political ‘motivation’ for my work. I have reservations about the novel being read in as ‘activist’; I want my stories to be enjoyable and my characters to be well rounded and believably imperfect, not vehicles for my political opinions. However, I have found that in writing a novel as part of a Ph.D., there is a considerable amount of time being spent thinking about the ‘why,’ and this greater level of self-scrutiny has propelled me into writing about topics I believe to be worthy of consideration. Moreover, although I do not believe that fiction should be, or attempt to be a substitute for policy, whether that be in

²⁹ Alland, Sandra, Khairani Barokka and Daniel Sluman (eds.), *Stairs and Whispers: D/deaf and Disabled Poets Write Back* (Nine Arches Press, 2017)

³⁰ Linda Alcoff, ‘The Problem of Speaking for Others,’ in *Cultural Critique*, no. 20, , pp. 5–32, (University of Minnesota Press, 1991) , available at: www.jstor.org/stable/1354221, [date accessed 02/10/20]

regards to education or migration, I can only speak for own experience as a reader and state that my understanding and compassion for people's struggles has been greater enriched through fiction than news reports. As such, I want my own fiction to reflect this, and I hope my stories have the ability to spark empathy or interest in otherwise lesser explored areas.

Interviews

Alongside the use of the sources described above, this thesis uses material from face -to face interviews I conducted, the full transcripts of which can be found in the appendix. These interviews were semi-structured and qualitative in nature, and their use, like the use of theorists and contemporary journalism, is to enrich the quality of my own understanding of specific questions that could not always be answered by desk-based research methods. In particular, the use of interviews is to highlight the on-going relevance of these topics— whether that be D/deaf education or the ways in which inter-abled communication affects people's understanding of identity— in the lived experience of people around me. However, it must be acknowledged that the use of primary interviews is unusual within Literary Studies and the use of this method is not to gain a scientific consensus or prove an idea true or false.

All creative work is unavoidably influenced by the writer's experience, and these interviews have formed part of my experience in similar ways that my own experience of working with people who communicate differently has done, but equally like my work experience, I have not intentionally or directly taken any individual person's life experience for my own creative work. Instead, I have used direct quotes and information from participants as part of these critical chapters at times where I felt the particularly candid nature of this qualitative material was useful.

Of nine participants, seven are ages 24-34, two are in their fifties and sixties. Two identify as having a disability (deaf and dyslexic), the rest all had close relationships with people with a language affecting disability whether by work or family. Interview nine is an exception to this, who has no experience with disability, but is a writer from an intersection of minority backgrounds, and is also my only non-white candidate. The ethics review that I undertook for these interviews can also be found in the appendix, where I note that I would only be advertising the project to those interested, and not actively seeking participants nor offering financial motives. This is because there is a

background of disabled people and their families expressing feeling exploited for research purposes, particularly when this research (such as my own) does not offer a direct benefit (such as change in policy or medical understanding) and as such I only conducted interviews with those who came forward with their own interest.

As I selected participants on the basis of their relevance to my project, their identities and experience are not evenly distributed across a spectrum of ages, races and those with and without a disability. This means that I cannot use this material to suggest conclusive evidence or suggest that they represent the broad opinion of a particular demographic. However, their input has been invaluable.

Chapter One: D/deaf education and language supremacy in *Children of a Lesser God* and *Chattering*

This chapter will focus on the depiction of education and language in *Children of a Lesser God* and *Chattering*, specifically as to how these topics are linked through their shared privileging of the voice. I will give an ideological and historical overview of some key ideas that have shaped the way that D/deaf children are educated today and argue that as D/deaf education has historically been predominately at the control of hearing people, it is unsurprising that this education has valued the teaching of speech over sign. As a result of this imbalance of power, D/deaf education is intrinsically connected with language: which language should be taught and the perceived intellectual and functional value of this language. Drawing upon disability theorists, and in particular Harlan Lane's comparison of the treatment of deaf people to colonialism, I will argue that language and education are showcased as tools of oppression in the chosen literary texts.

In his article, 'Justice, literacy and impediments to learning literacy', Joseph A. Dioro writes how:

Human societies deal differently —for better or worse— with persons depending on what languages they use, how they speak, whether they can read and write, and what kinds of written materials they can understand and produce.³¹

Dioro is referring to the experiences of those who have been given a learning disability diagnosis that affects the way they speak or write, which in many ways shouldn't be confused with D/deaf people, who are mistakenly labeled as having a learning disability. However, it is worth considering that the emphasis society places on writing and speaking 'correctly' often comes at the cost of recognizing any other talent or skills. Whilst this chapter focuses specifically on deafness, language- use related bias spans beyond just D/deaf people and applies to everyone who does not communicate within the narrow parameters of what is considered 'normal'. The fact that these presumptions are founded upon a limited scope of what intelligence 'looks like' can be emphasised by theorist Alex Kosogriz, who writes that 'many "disabilities" have come about because of

³¹ Joseph A. Dioro 'Justice, literacy and impediments to learning literacy' in *Contextualising Difficulties in Literacy Development: Exploring Politics, Culture, Ethnicity and Ethics*, (Routledge Falmer, 2002), (eds. Janet Soler, Janice Wearmouth and Gavin Reid), p.287

a hegemonic insistence on the literacy canon and correctness, inadequate measures of IQ and intolerance of difference', echoing a belief of many D/deaf people who eschew the framing of deafness as any form of disability.³²

A brief history of deaf education

Children and Chattering are written by American authors and forty years apart, but while the specific policies of SEN education of course vary depending on place and time period, the politics that Medoff addressed in the 1980s and Stern in 2010 hold as much relevance to British D/deaf education today. This is because the history of D/deaf education and primarily the way in which its fate was determined by the Milan conference of 1890 underpins the subsequent education of D/deaf people worldwide. This conference, in which only one attendee was deaf themselves, had a huge influence on the trajectory of D/deaf education, the impact of which remains today. Since the hearing delegates made the decision to ban sign language in schools, sign language now remains largely unused in places of education. As Robert Spirko writes:

The general tide in education of the Deaf has been towards oralism and speech training, and away from sign language-based instruction of the deaf, carried out by hearing people for/on deaf people, 'for their own good'.³³

Conversely, Gallaudet University, which is famous for being the only university solely for D/deaf people (and recently for a select group of hearing people who know American Sign Language) was founded thirty years before this in 1864, although it was not until a century later that it was given university status in 1986. Furthermore, it was not until 1988 that Gallaudet elected its first Deaf president, eight years after *Children* was first performed, in which the lack of deaf leadership in deaf schools is highlighted. However, whilst Gallaudet illustrates how autonomy can be fought for and achieved, it is not an accurate representation of the reality of D/deaf people, and many D/deaf children will not reach university at all.

In the UK, as of 2019, amongst D/deaf children, '57% fail to reach expected levels

³² Bill Green and Alex Kostogriz, 'Learning difficulties and the new literacy studies: a socially critical perspective' in *Contextualising Difficulties in Literacy Development*, p.110

³³ Robert C. Spirko, 'Better Me Than You': Children of a Lesser God, Deaf Education and Paternalism' in *Peering Behind the Curtain: Disability, Illness and the Extraordinary Body in the Contemporary Theater*, Thomas Fahy and Kimball King (eds.) (Routledge, 2002) p. 10

in reading, writing and maths in SATs tests at the end of primary, compared with 26% of children with no SEN.³⁴ Deafness is referred to here as a 'special education need', but this rather ubiquitous term has come to mean anyone who has one of a huge host of disabilities. Additionally, there are connotations in the words 'need' and 'special' that insinuates the child has a uniquely difficult problem that is somehow incumbent on them to deal with, and simultaneously that they do not have the capacity to know what is best for them. Overwhelmingly, what D/deaf people say is best for themselves is to be amongst other deaf people. One of my interviewees, MD, described the importance of a deaf school growing up, saying how, 'I think a lot of confidence, identity, comes from being around other deaf children,' and that 'I think I would have become really excluded and isolated if I went to a hearing secondary school.'³⁵ When asked about her opinion of hearing-impaired units at mainstream schools, she insisted that; 'it doesn't work', explaining that '(deaf students) have a different group and it makes them feel even worse, like they're surrounded by hearing people but they're excluded at the same time, like 'oh there's that special group in the middle'.³⁶

This is a repeated sentiment of D/deaf people— that D/deaf schools make them feel more included, more confident, not less— but hearing led governments continue to dismiss this insight and instead plough on with the closing of D/deaf schools, citing the need for inclusion as rationale. Indeed, between 1982-2016 the number of D/deaf schools fell from 75 to 21 and there was a 14% decline in teachers of the deaf between 2011-2018, despite a 31% increase in demand.³⁷

While equality in of itself is of course pivotal in the fight for social justice, it is important not to use this conceptual ideal to monopolise genuine rights of deaf children, which requires *equity*, not homogenous equality. As Harlan Lane, in his article 'construction of Deafness' writes:

³⁴ Kathren Sellgren, 'Deaf children fall behind at school says charity' (BBC News, February 2019), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-47212462> [date accessed 12/03/19]

³⁵ Interview 8, see appendix

³⁶ Interview 8, see appendix

³⁷ Sally Weale, 'Uk's oldest deaf school closes amid concern children are being let down' (*The Guardian*, 2016) available at : <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jan/04/uks-oldest-deaf-school-closes-concerns-children-being-let-down> [date accessed 23/08/19]

It is because disability advocates think of Deaf children as disabled that they want to close the special schools and absurdly plunge Deaf children into hearing classrooms in a totally exclusionary program called inclusion.³⁸

MD told me that these policies have led to divisions within the Deaf community, describing how, 'D/deaf people criticising other D/deaf people is rife' with 'hearing aids versus cochlear implants, signing versus speech [...] there's a lot of hierarchy.'³⁹ This 'hierarchy' and the corresponding criticism is all centred around the different mode or modes of communication, which is an understandably contentious subject matter, when these choices have, and continue to be, so monopolised by the decisions of hearing people.' The importance and complexity of language, and specifically the language of one's choice and culture, in shaping identity is paramount to all of us and this fact is reflected in both *Children* and *Chattering*. However, it is clear that this element of choice is diminished when 'minority languages are not treated equally with each other or with English.'⁴⁰ British Sign Language (BSL) was not recognised as an official language until 2003, and unbelievably, American Sign Language (ASL) is still not recognised as an official language. This is despite multiple research studies finding that 'sign is seen as fully comparable to speech in terms of its phonology, its temporal aspects, its streams and sequences'.⁴¹ Under these circumstances, decisions as to what form of assistive technology or form of communication to use can seem greater than a personal preference and become instead a political standpoint, an 'us versus them.'

In his introduction to *Children*, Medoff points to the more divisive aspects of language use amongst the D/deaf community, and describes how in the process of writing, 'a debate ensues concerning the political nature of the second act. Should I get rid of the politics?'⁴² The 'politics' refers to the controversy surrounding the autonomy of the central D/deaf characters, namely a court-case in which Orin attempts to sue the school for not hiring any D/deaf staff. When James appears to find this amusing, Sarah calls him out, asking 'how would you like to spend your life in an institution, in a world run

³⁸ Harlan Lane, 'Construction of Deafness' in *The Disability Studies Reader* (Routledge, 1997) ed. by Lennard J. Davis, p.164

³⁹ Interview 8, see appendix

⁴⁰ Deirdre Martin, *Language Disabilities in Cultural and Linguistic Diversity* (Multilingual Matters, 2009), p.36

⁴¹ Oliver Sacks, *Seeing Voices*, (1990, Picador), p.72

⁴² 'Not so random notes from the playwright' in *Children of A Lesser God*, p.xii

by people who don't understand you?'⁴³ Yet equally she is critical of Orin, commenting that 'Orin thinks he's the guardian of all us deaf children because he's an apprentice teacher and speaks.'⁴⁴ Orin is in turn critical of Sarah's decision to marry a hearing person, telling James that 'I need her and you don't [...] I need her for what we're going to do for deaf people'.⁴⁵

A lack of D/deaf teaching staff was also directly influenced by the events in Milan; since the conference the percentage of D/deaf teachers teaching D/deaf students fell from close to fifty percent to twelve percent in 1960 —whilst deaf people are not explicitly banned, there are structural factors at play that make it virtually impossible for them to teach.⁴⁶ Harlan Lane explains just some examples of these factors:

In many cultures, it just happens that to be a teacher of deaf children you must first qualify as a teacher of hearing children, and deaf people are excluded as teachers of hearing children. In other communities, it just happens that to become a teacher of deaf children the person who is most capable of communicating with them is disbarred because he or she must pass an examination couched in high register English without an interpreter.

Under these circumstances, there is thus an unfortunate element of truth when James tells Sarah that her wish to be a teacher is unrealistic, because 'the administrators in ninety percent of the schools in the country, would never hire you,' and that Sarah is 'dreaming a dream that can't come true.'⁴⁷

Paternalism and Deaf autonomy

In *Chattering*, education does not present as such an explicit theme as in *Children*, but there are references in several stories to D/deaf education. One such example is in the story 'Roadrunner' where the protagonist, named only 'the girl' references her own education, and illustrates the hostility felt by the hearing teachers, who 'occupied themselves by telling the deaf kids to behave, because if they didn't people would think deaf people were all retarded as well'.⁴⁸ In contrast James appears to be the perfect

⁴³ *Children of A Lesser God*, p.24

⁴⁴ *Children of A Lesser God*, p.23

⁴⁵ *Children of A Lesser God*, p. 33

⁴⁶ *Seeing Voices*, p. 24

⁴⁷ Mark Medoff, *Children of A Lesser God*, (Amber Lane Press, 1982), p.85

⁴⁸ 'Roadrunner,' in *Chattering*, p. 19

figure of the noble and kind teacher, telling Sarah that he decided to be a teacher of the deaf as 'it seemed important to do things that weren't simply self-serving,' and appears baffled by Sarah's retort that 'you're not helping anyone.'⁴⁹

All relations between teachers and students are naturally characterised by a power dynamic, but between hearing teachers and D/deaf students, these relations surpass matters of relative age and levels of knowledge, and equally reflect the two parties' disproportionate access to power and status within broader society. In 'Roadrunner', it is evident that the teachers' sense of superiority rises above the usual teacher-student status gap and relates directly to the students' method of communication, as they ask 'accusingly and knowingly, with a look of smugness, "do you want people to think you're animals?"'⁵⁰ The reference to D/deaf people being akin to animals because of their apparent lack of language is not a new concept; in Ancient Greece 'deafness was perceived not as a physical handicap, but as an impairment of reasoning and basic intelligence'.⁵¹ The animal metaphor is doubly cruel for firstly refusing to acknowledge that if (some) D/deaf people do have less knowledge, this is because of a lack of access to education rather than something inherently lacking in them, and secondly for effectively erasing the validity of sign as a legitimate language.

The stories in *Chattering* unpick these assumptions, both by placing a spotlight on the prejudiced attitudes of some educators, and also by not shying away from the fact that there are deaf people whose intellectual ability has been hindered by lack of appropriate provision. In 'Abel, Granny and Him', the character of Abel 'sat in class with a false smile on his face' and 'rocked back and forth to amuse himself'.⁵² Stern makes it abundantly clear that when cases of diminished intellectual ability occur in D/deaf people, it has nothing to do with deafness as a state of being but with the quality of their education. The majority of hearing people are of course unaware of the reality of education for many deaf people and Abel's fate is caused by a similar lack of awareness. His parents did not realise he was deaf, presuming instead that he was 'retarded', and not sending him to school until he was a teenager 'by which time it was too late and he

⁴⁹ *Children of A Lesser God*, p. 19

⁵⁰ 'Roadrunner', p. 19

⁵¹ Martha L. Edwards, 'Deaf and Dumb in Ancient Greece' in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. by Lennard J. Davis, p.36

⁵² Louise Stern, 'Abel, Granny and Him' in *Chattering*, p. 73

had very little language his whole life'.⁵³ The issue of 'good' English is subjective and nuanced; whilst not being able to spell correctly or read easily will statistically put someone at a disadvantage within mainstream culture, this is different from Abel's situation of having 'no language'. Having language, *any* form of language, is crucial to understanding and conveying human experience; 'I happy, I happy', the protagonist writes in 'Abel, Granny and Him', 'but she wondered if he understood what happiness was.'⁵⁴ Yet Abel's inability to understand and convey ideas because of a *total* lack of language is separate from any concerns about what constitutes 'good' or 'correct' English. BSL has an entirely different syntactic structure to English, and, as MD states, 'some (deaf) people would be like it's fine, not being able to write English because they feel 'my language is sign language,' and 'following written English, or oral English language structure is not.'⁵⁵

Moreover, since BSL is now officially, if not socially, recognized as a different language, it is unsurprising that native speakers make 'mistakes' in written English, just as a French or Spanish speaker may. However, *Chattering* portrays the extent to which this education has instilled its pupils with the notion that only children who are able to speak will be successful, depicting scenes such as this one in 'The Deaf School', where 'The speech teacher would tell Sophie that it was very sad that she wasn't good at speech, because it meant she wouldn't be able to [...] get a job with hearing people in the future.'⁵⁶

It is presumably because of this attitude that, as Lane explains, 'deaf children in America, starting in the late 1970s, were increasingly placed in local hearing schools.'⁵⁷ He describes this decision as 'having cut off the deaf child from his deaf world, having blocked his communication with parents, peers, and teachers' and passionately argues that it was this process that 'disabled the deaf child, as never before in American history.'⁵⁸ In his study of Deaf people around the world, Oliver Sacks echoes this sentiment and gives the same cause for this failing of deaf children, writing that:

⁵³ 'Abel, Granny and Him', p.73

⁵⁴ 'Abel, Granny and Him', p.73

⁵⁵ Interview 8, see appendix

⁵⁶ 'The Deaf School', p. 158

⁵⁷ *The Mask of Benevolence*, p. 25

⁵⁸ *The Mask of Benevolence*, p. 25

Deaf students of the 1850s who had been to the Hartford Asylum, or other such schools, were highly literate and educated- fully the equal of their hearing counterparts. Today the reverse is true. Oralism and the suppression of Sign have resulted in a dramatic deterioration in the educational achievement of deaf children and in the literacy of the deaf generally.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, despite evidence to the contrary, hearing people continue to assume that they know best, as illustrated in *Children* both by James's relentless determination to teach Sarah to speak despite her making clear she is not interested, and by Franklin's outrage at Orin's lawsuit against the school for not hiring any deaf staff. The choice of Franklin's words to express this, 'I won't continue in this field if the *subjects* of my efforts are going to tell me how to *minister* them' (my emphasis) heavily suggest that Medoff is aware of the links between colonialism and deaf education.⁶⁰ Indeed, even after Sarah and James are married, Franklin and James continue to interact within one another as if they are co-conspirators in their own morally superior plan, and their conversations illustrate this dynamic, as evidenced in this extract:

FRANKLIN: Getting her to marry you, Jimbo, is one thing...I'd say the only thing more remarkable would be to get her to do one thing you were hired to do.

JAMES: Get her to speak. I will.⁶¹

The repeated direction to 'get' Sarah to do things is indicative of an attitude shown throughout the play, that Spirko states is a 'specific audist "paternalism" that infantilizes the deaf and takes from them power over their own lives.'⁶² One dominant archetype of the relationship between a hearing teacher and deaf student is of a noble hero helping a grateful victim of misfortune. Lane exposes this false narrative, writing that:

Like the paternalism of the colonizers, hearing paternalism begins with defective perception, because it superimposes its image of the familiar world of hearing people on the unfamiliar world of deaf people. Hearing paternalism likewise sees its task as 'civilizing' its charges: restoring deaf people to society.⁶³

⁵⁹ *Seeing Voices*, p.25

⁶⁰ *Children of A Lesser God*, p.82

⁶¹ *Children of a Lesser God*, p. 50

⁶² 'Better me than you': *Children of a Lesser God*, Deaf Education and Paternalism', p. 19

⁶³ *The Mask of Benevolence*, p.33

James is determined to teach Sarah to speak because of his own deeply held conviction that he is helping her. This is despite Sarah, a fully-fledged adult, making it evident that this is not what she wants. When she says that she 'would make a better teacher' than him, he responds only with 'if you want to be a teacher, let me help you learn to speak and lip read.'⁶⁴ Whilst James is correct to note that in the current system it is unlikely for Sarah to be able to become a teacher without speech, he shows little sign of seeing how this is wrong, or appreciating that as a deaf person and as an adult she is capable of making her own decisions about her life. Instead, he goes to speak to her mother behind her back, telling her that 'What I'm trying to *force* on her is the ability to function in the same world as you and I do.'⁶⁵

Similarly, when Sarah confronts him directly, saying clearly that 'I don't need what you want to give me. I have a language that's just as good as yours!' James replies 'among the *deaf*, Sarah', a retort that appears to hold some ground, for it is hard to deny that the world is set up to function for people who speak.⁶⁶ Yet there are many issues with James' perspective. Firstly, learning to speak as a deaf person is not as straightforward as James makes it out to be, as illustrated towards the end of the play when Sarah finally uses her voice and James is visibly shocked as 'only a few words are barely understandable'.⁶⁷ Secondly, the work that goes into a deaf person learning to speak is often at the cost of all other learning, thus entirely undermining the whole endeavor. As Solomon observes from his research with D/deaf people:

Many deaf children who ultimately managed to develop oral skills complain that their schooling was dominated by the effort to teach a single ability- thousands of hours of sitting with an audiologist who squeezed their faces into positions, made them move their tongues in certain patterns, repeated drill exercises day after day.⁶⁸

Similarly, MD told me that at her (oral school):

I had friends in my class who couldn't understand the teacher so I would have to tell her or him what the teacher was saying ...and then the teacher would get

⁶⁴ *Children of Lesser God*, p. 11

⁶⁵ *Children of a Lesser God*, p. 8

⁶⁶ *Children of a Lesser God*, p. 15

⁶⁷ *Children of A Lesser God*, p.89

⁶⁸ *Far From The Tree: Parents, Children and The Search For Identity*, p. 54

angry with me because I should be focusing on my work and I would say, but they can't understand what you're saying!'⁶⁹

These testimonies from D/deaf people support the fact that, despite persistent misconceptions to the contrary, the ability to speak does not equate to comprehension, and therefore that the focus of educating D/deaf children should be shifted correspondingly.

The fallacy of 'normative' language

MD is fortunate to be able to both sign and speak fluently, and this was greatly aided by having D/deaf, signing parents who were able to give her access to language immediately. Indeed, on average children whose parents are also deaf and native signers, do better than deaf children who are brought up by hearing, speaking parents. As Solomon explains, children of deaf parents (as opposed to deaf children of hearing parents) are 'more likely to develop fluent written English, even if there is no spoken language at home and they attend a school where teaching is in Sign,' and 'score higher in other academic areas, including arithmetic'.⁷⁰

These facts would suggest that the reasons that hearing-run educational institutions continue to prioritise speech above all other learning is not necessarily for the good of the D/deaf child, but because of entrenched bias about the value of spoken language and its associations with intelligence and normality. The impetus to shape all members of society to a form that is considered 'normal' corresponds with Mike Oliver's individual model of disability, which states that this model 'is founded upon an ideology of normality', and that 'its aim is to restore the disabled person to normality, whatever that may mean.'⁷¹ According to MD, who frames the situation in terms of the medical model more explicitly, 'the problem is it starts in the hospitals when the child is born, and the doctors approach deafness as something to be sorry about', describing how 'the doctors then advise hearing aids, cochlear implants, speech therapy.'⁷² What they forget she believes, is to 'include learning sign language to give the child access to language

⁶⁹ Interview 8, see appendix

⁷⁰ *Far From The Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity*, p.155

⁷¹ 'The Individual and Social Models of Disability', p. 2

⁷² Interview 8, see appendix

from day one.⁷³ As a result 'for a lot of deaf children from hearing families they have a speech (and) language delay.'⁷⁴

James' insistence on Sarah learning to speak corresponds with this ideology of 'normality at all costs'; for example in one instance he tells her 'you want them to understand you in the very poetic way you describe in your speech as well the plain old, boring way *normal* people understand each other, then you learn to read my lips'.⁷⁵ In addition, it also corresponds with Harlan's theory of D/deaf people being colonized by the hearing educational system. In his article, 'Better me than you: Children of a Lesser God, Deaf Education and Paternalism', Robert C. Spirko expands on this theory, explaining that James has a desire for Sarah to 'pass' as hearing, despite this being a remote possibility for her. Spirko explains this concept, and how it relates to colonialism, writing:

In a Deaf context, passing as hearing requires an adherence to the norms of the dominant society, particularly in the form of communication: this adherence requires a great deal of work and practice. As in racial passing, ability passing is not available to all: only light-skinned African Americans might pass, just as only Deaf people with some residual hearing might.⁷⁶

Becoming increasingly frustrated with James' insistence that she won't realize her ambitions unless she learns to speak, Sarah eventually plays him at his own game, saying 'then I won't be a teacher', and that instead 'I'll go into the street with the little manual alphabet cards and beg for money'.⁷⁷ Indeed Sarah's occupation is something questioned at various points in the play. On their first date, Sarah responds to James' questions about her job as a cleaner saying that she likes 'working alone. In my silence', and to James' response that other jobs allow one to work alone, she says 'not with toilet bowl cleaner'.⁷⁸ This repeated use of sarcasm could be seen as Medoff illustrating Sarah's deflection from her own shame, but in actuality serves to make hearing people confront the wider structures that put Sarah in this position. Sarah's comments are

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ *Children of A Lesser God* p.86

⁷⁶ 'Better me than you': *Children of a Lesser God, Deaf Education and Paternalism*, p. 21.

⁷⁷ *Children of A Lesser God*, p. 85

⁷⁸ *Children of a Lesser God*, p.16

unnerving for a hearing audience, as Medoff plays upon our own warped stereotypes of the pitied 'deaf and dumb' person, whilst at the same time asking us to question why somebody like Sarah would be doing a job far below her intellectual abilities.

In his essay 'Staring Back: the Disability Experience from the Inside Out', Kenny Fries reflects upon the inability of non-disabled people to address the genuine restrictions that are faced by people with disabilities. He states that 'many times, those who live with disabilities have been silenced by those who did not want to hear what we have to say', and expands on this to assert that 'we have also been silenced by our own fear, the fear that if we told our stories people would say: "see, it isn't worth it. You would be better off dead."⁷⁹ James embodies the blinkered system which refuses to cater for difference, continuing to place the blame on Sarah's shoulders, saying that 'I think your real bitch—yours and Orin's— is that you are deaf and you wish you could hear', and 'I [...] think you're lying. I don't think you think being deaf is so goddamn wonderful.'⁸⁰ To this, Sarah simply responds 'because of people like you.'⁸¹

Both *Children of a Lesser God* and *Chattering* illustrate the colonization of D/deaf education. In *Children*, this is made fairly explicit, particularly through the action of Orin's lawsuit against the school, and his direct confrontation with James on this matter: 'one of these days, Mr. Leeds, I'm going to change this system that sticks us with teachers who pretend to help but really just want to glorify themselves!'⁸² In *Chattering*, the references are subtler, but they are there nevertheless. For example, in 'The Deaf School', the opening describes how 'the deaf school had originally been in beautiful old buildings up in the mountains with dark green tiles lining the marbled archways and courtyards', but:

The hearing students at the nearby university needed more buildings, more room, more of everything. The beautiful old school tempted them, so they found a way to take it over for themselves.'⁸³

⁷⁹ Kenny Fries, 'Staring Back: the Disability Experience from the Inside Out', in *Beauty is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability*, (Cinco Puntos Press, 2011), p. 102

⁸⁰ *Children of a Lesser God*, p.85

⁸¹ *Children of a Lesser God*, p.85

⁸² *Children of a Lesser God*, p.21

⁸³ 'The Deaf School', *Chattering*, p. 151

In *Children*, Medoff takes all his viewers on a journey that focuses largely on educating the hearing audience. Franklin, as Spirko writes, 'is the most obvious target for criticism: he is not a likeable character, and is overt about his need for control and his disdain for Deaf culture', and shows no sign of changing at the end of the play, asking James 'would you hire your wife to teach?' What —sign? That'd be like a football team hiring a guy to do nothing but hold for extra points.'⁸⁴

James' progress towards enlightenment is also slow, but he eventually shows some humility about the bias in his own views, giving by way of reflection these words to Sarah:

JAMES: Yes, I'm a terrific teacher: Grow, Sarah, but not too much. Understand yourself, but not better than I understand you. Be brave, but not so brave that you don't need me anymore.⁸⁵

These words indicate some shift, however small, in James's perspective and an indication that he may have understood Sarah's initial comments; that his preconception of what it means to truly be self-sacrificing is not necessarily accurate. *Children of A Lesser God* highlights some uncomfortable truths about the nature of oppression; namely that before we rush to 'help' people, first we must actually listen to those who are being oppressed.

⁸⁴ *Children of a Lesser God*, p.82

⁸⁵ *Children of a Lesser God*, p.89

Chapter Two: Beyond ‘narrative prosthesis’- how do D/deaf characters reclaim metaphor in *Children of A Lesser God* and *Chattering*?

In this chapter I will continue to discuss *Children of a Lesser God* and *Chattering* but my focus will be on the use of metaphor in relation to representations of disability. David Mitchell and Snyder have argued that disability has been used extensively in literature as a means of portraying certain characteristics or as a plot device. They have termed such ‘perpetual discursive dependency upon disability “narrative prosthesis.”⁸⁶ As I will show in this chapter, the representation of deafness can function in a similar way through common misperceptions surrounding notions of silence. Jacques Lacan’s concept of the “mirror stage” will aid me in highlighting ways in which my chosen texts can be seen to illustrate the advantages of communication that takes place in *literal* silence, and notions of ‘deeper’ communication both in and outside of the D/deaf community. Drawing upon Amy Vidali’s essay ‘Seeing What We Know, disabilities and theories of metaphor,’ I argue that the D/deaf characters in both *Children of A Lesser God* and *Chattering* reclaim their own use of metaphor to describe their lived experiences of what silence and communication means to them.

Why disability metaphors in literature can be problematic

In basic terms a metaphor is ‘a figure of speech that describes an object or action in a way that isn’t literally true, but helps explain an idea or makes a comparison.’⁸⁷ The author of *I is An Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How it Shapes the Way We See the World*, James Geary, claims that ‘We think metaphorically,’ and that ‘without the metaphor, we have no way of communicating about ideas, feelings, concepts or anything abstract.’⁸⁸

However, everyday expressions use metaphors which function by assuming a universal understanding, that in turn can exclude those who do not have these experiences, for example ‘seeing clearly,’ ‘standing up for what you believe’ and so on. Many of the ways

⁸⁶ David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, (University of Michigan, 2000) p.47

⁸⁷ Oxford Language Dictionary online

⁸⁸ James Geary, ‘How do metaphors shape your life?’ available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/5rC580g3n1W9dvc63qvS2rB/how-do-metaphors-shape-your-life> [date accessed 11/09/20]

that we use disability metaphors as idioms— for example describing someone as being ‘blind’ to an issue or ‘blinded’ by greed etc.— discount the reality that blindness is a genuine and life changing experience or identity for many, not just a figure of speech. More generally, the use of a verb such as ‘disabling’ to describe something as out of action similarly functions as one of many pervasive descriptors in which disability as a blanket term is assumed to be negative, and which is built into the English language.

Examining every day verbal expressions illustrate the extent to which normative and able-bodied assumptions are built into the fabric of our language. These assumptions are insidious in the way that they affect our thinking precisely because of their unconscious nature. In contrast, writing a piece of fiction is a conscious act, but these casual assumptions will be carried through to create fiction in which disability is still othered in various ways, one prominent factor being the way in which disability and disabled characters are used in metaphoric ways. Therefore, of course there is a distinction between metaphoric verbal expression and the use of metaphor as a literary device, but they are relevant to each other as literary works recreate and enforce perceptions in ‘real life’ and Visa-Versa. Thus, whilst metaphoric verbal expression serves to shortcut meaning and literary metaphor seeks to complicate meaning, there are parallels to be found.

Indeed, metaphors are one of the most basic forms of literary device; children’s literature is often obviously metaphoric in order to convey certain moral ‘messages,’ and this is where most readers first meet disability as metaphor in a literary sense. There are many examples of disability being used as a metaphor for undesirable character traits within children’s narratives— think Hook’s prosthetic arm in *Peter Pan*, or Scar’s facial scarring in *The Lion King* (and in these cases the character’s names are themselves metonymic.) In *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson purport that ‘primary metaphors’ are understood ‘automatically and unconsciously simply by functioning in the most ordinary of ways in the everyday world from our earliest years’.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago, 1980,) p.47

In addition, and in continuum with the example of sight, using metaphors that equate knowledge with seeing unintentionally perpetuate an idea that people who do not see do not have knowledge. In her article 'Seeing What We Know, Disabilities and Theories of Metaphor,' Amy Vidali writes that 'the knowing is seeing metaphor has been critiqued by those in Disability Studies, who challenge the idea that the visual channel is, or should be, the main way to gather knowledge and express what it means to know'.⁹⁰ Vidali continues by quoting Rod Michalko, a blind professor and writer who illuminates (excuse the metaphor) the ways in which the seeing is knowledge metaphor is built into sighted people's day -to- day experiences and expectations. Michalko writes:

The students in front of us have had more than a decade of formal education; they have had several years of seeing the point, of not being blind to the facts, of looking at things objectively, and of trying to see what the teacher is getting at. They have had many years of educational practice of seeing that seeing is enlightenment and blindness is ignorance.⁹¹

This devaluing of non-normative methods of knowledge also links to deafness and metaphor; the use of idioms such as 'fall on deaf ears' for example fundamentally feeds into a narrative of language supremacy. Vidali's text supports this position, as she writes:

While it is reasonable to assume that able-bodied people profoundly influence metaphors through their physical and cultural experiences, I am dissatisfied with an approach to metaphor that assumes that the building blocks of language are formed by able bodies and are transferred to those with disabilities by contagious contact.⁹²

In adult fiction, where figures of 'good and evil' seen in children's literature are less common, the use of disability as metaphor is likely to be subtler, and often present as a purportedly positive addition to the text. An able-bodied protagonist discovering

⁹⁰ Amy Vidali, 'Seeing What We Know: Disability and Theories of Metaphor', *Journal of Literary & Cultural Studies*, Volume 4, no.1, (Project Muse, 2010), pp. 42-3, available at muse.jhu.edu/article/378826 (date accessed 11/09/20]

⁹¹ Rod Michalko quoted by Amy Vidali in 'Seeing What We Know: Disability and Theories of Metaphor', p.44

⁹²'Seeing What we Know', p.39

disability through friendship with a minor character is an example of this. These relationships often showcase a dynamic whereby the disabled character's disability serves as a form of awakening for the able-bodied protagonist —using the example of blindness, a blind character would teach the sighted character a new way of 'seeing'.⁹³ This form of metaphor can be seen as closer to an allegory, and is on the surface, positive. However, whether a metaphor use is positive or not is largely beyond the point, as Mitchell and Snyder argue:

The problem of the representation of disability is not a search for a more 'positive' story of disability, as it has often been formulated in disability studies, but rather a thoroughgoing challenge to the undergirding authorization to interpret that disability invites.⁹⁴

All these examples of metaphor use are connected by their erasure of the disabled persons or character's experience; all fail to separate the disability from the person and all elevate the non-disabled person's 'journey' over the authenticity or experience of the disabled person. The dynamic in which the disabled person is merely used as a manner of elucidating some awakening in the non-disabled person is one aspect of 'narrative prosthesis.' Mitchell and Snyder explain the use of their term, stating 'Narrative prosthesis is meant to indicate that disability has been used throughout history as a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potential and analytical insight'.⁹⁵

These forms of representation suggest that the writer is not genuinely interested in investigating experiences of disabled people, which takes a degree of research as well as imagination, but instead pursuing entirely their own ideas about what a particular disability may represent. As a result, the disabled characters become synonymous with an idea of a disability in the mind of a non-disabled writer, and authentic representations of personhood and experiences are left out of the equation. Such narratives that elevate a singular physical attribute over individual nuance are not necessarily unique to disability but to anybody that deviates from the assumed

⁹³ The 1999 film 'At first sight' is one example of this dynamic, as is the 1981 short story 'Cathedral' by Raymond Carver.

⁹⁴ *Narrative Prosthesis*, p.59-60

⁹⁵ *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, p.224

construction of 'normal', as Rosemarie Garland Thomson describes; 'the gender, race, and ability systems intertwine further in representing subjugated people as being pure body, unredeemed by mind or spirit.'⁹⁶ Similarly, Mitchell and Snyder assert that 'there is a politics at stake in the fact that disability inaugurates an explanatory need that the unmarked body eludes by virtue of its physical anonymity.'⁹⁷

As explored in depth in Chapter One, *Children of A Lesser God* is a fairly radical commentary on the subjugation of D/deaf rights, yet Robert Spirko argues that in many reviews and in the (academy award winning) film adaptation, 'issues of deafness and power are glossed over in the face of the love story between a hearing man and a deaf woman.'⁹⁸ This perception of the story undervalues the intention and contribution of the text to the D/deaf community whilst also minimizing the impact on the awareness of hearing audiences. Furthermore, the ensuing connotations of this interpretation largely instate deafness as a symbol for communication and over-coming obstacles in romantic relationships. As Spirko summarizes, 'if deafness becomes a metaphor, we are not encouraged to read the 'Deaf politics' of the play for themselves, and we leave the play with little more appreciation for the real issues facing the Deaf than we came'.⁹⁹ As such, to view deafness as a metaphor in this text risks missing the opportunity to truly engage with the overt and tangible political questions surrounding the rights of deaf people to self-determination.

In *Chattering*, Stern's story 'Boat' also provides a good example of this dynamic whereby the disabled person's disability is used as a catalyst for the able-bodied character's own self-development. However, as it is the deaf character in 'Boat' that is the protagonist, the story is able to expose the dynamic, rather than implicitly recreate it. Here the deaf protagonist is kept up late by her drunken hearing housemate writing her long notes about how 'her silence has taught him so much'.¹⁰⁰ The hearing character comments that 'you and me, we're alike' because 'you understand me'.¹⁰¹ These

⁹⁶ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, 'Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory,' *NWSA Journal*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2002, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4316922 [Date accessed 01/10/20], p.7

⁹⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸ Robert C. Spirko 'better me than you': *Children of a Lesser God*, Deaf education and Paternalism' in *Peering behind the Curtain: Disability, Illness and the Extraordinary Body in the Contemporary Theater*, Thomas Fahy and Kimball King (eds.)- 2002, Routledge

⁹⁹ 'Better me than you', p.18

¹⁰⁰ 'Boat' in *Chattering*, p. 34

¹⁰¹ 'Boat', p. 34

comments anger the protagonist because the housemate hasn't made attempts to get to know her as an individual or ask her own views. The protagonist comments that 'she hadn't said much to him in between all that he said, or ever told him anything about what she was thinking or feeling. He didn't know her language.'¹⁰²

In the previous chapter, I introduced Harlan Lane's analysis, that the way in which D/deaf people are treated by hearing people is 'paternalism.' This particular description is apt when thinking about the ways in which D/deaf characters are described by hearing writers; for example, Lane's deduction that, 'the hearing people who control the affairs of deaf children and adults commonly do not know deaf people and do not want to'.¹⁰³ He states that 'since they cannot see deaf people as they really are, they make up imaginary deaf people of their own, in accord with their own experiences.'¹⁰⁴ Of course, this description is more concerned with policy than fiction, but his comments emphasize that even when disabled people are purportedly the focus, it is still the able-bodied person's views and voices that are prioritised; able-bodied people's ideas are elevated whilst disabled people are used for this elevation. In regards to deaf characters, they are commonly used in literature as a metaphor for 'silence,' and its various abstract connotations.

Silence as metaphor

Because deafness limits or excludes sound, the representation of D/deaf characters in literature is often accompanied with thematic links to silence. These portrayals of silence largely take the literal meaning of silence and deafness and then implicitly or explicitly link this to metaphoric ideas about silence. These metaphoric representations commonly incorporate spiritual ideas of purity and closer to connections with God as well as broader political themes of 'being silenced' and associative lack of identity; deafness is often used as a metaphor for 'finding one's voice,' for example.

Since hearing people are the majority population, the dominant assumption is therefore that language equates to speech. It is thus speech which allows us to enter a

¹⁰² 'Boat' in *Chattering*, p.34

¹⁰³ *The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling The Deaf Community*, p.37

¹⁰⁴ *The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling The Deaf Community*, p.37

pre-existing community, indeed the entire country or region in which we were born, and thus to belong. This is the belief of Jacques Lacan, who names the beginnings of language development as the 'mirror stage'.¹⁰⁵ The mirror stage marks the transition between believing ourselves to be simply an extension of our mothers, and an awareness (through this self-recognition in the mirror) that we are separate people, who will gain entry through speech, to this already established community with a particular ideology and behaviour. Before taking into account the many groups of people who do not use speech as a form of communication, we might note that the process of both writing and reading is a method of creating and consuming language entirely in silence. If we disregard the idea that language is inherently full of sound, then viewing silence as its natural opposite is no longer applicable, and this opens up the dialogue surrounding entrenched beliefs about who is deemed 'to have a voice'.

The opening of *Children* shows James making a similar assumption about the deeply entwined nature of speech and human identity, and also of the diametric nature of language and silence:

All right, start in the...*Finish the sentence!* Start in the beginning. In the beginning. In the beginning there was silence and out of that silence there could only come one thing: Speech. That's right. Human speech. So, *speak!*¹⁰⁶

James' repeated use of 'in the beginning' is quite clearly a biblical reference; this alongside the emphasis on speech being 'human' not only insinuates that speech is a fundamental part of being human, but seems to also imply that to not use language is to somehow defy God. Therefore, James' attitude towards Sarah is that her silence is something to change, seemingly in order to help her, but actually as he eventually admits, because her silence scares him:

Your silence frightens me. When I'm in that silence, I hear nothing, I feel like nothing. I can never pull you into my world of sound any more than you can open some magic door and bring me into your silence.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Jacques Lacan—the mirror stage was first introduced on 03/08/1936 at a conference of the International Psychoanalytical Association in Marienbad.

¹⁰⁶ *Children of A Lesser God*, p.1

¹⁰⁷ *Children Of A Lesser God*, p. 89

James's fear of silence is visceral; he fears it because within it he *'feels nothing'*, his insistence on getting Sarah to speak is relentless because 'out of silence' there could *only* be *'human speech'* (my emphasis). If we have spent our whole lives associating the ability to speak with the core of our identity, then silence feels, ironically, on a primal level like an erasure of ourselves. For Sarah to disrupt this established system that James has known since a child then, is frightening, and his admission that 'he can never pull you into my world of sound,' suggests that he initially believed that he could do just this, as shown through his relentless attempts to teach her to speak against her will. However, although this fear apparently stems from association with silence and 'nothingness,' his desire to change Sarah suggests that he viewed this apparent lack simultaneously as a form of potential, albeit not for her but himself. The notion that Sarah's silence presented a space in which he could exert his own imprint and ideas as to what he desired her to be is suggested within the text, as illustrated here when Sarah addresses James directly on the matter:

SARAH: let me be a person.

JAMES: I don't want you to be a person?

SARAH: You want me to be a *deaf* person so you can change me into a hearing person¹⁰⁸

Likewise, in *Chattering*, there are several references throughout the collection of hearing characters creating a dubious link between deafness and potential, or more specifically, a potential for hearing people to gain something from what they see as a fresh slate. This is first introduced in the story 'Rio,' where a man hopes to work as a pimp for two young deaf women he meets, telling them that 'men always want silent women' and 'you two are the perfect women' because 'you are beautiful and no words come out of you to ruin the fantasy, and you can never hear the filth that is said around you. Completely untouched, untouchable.'¹⁰⁹ Whilst this certainly seems to suggest familiar ill-conceived notions about women in general, and a man's desire for 'purity' and obedience, the stories in *Chattering* suggest that this notion of purity is not restricted to men's sexual fantasies of women, but can also be seen across genders in a

¹⁰⁸ *Children of A Lesser God*, p.70

¹⁰⁹ 'Rio', in *Chattering*, p.10

variety of misguided attitudes of hearing people towards deaf people. For instance, in the story 'Window Cleaner', the deaf protagonist Christian works as a window cleaner in a hearing woman's house, who rather than engaging in the sort of conversation one would with a stranger, instead immediately questions him about some art work she has, saying 'these sculptures are about the voice and silence. What do you think about that?'¹¹⁰ Whilst presumably not coming from any ill intentions, the comments nonetheless indicate an othering of Christian. The woman has opted to allude to a form of knowing that she thinks, or perhaps hopes that deaf people will have. Christian's response 'what did he think about that? He had no idea. The sculptures looked like wormy clumps of clay to him. He didn't know this woman,' illustrate that he does not have a 'special' knowledge, nor would he choose to share it with a stranger if he did.¹¹¹

Yet the D/deaf characters in *Chattering* also share an awareness of this apparent potential, however conflicted their feelings may be about it; the young woman in 'Rio', reflects that 'I know, even if I often don't want to believe it, that it is true what he said about the specific quality of our silence. It is potential and remains only potential,' emphasizing its elusive nature by describing how 'it is like water, the liquid clear and thin, something you can feel but not hold down in any way'.¹¹² The emphasis that this silence 'remains only potential' and is something that you cannot 'hold down in anyway' reinforces that it is, much like the pimp's suggestion, a fantasy. Yet at the same time, it is still something that can be *felt*, and it is this emotional connection to silence that is maintained throughout the collection of stories in *Chattering*. Specifically, it is the space that silence allows for the characters to feel their emotions, without the detraction that comes from trying, and failing, to put these emotions into words with sufficient adequacy.

These ideas are explored by the protagonist of 'Boat' who describes this inability to translate feeling into language, describing how:

She felt all her words were petty pinpricks and didn't penetrate the state he was in or relay anything substantial to him. He felt close to her but far away, too. All

¹¹⁰ 'Window Cleaner' in *Chattering*, p.141

¹¹¹ 'Window Cleaner' in *Chattering*, p. 141

¹¹² 'Rio' in *Chattering*, p.14

of the ways of getting across the silence that she could think of or that she sensed felt blasphemous, grimy, cheap reproductions.¹¹³

In this instance, whilst the protagonist is explaining the difficulty in conveying her emotions through words, this struggle is heightened both because she is required to communicate through written notes rather than using her primary language, and because she is trying to explain a reality— that of being deaf—which her flatmate cannot ever know. However, it is a shared human experience, not something unique to deafness, to feel isolated by the inability to truly explain our individual emotions and experience of being alive. In addition to this, the semantic field used by the protagonist, namely ‘grimy, cheap, blasphemous’ corresponds once more with notions of silence equating to purity, and thus in turn, language being impure, with the use of ‘blasphemous’ in particular again connoting religious ideas.

Similar notions are explored in ‘Roadrunner,’ in which the protagonist suggests that there must be a different way of truly getting to know someone than through language. The protagonist in this story is hitchhiking with a hearing man who is unable to communicate with her through language, and yet, ‘she wondered how she could understand who he really was in just this time spent together. Even if they could communicate, she didn’t think that this was the way.’¹¹⁴ Instead, she ponders on everyday yet intimate memories that she feels could portray a deeper sense of who she is than any description she could conjure through conversation. She describes one of these moments as ‘the large square of light that came in from the living room and framed itself above her sister’s bed, a thin line of shade dividing the square unevenly in two’, describing how ‘it was the most intimate memory she could call up, the steady accompaniment to all her night-time terrors’.¹¹⁵ For this reason she suggests ‘once she had seen what pattern of light on the wall he was accustomed to seeing in the night, she could slip into his life without knowing that much about him or about it’.¹¹⁶

Alongside this sense that people can be better or otherwise known through language-less moments, the protagonist also asserts that language actively brings sadness. She reflects on how ‘when she met other people she was mostly happy being

¹¹³ ‘Boat’, in *Chattering*, p. 35

¹¹⁴ ‘Roadrunner’, *Chattering*, p.21

¹¹⁵ ‘Roadrunner’, *Chattering*, p.21

¹¹⁶ ‘Roadrunner’, *Chattering*, p.21

next to them and with the moments when their eyes met in understanding. But trying to communicate brought her misery.’¹¹⁷ Although this misery could be attributed to the frustration of trying to communicate with someone who doesn’t know her language, this feeling seems to transcend these specific problems. Whilst she is able to talk, ‘talking to them made her even more hungry- it was like an addiction that could never be satisfied’.¹¹⁸ Her feeling that she was ‘always clinging on to the delusion that the next word, the next conversation, the next person would be the time where she would find a way to make her words flow without suffocating her idea of this person’ and that ‘their words squirted and dashed away so quickly, and pushed her further and further away from any sense of them,’ indicates that it is language, as much as silence, that is elusive and has no tangible quality on which to grab hold of.

This sentiment also corresponds with another aspect of Lacan’s work, which posits that in this initial entry into language, alongside entering into an established community, we also experience a sense of loss, or ‘lack’, created through this realisation that we are not part of our mothers, and in many ways thus alone.¹¹⁹ In addition, it is language itself, and its inadequacy at ever fully describing how we feel that creates this lack. This concept is summarised by Jacqueline Rose in her article ‘Feminine sexuality’, in which she writes:

Lacan’s account of childhood then follows his basic premise that identity is constructed in language, but only at a cost. Identity shifts, and language speaks the loss which lay behind that first moment of symbolization. When the child asks something of its mother, that loss will persist over and above anything which she can possibly give, or say, in reply.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ ‘Roadrunner’, *Chattering*, p.21

¹¹⁸ ‘Roadrunner’, *Chattering*, p.21

¹¹⁹ Jacques Lacan, ‘lack’ (manqué) in ‘Le Transfer’ 91960-1)

¹²⁰ Jacqueline Rose, ‘Feminine Sexuality’ in *Identity: a Reader* ed. by Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman (Sage, 2000)

Therefore, one could argue that the more language we learn, the more we try to describe our emotions, only to fail and to try again, only to fail again; or, as the 'Roadrunner' protagonist says, to become 'further and further away from them.'

Translation as metaphor for imbalance in power dynamics

In the last scene of *Children*, Sarah and James decide that if they are able to make their relationship work it will be through meeting 'in another place; not in silence or in sound but somewhere else.' Here the use of deafness as a metaphor for silence is explicit, but the overall meaning of the metaphor is deliberately poetic in tone, and as a result is ambiguous. Is this a nod to the larger political questions of the play, a suggestion that they need to disregard pre-conceived ideas and pressures from their respective hearing and D/deaf communities, and create a new pathway to acceptance? Or is this romanticized use of silence more akin to Spirko's warning that the play will be seen as a love story, and this 'in between' about compromises in relationships in general? In the latter interpretation, it is not a stretch to suggest that the communication break down between James and Sarah is in part metaphoric for the misunderstandings that occur in any relationship.

Prior to this closing scene, the dynamic between the two protagonists is one of an imbalance of power throughout, for a variety of reasons: she is a student while he is her teacher, he has a prestigious job whilst she is a cleaner, and of course his hearing status makes him part of the majority, whilst she is part of an often misunderstood minority group. In addition, due to the practical elements of staging the play, this power dynamic carries through to the perception of the actors themselves. This is due to the nature of the constraints in staging a play that uses (rightly) a D/deaf, signing actress for the role of Sarah, for an audience of largely non-signing hearing people, meaning that the translation of her lines is imbedded into James' lines: he essentially repeats back everything Sarah says, translating from sign to speech for the hearing audience. This means that Sarah is quite literally speaking through James throughout the play. While it does serve a practical purpose, there are other ways this could be done, via captions for example, and this continuous translation also serves as a metaphor in itself for D/deaf people needing hearing people in order to communicate, and that their own 'true' voices are never heard.

Indeed, the day-to-day nature of most D/deaf people's communication with hearing people will not be through qualified interpreters, but instead through acquaintances, family and friends. Unlike interpreters, who both understand perfectly all that is being said, and have the professional obligation to speak as if they were themselves the D/deaf person, friends and family will, like James, generally sign imperfectly and naturally have their own views and pejoratives. This fact adds to the reality that a substantial amount of D/deaf people's words will ordinarily be lost somewhere in translation. The nature of these relationships is referenced in the play, with James perhaps semi-consciously blocking Sarah from certain parts of conversation, such as this incidence when James and Franklin are arguing:

SARAH: What's he saying?

JAMES: He's not saying anything important

SARAH: You can't decide what I hear and don't hear.

FRANKLIN: (*Not signing, forcing James to sign it*) I'm saying I think James should get a taste at being a translator as that's one of the problems facing him each and every time the two of you venture into the hearing world¹²¹

It is notable that Franklin says facing 'him' as if it is James that faces a disadvantage by dating Sarah, rather than Sarah who is disadvantaged by wider society not learning sign language. This particular casual assumption is addressed in *Chattering*, where the deaf protagonist in 'Roadrunner' expresses her frustration at the lack of effort made by her travelling partners to communicate with her:

Neither of them asked her to teach them any sign language. They seemed to feel that they could say to her all of what they needed to— Eat, Sleep, Fuck. What time is it? Are you married? Do you have kids? Where you go?¹²²

This frustration eventually results in an outburst, 'fuck you', she signed 'why you think me should be the one to understand you? You never ask me.'¹²³ The hold that these assumptions have about who should be responsible for making an effort to

¹²¹ *Children of A Lesser God*, p.40

¹²² 'Roadrunner' in *Chattering*, p.23

¹²³ 'Roadrunner' in *Chattering*, p.25

communicate, and who should have the power is revealed when they are reversed by D/deaf people challenging them. The indignation that James expresses when Sarah tells him she would rather have Orin, as a deaf person who can speak, translate her speech to the courts than James, is indicative of the unchallenged power that James is accustomed to having:

SARAH: I can't say what I feel about being deaf through a hearing person.

JAMES: You can't say what you feel about being deaf through...through a hearing person.

SARAH: Does that make you angry?

JAMES: Yes, that makes me angry! ¹²⁴

The anger that James expresses at this request of Sarah's only intensifies when she is unimpressed that he 'tried to save (her) the frustration of going before the group of hearing men', refusing to see how this behaviour is contributing to her lack of agency.¹²⁵ Indeed it goes further than a lack of agency, but an on-going complete erasure of identity, as Sarah explains that 'all my life people have spoken for me: *She says; she means; she wants*. As if there were no I. As if there were no one in here who *could* understand', emphasising the impact with the statement that 'all my life I have been the creation of other people'.¹²⁶ However, these eloquent explanations are met from James only with continued insistence (of an increasingly vitriolic nature) that Sarah should learn to speak: 'Shut up! You want to talk to me, then *you* learn *my* language!'¹²⁷ The extreme degree of personal affront that James feels to Sarah not speaking 'his' language continues, and indeed he seems to accuse of her of not speaking specifically to wilfully aggravate him, saying, 'did you get that? Of course you did. You've probably been reading lips perfectly for years; but it's a great control game, isn't it?' and then with increasingly baffling rationale, 'you can cook, but you can't speak. You can drive and shop and play bridge but can't speak'.¹²⁸ Robert Spirko observes that 'James [...] seems

¹²⁴ *Children of A Lesser God*, p. 83

¹²⁵ 'Better me than you': *Children Of A Lesser God*, Deaf education, and paternalism', p.21

¹²⁶ *Children of A Lesser God*, pp. 83-4

¹²⁷ *Children of A Lesser God*, p. 86

¹²⁸ *Children of a Lesser God*, P.86

unable to disassociate normal functioning from speech'.¹²⁹ These associations once more illustrate the widely held conviction that intelligence and speech are in some way intrinsically connected. Lane puts forward an explanation for why this might be, arguing that:

Only two kinds of people, after all, fail to use your language properly: foreigners and the mentally retarded. The deaf clearly were not the former: they did not come from some other land or visibly constitute a distinct community in our own, like for example, the Navajo Indians. Therefore, they could not have their own language, and their failure to use ours properly, like that of a person with mental retardation, could only be the result of faulty intellect.¹³⁰

Spirko and Lane's comments emphasise the ways in which misconceptions about normative language use and the connection to intelligence are still entrenched in society. Literature, and the portrayal of disabled characters, as well as the elevation of disabled writers, has the potential to reproduce or challenge these associations.

Reclaiming disability metaphors

It is both ironic and tragic that the continued assertions that speaking, or indeed writing, in a certain way are the only way to judge intelligence, leads to deaf people's true potential is being squandered in the dogged pursuit of conformity. Within literature, this means missing out on an entire demographic of potential writers, with an experience and insight that is invaluable. Raymond Antrobus, a deaf (and very successful) poet describes his own experience within the education system in his poem

'Dear Hearing World': I tried, hearing people, I tried to love you, but you laughed at my deaf grammar[...] I was a broken speaker, you were never a broken interpreter, taught me my speech was dry for someone who should sound like they're under water. It took years to talk with a straight spine and mute red marks on the coursework you assigned.¹³¹

¹²⁹ 'Better Me Than You', p.21

¹³⁰ *The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling The Deaf Community*, p. 108

¹³¹ Raymond antrobus, 'Dear Hearing World' in *Stairs and Whispers: D/deaf and Disabled Poets Write Back*, ed. by Sandra Alland, Khairani Barokka & Daniel Sluman (Nine Arches Press, 2017)p. 184

In perhaps the most powerful stanza, he asserts 'You erased what could have always been poetry.'¹³² In an interview with *The Guardian*, Stern reflects upon her good fortune in being a Deaf child of Deaf parents, who were able to give her access to a language that she was able to use with confidence and authenticity, saying:

I'm not against deaf people learning to speak but most of them are never comfortable enough with speech to be able to articulate their thoughts or communicate effectively. And if you don't speak that well, or someone has a hard time understanding you, then you have to have another way of communicating or you are done for. My speech class is the only class I failed in my whole life. If my parents were a different kind of parents, where would I be now? Not here talking to you, that's for sure.¹³³

Stern continues, asserting that 'it is only language that can lift people like this out of their environment', and ultimately comes back to the belief which, despite not agreeing on the specifics, is something that both hearing and deaf people alike seem to agree; 'we need to understand that language is more important for human beings than food or water. It's what makes us human.'¹³⁴

Sarah spends much of *Children* trying to express to James that she is happy in her own existence, at one point saying that 'deafness isn't the opposite of hearing, as you think. It's a silence full of sound.'¹³⁵ Describing deafness in this way is deliberately metaphoric; the 'sound' here is in the richness of Deaf culture, and as sound is given a different meaning, so too is silence. As such a new language of silence, in which there are different forms, are hinted at with the 'it's', suggesting that this particular form of Deaf silence is not the one used by hearing people to name something lacking; on the contrary, this deafness is 'full'. In *Chattering*, the nameless character in the story 'Boat' describes her own silence with similar imagery, describing how:

¹³² 'Dear Hearing World'

¹³³ 'I didn't think I would ever live in the hearing world, let alone write in it'

¹³⁴ 'I didn't think I would ever live in the hearing world, let alone write in it'

¹³⁵ *Children of A Lesser God*, p.30

The silence was nuanced, not blank and dead. It was mischievous and sly, and full of a sadness that managed not to be melancholy. She would laugh to herself when the silence tickled her, which was often'.¹³⁶

While her experience of silence is not something that can be easily conveyed, and much of this story is spent attempting to express its complexity, whatever this silence is, it is a something rather than nothingness; this silence is alive, has its own personality, it is, like Sarah's silence, 'full'. Vidali writes that 'it feels almost commonplace to claim that metaphor is important, that we often think in metaphoric ways, and that metaphors impact the world, both figuratively and materially.'¹³⁷ Language relies on shared understanding, and fiction that provokes change relies on emotional understanding, which the imagery of metaphor is often able to provide. Thus, we cannot, as Vidali writes aim to 'police' or remove disability metaphors'.¹³⁸

In his book *Enforcing Normalcy* Lennard J. Davis states how 'Western culture is organized to discourage silence. Silence is the repressed other of speech.'¹³⁹ He continues, stating:

A brief scan of the *Oxford English Dictionary* reveals the metaphorical use of 'silence' to stand for death, night or incomprehensible nature. [...] We also speak of silence as a form of political repression. We say that women's voices have been silenced, and we correct that condition by calling for women to speak. Silence is seen as the prison-house whose guards are language.¹⁴⁰

However, silence is not a 'prison house' when two people are communicating using sign language, quite the opposite; silence is the catalyst for its formation. Deaf theorists Tom Humphreys and Carol Padden contend that within the D/deaf community, 'voice is a problematic term that combines two meanings: the modality of expression in spoken language, but also *being heard*'.¹⁴¹ However, these terms are only problematic because of the extended assumptions that render 'having a voice' as using spoken language; if

¹³⁶ 'Boat' in *Chattering*, p. 35

¹³⁷ 'Seeing what we know', p.34

¹³⁸ 'Seeing what we know', p.42

¹³⁹ Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normality: Disability, Deafness and The Body*, (Verso, 1995), p.108

¹⁴⁰ *Enforcing Normality: Disability, Deafness and The Body*, p.108

¹⁴¹ Carol Padden and Tom Humphreys, *Inside Deaf culture*, p. 58 (Harvard University Press, 2006)

there were wider awareness about the ranges of ways in which people are capable of expressing an opinion, and indeed the knowledge required of the predominately hearing, speaking community to 'listen' to these opinions, surely the term given would no longer be an issue. Therefore, perhaps it is the ableist assumptions attributed to these terms that create the problems, not the terms themselves, and thereby greater awareness of the multitude of ways that people can sign, write, or use picture symbols to use their voice would alter the way we understand these terms. It is also important to note that deafness is a spectrum, in which many people have some ability to literally hear some sound, and also that within the group of D/deaf people who use sign language as a preferred or sole language silence is still not a universally connecting factor of this identity. In this light, whilst Sarah's deafness could be seen as representing political silencing, this could in part be due to the ableism inherent in readers' perception when deaf characters are featured in texts. Whilst her deafness is connected to a metaphorical 'political silencing' in relation to the D/deaf characters request for linguistic and educational autonomy being ignored, I would argue that this is quite distinct from stereotypical uses of metaphorical conceptions of silence. Instead, the political silencing explored is specifically related to her journey as a D/deaf person, rather than her deafness being used for an able-bodied person's experience. This could be seen as a good example of Vidali's distinction that rather than policing metaphors we need to 'find ways of working with critically, ethically, transgressively and creatively at the edges of disability metaphor.'¹⁴²

Like most constructions of our society, language is built around the white abled-bodied man, as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes; 'Western thought has long conflated femaleness and disability, understanding both as defective departures from a valued standard.'¹⁴³ Vidali explains that 'the imperative, then, is not simple avoidance of the knowing is seeing metaphor and other metaphors,' but 'a willing embrace of the opportunity to diversify our writing to represent a wider range of bodily and cognitive experience.'¹⁴⁴ She offers practical examples, suggesting 'we can ask students to find the "scents" of previous course ideas while reading a new article, as an exciting alternative to asking them to "see" the main point. We might suggest that colleagues taste and

¹⁴² 'Seeing What We Know', p.42

¹⁴³ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, 'Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory', p.5

¹⁴⁴ 'Knowing is Seeing', p.47

digest a new subject, in order to encourage bodily ways of knowing and interacting that go beyond “witnessing” texts.¹⁴⁵ ‘A disability approach to metaphor,’ Vidali writes, ‘must engage the full range of disability[...] actively transgress disability metaphors by employing a diverse vocabulary; and artistically create and historically reinterpret metaphors of disability.’¹⁴⁶ Questioning how people who differ from ‘the valued standard’ are represented in literature offers us, as writers and readers alike, the chance to respond in more a curious and non-reactionary manner when coming across new ways of using language, ready to approach ideas such as disability first language, (which is contrary to what is regarded as politically correct but often more preferred by disabled people themselves) or third person pronoun use, for example, with compassion and open mindedness. These are the qualities after all that the best literature has a unique ability to evoke.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

¹⁴⁶ ‘Knowing is Seeing’, p. 42

Chapter Three: cultural appropriation, identity politics and questioning motives; creating minority characters in my work *And All That is in Between*

This chapter will be following on from the previous chapter in regards to minority representation and metaphor use, and discuss how these ideas link to cultural and voice appropriation. Specifically, I will be looking at the choices of writers when creating characters outside of their own identity, and the contention that this can evoke. The text I will be focusing on for these questions will be my own work, starting from looking at my novel in short stories in this context and examining my own process of questioning and self-reflection when writing *And All That is in Between*. I will then examine how the process of self-reflection relates to current day discussions of what is and isn't deemed appropriate subject matter for writers of particular identity markers.

As discussed in chapter two, the use of disability metaphors in the work of able-bodied authors should be approached with awareness. I would like to state plainly from the outset that my novel, that is preoccupied largely with questions involving minority identity, will contain the use of metaphor in ways that could be viewed as problematic; some of which I am explicitly aware of and some which I am sure I have yet to recognise. My intention in mixing the overall themes of communication and 'otherness' with both D/deaf and refugee characters was not to use these characters' identity markers as a metaphor *for* these themes. Rather, my intention in featuring characters from a variety of different backgrounds was to explore how by meeting different people we are challenged to think about communication and human connection differently. Nevertheless, intention and impact are different things, and I will reflect honestly on the extent to which my work could be viewed as also replicating some of the problematic tropes that I have explored in the previous chapter. To do this, I will focus on three of the short stories; *The Dancer*, *Good People* and *Why We Are Here*.

With reference to the portrayal of disabled characters, I examine the argument that it is specifically the contributions of able-bodied writers that risk perpetuating some of the stereotypes and poor use of metaphor that I have explored in chapter two. I will discuss both the merits and the limits of viewing literature through the lens of cultural appropriation and identity politics. The aim of this chapter is to explore where the line is drawn between appropriation and solidarity, between speaking for and speaking up.

Some notes on cultural appropriation, and the use of metaphor in ‘The Dancer’

Cultural appropriation is a term whose usage has become commonplace only in the last few years but can again be traced back to the late 1970s— and a book by Kenneth Coutts Smith published in 1976. Although the book, entitled *Some General Observations on the Concept of Cultural Colonialism* did not use the term specifically, his ideas of ‘class appropriation’ and ‘cultural colonialism’ provided the foundations for what is now referred to as cultural appropriation. The term is, like identity politics, subject to misinterpretation and controversy, and a fair amount of online hysteria. Yet at its heart is a simple plea; that those from a dominant cultural group not profit from those whose identity or culture has been subject to oppression without acknowledgement, or regard to cultural sensitivities.

Within the D/deaf community a recent example of cultural appropriation is the methods by which some hearing people are choosing to learn sign language. While choosing to learn to sign is in itself an act of solidarity, when it is taught by other hearing people as opposed to classes run by D/deaf people, the language becomes detached from its purpose and cultural context. Similarly, to decide to make a play or film about disabled people without using disabled actors, as is commonly the case, and without engaging with why many disabled people perceive this as troubling, again suggests a lack of true regard for the social structures that currently disadvantage disabled artists. Therefore, it is not that able-bodied people should be banned from telling ‘other people’s stories,’ but that there needs to be a basic level of consideration for the people whose stories are being told.

Moreover, there is a thin line between representation and tokenism when any majority identity is seeking to represent a minority identity, and within literature there is equally a culture of ongoing debate around these issues. While the subjectivity of art makes it inevitable that there will always be storytelling deemed unrealistic or poorly researched, the scarcity of disability representation within literature of all forms inevitably makes disabled communities more sensitive to the few stories that are produced. Therefore, it is unsurprising that this literature gets more backlash for following well-trodden tropes (disabled character suffering, dying, functioning as a metaphor for able-bodied character) than if it were considered more ordinary for writers to include disabled characters.

In my story 'The Dancer', Ellie is the protagonist and the story is about her re-finding her purpose after quitting dance school. The plot focuses on the multiple ways she is undergoing a transition period, such as leaving her childhood home and changing the focus of her career. Her new role as a teaching assistant to a child whose disabilities are not fully catered for, meaning he sits as an outsider in the school, also enforces the idea of in between. These practical features are all intended to reflect that Ellie is grappling with her 'in between' identity, a large aspect of which, her deafness, has mostly been ignored. In many ways the story fits into an archetypal 'finding your voice' narrative. As she is both the protagonist and a character with a disability, the story could be viewed as disrupting the stereotypical narrative. Ellie is not an able-bodied character being inspired by a disabled character, and her disability is not a metaphor for something in an able-bodied characters journey as discussed in chapter two.

Disabled people serving as an abstract form of inspiration for the benefits of non-disabled people is also theorized in wider every day contexts. The comedian and journalist Stella Young coined the provocative term 'inspiration porn' as a means of emphasizing the objectification in the quotidian narratives that disabled people encounter. In her Tedx Talk titled 'I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much,' Young discusses the various ways throughout her life that people have deemed her an 'inspiration' simply for carrying out her day-to-day activities. Specifically, she addresses a rise in images of disabled people with corresponding quotes that are shared across the Internet as sources of motivation for able-bodied people. Young states that she uses the term inspiration porn 'deliberately, because they objectify one group of people for the benefit of another group of people'.¹⁴⁷ She explains in more detail, arguing that:

The purpose of these images is to inspire you, to motivate you, so that we can look at them and think, "Well, however bad my life is, it could be worse. I could be that person". But what if you are that person?¹⁴⁸

On reflection there are many ways in which *The Dancer* could also be viewed as keeping with this 'disability as inspiration for able-bodied person' narrative. This idea is

¹⁴⁷ Stella Young, 'I'm not your inspiration thank you very much', (TedxSydney, 2014), https://www.ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much?language=en [date accessed 19/01/19]

¹⁴⁸ 'I'm not your inspiration thank you very much'

essentially about power dynamics; how power is distributed and who's voice is elevated, and although Ellie is a protagonist with a disability, she is raised to be able to fit into mainstream life very well. Equally the majority of the story takes place in a school where, whilst she may be the odd one out in this context too, she nonetheless is systemically more privileged. In contrast, the two other prominent characters in the story, Ed and Isaac, hold less systemic power than her, and their characters are only viewed in sketches. Whilst Ed is given his own narrative in the following story (albeit in the second person, which again could be viewed as giving the assumed hearing reader authority), Isaac remains crucially only seen through Ellie's eyes. Within these restraints he could be read as serving purely as a metaphor for 'not fitting' and thus as part of Ellie's 'journey' to self-acceptance etc. However, I explored ways of 'remedying' this reading of the character dynamic, and faced the practical limitations of writing a non-verbal character. The dilemma was mainly to do with illustrating the ways in which Isaac would actually communicate, without appearing to patronise or belittle his intelligence. I ultimately decided that I would rather sketch a non-offensive outline than flesh him out with too much unknown detail. For example, I tried to give him an inner dialogue and my attempts were clunky and felt more offensive to me than suggesting his atypical intelligence through non-verbal cues, such as his ability to create practical models independently.

Overall, I weighed up the possibilities and decided although his character may be viewed as being 'used' to illustrate certain issues, these were issues that were important to raise. Issues such as the problematic nature of an untrained Teaching Assistant with limited sign language being his 'voice'. In the context of the whole novel, I hope that readers will view this critically; not as Isaac being the innocent 'inspirational disabled child' or Ellie as the 'inspirational teacher' who helps him, but as illustrating a reality that takes place, as I myself witnessed as a Teaching Assistant in a similar position. In this context, their dynamic is in many ways 'problematic' but it is also, I hope, in other ways authentic.

Reflecting upon Identity politics in my stories 'Good People' and Why We Are Here'

The term 'identity politics' was coined in a statement released by a group of Black feminist lesbians named the Combahee River Collective in 1977, in which they stated that 'this focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity

politics'.¹⁴⁹ The statement, which outlines their beliefs about the importance and methods of the liberation of Black women, and the ways in which they have been excluded from the feminism of white women, proclaimed that, 'we believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression.'¹⁵⁰ Although similar beliefs had been expressed before, the statement was unique in framing identity through an intersectional lens, and for presenting identity politics as a form of resistance. The term in its most simple form is a logical descriptor of activism; that to fight the oppression disproportionately affecting a certain demographic, said demographic and inequality must be named, which is what CRC's statement recognized. As such, the Combahee River Collective were distinctive for understanding and presenting these forms of oppression— class, gender, sexuality and race— as being systemic but also interlocking, and for arguing that identity politics could be a form of political resistance, through bringing people with shared oppressions together.

Over forty years later, in February 2020, Barbara Smith, one of the members of the collective, writes in a *Guardian* article in which she endorses then presidential nominee Bernie Sanders that, 'I am often disheartened to see support for identity politics and intersectionality reduced to buzzwords.'¹⁵¹ Indeed, as a result of the uncritical use of this term, it frequently becomes detached from its original history, with both sides of the political divide often claiming it produces an 'us and them' mentality. In these misinterpretations there is a risk of reducing the concept of identity politics to a type of essentialism, wherein people who have certain exterior attributes become aligned only with those with the same attributes, which in turn exacerbates stereotypes and group mentality. It should not be controversial for Barbara Smith, for example, to write of Sanders—a white Jewish man—that she believes 'his campaign and his understanding of politics complements the priorities that women of color defined decades ago.'¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ 'The Combahee River Collective Statement' (April 1977, copyright 1978 by Zillah Eisenstein), available at: https://americanstudies.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Keyword%20Coalition_Readings.pdf [date accessed 17/09/2020]. p.4

¹⁵⁰ Ibid

¹⁵¹ Barbara Smith 'I helped coin the term 'identity politics: I'm endorsing Bernie Saunders,' (*The Guardian*, February 2020), available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/feb/10/identity-politics-bernie-sanders-endorsement> [date accessed 17/09/20]

¹⁵² Ibid

Similarly, perhaps writers, whose job it is to imagine lives and perspectives outside of their own, being restricted to writing about certain identities is unhelpful to the cause of building empathy between people of perceived differences.

In creating many characters from different identities than my own, there were multiple times writing *And All That is in Between* where I questioned whether I was capable of depicting certain characters in ways that were helpful or authentic. In particular, in the two stories which feature the ongoing refugee crisis (itself a contentious term) I spent a lot of time reflecting upon my 'right' to do so and the best angle of which to approach the topic. 'Why We Are Here' is concerned with addressing the reasons for volunteering from various angles, and at points explicitly refers to the contention involved in story telling;

'We want to show the world that these people exist! The filmmakers said. The world knows they exist, the managers repeated each day. The world already knows.'

Similarly, both of the titles of these stories are implicit references to what it means to 'help,' of which, as a privileged non refugee, my writing these stories could be seen as a form of. However, to choose not to write about the current displacement of people in some regard would for me have felt like a deliberate omission; so big is its significance both to this period in which I have been writing, and in realizing my aim in 'connecting the disconnect' in what and who we construct as 'other.'

Therefore, I am happy with my decision to include these stories, and I feel the role they play in shaping the novel as a whole is important, but they are the stories nonetheless that I re-drafted the most, and particularly in regard to the creation of the refugee characters. In 'Why We Are Here', previous drafts of the story involved a different plot in which a friendship between Zennor and an Afghani refugee was given much more space than the relationship between Zennor and Tesfay. In the original drafts, this refugee was a confident, very intelligent man in his forties with excellent English who was also a poet. I wrote a scene where he recited a poem and encouraged her to do the same, and this represents a turning point for Zennor and her dyslexia, which was given a big focus. In this version of the story, the refugee character was not in any way depicted as weak, and was someone with his own interests and skills, and thus

in some ways it could also be viewed as a subversion of a narrative in which the westerner 'saves' the refugee. However, on finishing this draft, I wasn't happy with the overall focus; Zennor's dyslexia and self-understanding was given more weight than the refugee crisis in which the story took place, and I obviously did not want to imply that a westerner's identity quest is more important than a non-westerner's persecution. I therefore changed the focus to be on the reasons for volunteering, and in the final draft Zennor's dyslexia is only vaguely hinted at.

Another significant addition to the eventual draft was Ellie's visit, and in particular her and Zennor's discussion about their ancestors being refugees. This discussion helped bring another layer to 'why (they are) here', as well as suggesting that the labels of 'volunteer' and 'refugee' which are discussed a lot in the story, could so easily be reversed had history gone another way. Nevertheless, like Ellie in 'The Dancer', this story is written from a person from a privileged identity, and deciding to write from a refugee's perspective could have been a way of ensuring the importance of their humanity was highlighted. For similar reasons to those in regards to Isaac and Ellie in 'The Dancer,' I ultimately decided that keeping the story from Zennor's perspective meant that I could effectively write to my strengths whilst still telling an important story- the refugee crisis is not Zennor's story but her perspective still highlights important and contemporary issues.

In the first draft where I changed the refugee character to Tesfay, a vulnerable teenage boy, I had him as such a minor character that he was only referred to in reported action, and whom nobody had met, but whose name was still written everywhere by the refugees across town on hearing about his death (as it still is in the final draft.) This decision was made because I wanted to explore how so many refugees' deaths are simply reported by the media as statistics, with no known personal information about them. The other refugees writing his name everywhere is intended to show how they tried to use this only information they have to honour him, in this very basic way. However, with feedback that suggested that the complete lack of depth afforded to Tesfay could be seen as a lack in the story, I added in the scene where him and Zennor meet to be in the present tense, rather than reported action, and did the same for when she finds out about his death. Overall, I feel this keeps with the original ideas that I was aiming for, whilst also giving Tesfay and his death a tangible presence in the narrative.

As stated, Tesfay is a very different character from the original refugee character, being young and obviously vulnerable with very little English. I made this decision firstly because I wanted to show how two people form a bond with very little shared language, a message that is key to the novel's aims overall. However, it was also to contrast the way the media so often depicts refugees, as big, grown up, 'scary' men, whereas my own experience volunteering showed me just how often they are actually vulnerable under age boys.

The depiction of Soban in 'Good People' perhaps creates a middle ground between vulnerability, as the last scene of the narrative illustrates, and strength, as his character is quick witted and acerbic, appearing to have more strength of character than Kate who has more obvious insecurities. Again, there is also an argument that Soban is used as a device in Kate's personal journey, as again she is the protagonist and we see more of her character and background than Soban's. This story has also gone through many different versions, and ultimately as a writer it is my role to decide what each story is about and fitting characters into this overall intention. This story, as the title suggests, was about the many ways of viewing what it is to be a 'good person', and in this sense I felt satisfied that the character dynamics functioned to this aim.

The danger of a single story

Mitchell and Snyder's narrative prosthesis hypothesis laments not the absence of disability from literature, but the way in which disability is portrayed. They proclaim that 'the deviant body, unlike other marginalized elements of society such as race, sex, etc, has not experienced an absence from literature— rather, it is presented frequently as a contrast to normalcy,' emphasising that 'disabled peoples' social invisibility has occurred in the wake of their perpetual circulation throughout print history.'¹⁵³ Likewise scholar of life writing G. Thomas Couser maintains this position, writing in his book *Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics and Life Writing*:

It would be highly illuminating to know more about what sorts of life writing do *not* get published and why— that is, what sorts of life writing get written but

¹⁵³ *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, p, 226

never published. To cite one pertinent subculture, the disability community is rife with anecdotal evidence of editors and agents who demand or favor a particular angle, employment, or tone in disability memoir. In this regard, buzzwords found in blurbs, like ‘uplifting’ and ‘life-affirming’ are revealing indices of what gets published and what does not. Poster lives may be welcomed; narratives by angry former poster children may not be.¹⁵⁴

One such novel that gained huge notoriety was Mark Haddon’s 2004 novel, *The Curious Incident of The Dog in the Night-Time*. Written by a neurotypical author, the novel is narrated by Christopher, a teenager on the autism spectrum. While Haddon has in subsequent years received criticism from the autism community, these criticisms have come from people who have—to use an ableist metaphor— ‘quieter voices’, and not those who have the platform to affect Haddon’s notoriety or book sales.

In mainstream terms, his writing has been highly rewarded; seventeen literary awards in total and the stage adaptation of *Curious* won prestigious Olivier and Tony awards. Perhaps some of the more cynical critics of Haddon’s work could suggest that choosing this topic was a ploy to win awards, but it seems doubtful that Haddon himself would have had any idea of the extent of this reception to this otherwise low-key family drama. Instead, I would argue that the anger directed at Haddon is ultimately aimed at a structural backdrop in which able-bodied storytellers of all mediums seem to be repeatedly rewarded (literally) for imagining such a ‘difficult’ issue, whereas disabled writers themselves may be unable to get their stories accepted for publication.

In reference to a ‘particular angle’, one reason for criticism of *Curious* is a plot line in which Christopher finds out his mother has not died as he has been told, but left the family home because she could not cope with Christopher’s disability. This narrative, of parents brought to the brink by a child’s condition, is another common trait of literature involving disability. Once more I would argue that the issue is not that these narratives are unrealistic— of course there are parents of children with disabilities that find it hard to cope for all sorts of understandable reasons, and their stories are important to validate through storytelling. Yet when this becomes the only story that is told, it becomes cliché

¹⁵⁴ Thomas G. Couser, *Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics and Life Writing* (Cornell University Press, 2004), p.200

and is reinforcing structures in the real world where the birth of a disabled child is automatically announced to parents as a tragedy.

Although the manner in which race and disability are represented in literature is not directly comparable, there are some ways in which studying racial tropes are helpful for better understanding the problematic nature of some disability representation. In the 2005 satirical *Granta* article 'How to Write about Africa,' Binyavanga Wainaina mockingly addresses the familiar tropes that Western writers use to portray Africa:

In your text, treat Africa as if it were one country. It is hot and dusty with rolling grasslands and huge herds of animals and tall, thin people who are starving. Or it is hot and steamy with very short people who eat primates. Don't get bogged down with precise descriptions. Africa is big: fifty-four countries, 900 million people who are too busy starving and dying and warring and emigrating to read your book.¹⁵⁵

In her 2009 Ted Talk 'The Danger of a Single Story,' Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says that 'it is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power,' expanding that 'power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person.'¹⁵⁶ Adichie quotes the Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti who writes that 'if you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story and to start with 'secondly.' [...] Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state, and you have an entirely different story.'¹⁵⁷

By using this highly sensitive and complex topic as an analogy, I hope not to further lump all 'minority voices' together or to make crass comparisons, but instead to argue that a structure of powerful voices monopolizing the narrative of minority voices is seen in multiple contexts. With the example of Wainaina's work, it is clear that he is not arguing that poverty does not exist in African countries or that the causes should not be addressed. Instead, his article argues that when poverty becomes the only way that Africa

¹⁵⁵ Binyavanga Wainaina 'How to Write about Africa' (*Granta*, issue 92, 2005) accessible at: <https://granta.com/how-to-write-about-africa/> [date accessed 22/06/2020]

¹⁵⁶ Chimanda Ngozi Adichie 'The Danger of a Single Story', Ted Global 2009, July 2009) https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story [date accessed 20/06/20]

¹⁵⁷ Ibid

is portrayed by and for the Global North, then the vast populace of this continent becomes reduced to a singular entity, devoid of individuality, nuance and cultural specifics. As Adichie so compellingly explains ‘that is how to create a single story, show people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become.’¹⁵⁸

I discussed this issue with one of my interviewees— KD, a writer whose identity crosses over an intersection of minority groups. When discussing whether he thought stereotyping within literature actually has a tangible detrimental effect in the ‘real world’, he replied that ‘I think it does because you run the risk of reinforcing stereotypes or even creating a new way of being harassed for that specific character.’¹⁵⁹ He gave the example of the character of Apu in *The Simpsons*, who ‘might have been the first Indian American character on television’.¹⁶⁰ KD argues that ‘everything that’s problematic about him has still continued on *The Simpsons* thus is being used to discriminate against people from that background’, concluding that ‘the problem with Apu is he’s very one dimensional.’¹⁶¹ As Adichie argues, ‘the single story creates stereotypes and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story’.¹⁶²

The bluntness with which Wainaina states that people in Africa are ‘too busy starving to read your book,’ emphasises another assumption, unconscious or otherwise, that the intended recipients are not the minorities that these writers are depicting, but other ‘similar’ audiences. In this way the narratives are sanitized for the majority audience, who can enter this new perspective only through the gaze of someone they can relate to. This structure is arguably at play in *Children of A Lesser God*, which although featuring a D/deaf actress, is largely told through the eyes of the able-bodied person; it is written by a hearing writer and the play ‘takes place in the mind’ of the hearing protagonist.¹⁶³ As such, Spirko claims that ‘this response of the hearing audience to the play is influenced not only by this flawed empathy —only partially putting themselves in the place of the other— but also by other cultural constructions of normality and difference and of the nature of literature.’¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁸ Ibid

¹⁵⁹ Interview 9, see appendix

¹⁶⁰ Ibid

¹⁶¹ Ibid

¹⁶² ‘The Danger of a Single Story’

¹⁶³ *Children of A Lesser God*, p.xi

¹⁶⁴ ‘Better me than you’, p. 17

However, a scenario in which all writers only write amongst their 'own' identities does not seem practical nor ideal for many reasons either. When talking about her own identity, the novelist Linda Grant comments that 'I was asked whether I thought that any non-Jewish novelist had ever really nailed a Jewish character, which implied a universality of the Jewish condition that doesn't exist, a condition of Otherness.'¹⁶⁵ Thus whilst writing outside of one's own experience can perpetuate stereotypes through a lack of real understanding, dissuading writers from doing so denies the chance to gain understanding through the imaginative process that writing entails. Additionally, attempting to divide writers into exterior characteristics also creates a false dichotomy. In stating that non-disabled people should only write non-disabled characters, by extension disabled people should only depict (their own particular) disability and experience. This is equally restrictive and again reduces disabled people to one aspect of their identity. Similarly, KD tells of a writing course he attended in which one course-mate had 'made an inference based on me as a person' and was 'expecting me to make every male character gay, but actually that wasn't ever what I was trying to do,' indicating that he felt his course-mates had made assumptions about his characters based on his own identity.¹⁶⁶

The identity of a writer

The writer Zadie Smith has been outspoken on the issue of cultural appropriation, and has affirmed her choice to write outside of her own parameters of direct experience, arguing that 'doesn't everyone exist in a Venn diagram of overlapping allegiances and interests? [...] everyone, no matter where they are from — if they really think about it — will find themselves with a similar plurality of communities.'¹⁶⁷ Smith also highlights a particular aspect of her own criticism— or lack of. Despite her novels notoriously featuring characters from a wide range of backgrounds, she comments that 'I'm almost never accused of cultural appropriation—why not? Because I'm brown and Bengalis are brown and so it's all the same to white people?'¹⁶⁸ Implied here is that there is an

¹⁶⁵ Linda Grant, 'Whose life is it anyway? Novelists have their say on cultural appropriation'

¹⁶⁶ Interview 9, see appendix

¹⁶⁷ Zadie Smith quoted in 'Zadie Smith: I have a very messy and chaotic mind' (*The Guardian*, 2018) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jan/21/zadie-smith-you-ask-the-questions-self-doubt> [date accessed 01/07/20]

¹⁶⁸ Zadie Smith quoted by Isaac Chotiner in 'Zadie Smith on Male Critics, Appropriation and What Interests her Novelistically about Trump' (*Slate*, February 2016), <https://slate.com/culture/2016/11/a->

assumption amongst literary critics (and the publishing world is overwhelmingly white) that lumps minority background into one, homogenous group of oppression. As KD argues, privilege and race are more nuanced than these assumptions:

I don't think coming from a minority background that you necessarily have the right to write about other minority backgrounds. If you take just British Asians for example— if you take Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani —the levels of discrimination they face are homogeneously higher than white populations, but within the Asian population, they all face different levels of stigma and discrimination.¹⁶⁹

Smith argues that 'the whole debate can fall into a kind of trap,' commenting that 'the rhetorical pressure falls on this idea of neutrality, as if to be white is not to possess a race or an identity – is simply to be “the author” – whereas to be black is precisely to have an identity'.¹⁷⁰ Instead Smith maintains her right to maintain her own identity whilst also being able to write outside of these parameters: 'No, I don't desire this supposed neutrality. I am all the things I am — and also an author.'¹⁷¹ Ultimately she does not attempt to refute mistakes may have been made in regards to the authenticity of her characters backgrounds 'but if I didn't take a chance I'd only ever be able to write novels about mixed-race girls growing up in Willesden.'¹⁷²

Smith's comments highlight the potential results of taking identity politics to the extremes; that the writer is restricted and potential for new literature such as her highly commended *White Teeth* to emerge is lost. If Smith had not written this novel that contained characters that fall outside of her own identity, this would not correlate to people of those backgrounds doing so instead. *White Teeth*, like any work of fiction, is not simply the sum of the exterior parts of an author's identity. 'Where does writing come from,' seems too philosophical a question to have any tangible benefit, but it would be clear to most writers that imagination is not a formula created wholly from lived experience; if it was then fantasy could not exist as a genre. There is artificiality in

[conversation-with-zadie-smith-about-cultural-appropriation-male-critics-and-how-trump-interests-her-novelistically.html](#) [data accessed 01/07/20]

¹⁶⁹ Interview 9, see appendix

¹⁷⁰ 'Zadie Smith: I have a very messy and chaotic mind'

¹⁷¹ Ibid

¹⁷² Ibid

suggesting that writers can compartmentalize the facets of their identity, experience and imagination and write within an acceptable, allocated realm. Equally there is a falsehood in suggesting that disabled people and able-bodied people (or any 'group') of people can be entirely separated from each other's experience.

It is helpful to understand and discuss cultural appropriation and identity politics if this education is used as a tool in which to create change; for example, to address the lack of diversity in publishing and the damage of stereotypical representation of minority characters. However, with the emergence of social media, because of the speed in which ideas can now spread, conjecture as to an author's intention can easily become a bandwagon to jump on, and it seems unlikely that helpful solutions will result.

At his keynote speech 'Disability and other human questions', at Liverpool Hope 2019 Disability Disciplines conference, renowned disability theorist Dan Goodley sensitively addressed the layers of complexity that exist within the field of Disability Studies. Goodley argues that it is precisely because 'non disabled people's disability stories have throughout history been powerfully influential and problematic not least for disabled people' that 'it is particularly the ontological duty of non-disabled people to unpack their own understandings, conceptions', prejudices and troubles in relation to disability.'¹⁷³

Additionally, Goodley spoke movingly about his journey to disability studies, as an able-bodied man, which was primarily through a close relationship with his grandfather. These personal relationships between able-bodied and disabled people he argues, mean that:

Reducing my disability story to a descriptor that coins it to be just that of a white, cis gendered male risks misrecognizing the wider relational qualities of my story or indeed any story that is told of disability and misdiagnosing my narrative as just a story of a non-disabled teller does a disservice to the centrality of disability in my family.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Dan Goodley, 'Disability and other Human Questions' (I am quoting Goodley's Conference Talk at Liverpool Hope University on 3rd July 2019)— A book by Goodley with the same name has subsequently been published by Emerald Publishing in November 2020

¹⁷⁴ Ibid

Goodley argues that ‘we *all* come to disability studies with innumerable stories of disability already lived, told and at times repressed as part of our personal biographies.’¹⁷⁵ His speech serves as a reminder of the irrefutably interconnected nature of people, and that trying to divide individuals into identity groupings is nearing on impossible. In addition, beyond a certain point, analyzing an author’s intentions risks prying deep into a writer’s personal life and those of their family; should every writer be expected to delve into their personal history in order to defend their right to write? To what extent does this overlap with the privacy of their family or friends?

In regards to contemplating an author’s own right to anonymity and indeed the sacrament of the ‘death of the author’, the politics of identity took on a whole new dimension in 2016 in regards to the author Elena Ferrante. A journalist speculated that Ferrante, whose own identity is unknown to anyone but her publisher— her name only a pseudonym— may be a retired librarian called Anita Raja. Ferrante has stayed quiet throughout the furor and speculation that followed, but answers given to a rare interview in 2015 give some insight into her attitude towards the fascination with the identity of an author. She says:

The most urgent question for a writer may seem to be, what experiences do I have as my material, what experiences do I feel able to narrate? But that’s not right. The more pressing question is, what is the word, what is the rhythm of the sentence, what tone best suits the things I know?¹⁷⁶

She expands, by emphasising that, ‘there is no work of literature that is not the fruit of tradition, of many skills, of a sort of collective intelligence.’¹⁷⁷

Ultimately, the real problems that need addressing are structural, not individual. As such, they will only improve with a collective acknowledgment and fight to dismantle the inequalities that are present within every aspect of the arts, from education to the publishing industry. Naming concepts such as cultural appropriation and identity politics are incredibly helpful in starting a conversation, but their function is constructive only up to a point. Respect, humility and the ability to listen to feedback are traits that are useful for every one with some degree of privilege, but I see little long term or tangible change

¹⁷⁵ Ibid

¹⁷⁶ Elena Ferrante ‘The Torment and The Engine,’ (*Harper’s Magazine*, May 2015), available at: <https://harpers.org/archive/2015/05/the-torment-and-the-engine/>, [date accessed 17/09/20]

¹⁷⁷ Ibid

emerging from externally dictating the parameters of a writer's imagination. Writers have always been the visionaries of new worlds, showing what could be possible from their desks; what we need is not to limit the scope of these visions, but to bring more people to these desks.

Chapter Four: 'Worlds Apart'; education, grief, borders— an analysis of 'the in between' in my novel in short stories *And All That Is In Between*

The focus of this chapter will be on the most prominent theme of the novel, the concept of 'in between' and how it relates to many of the themes of the novel, focussing on the themes of education, borders and grief. I will discuss the ways in which these topics are significant to the central concept of 'in between', and how they allow a path into thinking about the ways in which we are separated and connected, a crucial factor of my understanding of this concept. The novel is in many ways about interconnectedness and this interest of mine is also reflected within the structure of the novel. For this reason, the chapter will start by evaluating my structural choices and the ways in which key literary texts and authors have influenced my decisions in this area.

Notes on form

The concept of 'in between' is relevant to multiple themes in the novel, as this chapter will detail, and my aim is that the concept is also reiterated in the structure and form of the novel. My initial plan with *And All That Is In Between* was to structure the work as a collection of short stories, in part inspired by modernist literature, in particular Katherine Mansfield's short stories.¹⁷⁸ This is largely in relation to the way that the concept of time is presented, with the importance placed on a particular moment or meeting between characters, not on linear plot progression. Writers such as Ali Smith offer more contemporary examples of temporal structures that have inspired my own writing choices, specifically Smith's experiments with form and the way her narratives project forward and back in time, often in the space of a paragraph or two or within one story or passage.¹⁷⁹ The decision to shift my work from a collection of stories to a novel in short stories was altered initially by reading Jennifer Egan's *A Visit From The Goon Squad*, which also masterfully plays with time and in addition somewhat defies genre.¹⁸⁰ Critic Sarah Churchwell describes *A Visit* as 'neither a novel nor a collection of short stories' but (rather fittingly) 'something in between', describing the work as:

¹⁷⁸ Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923), *The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield* (Wordsworth Classics, 2006)

¹⁷⁹ I am referencing in particular two bodies of work by Ali Smith: *The First Person and Other Stories* (The Penguin Group, 2008) and *How to Be Both* (Penguin Books, 2014)

¹⁸⁰ Jennifer Egan, *A Visit From The Goon Squad* (Corsair, 2010)

A series of chapters featuring interlocking characters at different points in their lives, whose individual voices combine to create a symphonic work that uses its interconnected form to explore ideas about human interconnectedness.’¹⁸¹

In my work I always had the intention of ensuring all characters were interconnected in some way, and I also wanted to illustrate the impact of generations before and after our own lives, thus disrupting a traditional concept of subjective time as something that is confined to one person’s experience. My interest in centralizing characters from the same family to do this was emboldened when reading other notable novels in short stories such as Elizabeth Strout’s *Olive Kitteridge*, in which the differing protagonists of each story are each linked to the eponymous Olive through the community where she lives. ¹⁸² Most recently, Bernadine Evaristo’s 2019 Booker Prize-winning novel in short stories *Girl, Woman, Other* massively challenged what is possible for this genre.¹⁸³ Whilst I cannot attempt to emulate what Evaristo has achieved in the scale, scope and finesse of her work, the ways in which she so deftly weaves generations and geographies together, and the unorthodox family set up at the heart of the collection ignited my sense of possibility immeasurably.

Although the individual stories of my novel generally follow a chronological trajectory, they also play with subversion of time, particularly in the first and last stories. ‘What The Words Looked Like’ moves back and forth in time throughout, explicitly playing on this in the last paragraph with; ‘one day soon’ ‘one year after this day,’ ‘fourteen years ago from today’, and finally concluding that ‘but right now it is not any of these days [...] It is only this moment, on this day.’ The final paragraph of this first story of the collection mirrors the final paragraph of the last story, in that both take place by the bedside of a character on their final day of life; in ‘What The Words’ it is Daniel’s, in the title story it is Eli’s mother Rose. The last paragraph of ‘In Paris’ is also intended to explicitly echo the first story of the novel, wherein instead of Jools imagining a future without Daniel for both herself and her children, it is her daughter Ellie, now grown up and herself a mother,

¹⁸¹ Sarah Churchwell ‘A Visit from the Goon Squad by Jennifer Egan- review’, *The Guardian* (March 2011), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/mar/13/jennifer-egan-visit-goon-squad> [date accessed 22/06/20]

¹⁸² Elizabeth Strout, *Olive Kitteridge* (Simon and Schuster, 2008)

¹⁸³ Bernadine Evaristo, *Girl, Woman, Other* (Penguin, 2020)

recognizing the same sense of inevitability now with the death of her sister. Indeed she has in a way become a mother to Jools in this scene as well as to her new-born baby, signifying a full circle. This is intended, amidst the apparent bleakness of the repetition, to signal that the continuation of life is just as inevitable as death, as is the hope that comes with it, because as Ellie says she ‘will experience more kindness than most people will ever know.’

While the order of the stories is largely chronological, so that the reader can follow the thread of the ways in which the characters connect, there are several significant devices that subvert this trajectory. One is that we often learn of a character’s death before we learn about their lives (a topic I will address in more detail at the end of this chapter); the second is that the title story—chronologically first—comes last in the novel. The purpose of this was not to give these events the most impact or suggest the events of the Holocaust supersede the severity of world events that are featured in prior stories. Instead, it was placed here because it is an event, unlike other parts of history referred to in the novel that the vast majority of readers will be aware of, and thus my intention was that readers would make connections to the other events as a result

Creating stories that are non-linear in form, and in which moments of human connection are prioritized over plot is my attempt, influenced by many writers before me, at suggesting that conflating human progress with a linear progression of time actually leads not to hope, but to despair. By using aspects of non-linear plot progression, my aim is to portray that time is always past, present and future, at once. By playing with time, the narrative aims to reflect that as with the cycles of life and death, cycles of power and cruelty continue. Yet my hope, as *All That Is In Between* aims to show, lies in ordinary people and the small moments of connection in between.

The role of education in *And All That Is In Between*

The theme of education has a reoccurring presence in the novel, largely functioning as a representation of a societal institution, to which the characters are seen in relation to. Two of the stories, ‘The Dancer’ and ‘The Teacher’ take place within a school, the beginning of ‘The Interpreter’ is also set in this same school, and ‘On a Bright Day’ is set on a university campus. Indeed, all of the stories reference education in some way, even if this reference is passing. As detailed in Chapter One, education and language are firmly intertwined, which is one reason for its relevance in a novel occupied with ideas of

communication. However, the main function of the topic is to illustrate the extent in which the various characters 'fit' into the education process. The school system serves as most people's entrance to wider society outside of the home, and the various social expectations and constructs that come with this, largely ideas of normalcy and conformity, as well as a route to success and power. Viewed in this light, we can view education as a way of assessing the ways in which multiple characters in the novel 'fit' into society's expectations, and by which others choose to 'drop out' from.

The idea of 'dropping out' is introduced early on in the novel, as the first story chronicles Jools deciding to leave Oxford university, a decision which will then be echoed, albeit in different guises, by both her daughters as Ellie quits dance school and Zennor never enters higher education. Beginning the novel with Oxford university in particular is intended to be symbolic of education as a bastion of power, and the resulting inequalities. More than sixty percent of Oxford university students were previously privately educated or attended a grammar school, with less than one in ten describing themselves as working class¹⁸⁴. Considering these credentials, the fact that the majority of politicians continue to come directly from Oxbridge, reflects the huge influence of education in the structure of society, and the discrepancy of power that educational institutions often serve as a vessel for. This power is perhaps the most starkly represented in the title story, where Eli's life is saved because of his academic excellence. This narrative is inspired by my own Grandad's experience, who was allowed to escape Nazi Germany in order to take up a place at an English boarding school before attending Cambridge university. In the current culture of distrust, the prestige of refugee's job is often still used as a 'redeeming factor' within media coverage, and indeed it is still largely only those with enough money and status to leave that can. This is reflected in Eli's general feelings of unease in his own societal position, even a long time into being supposedly settled in the UK. The questioning of intelligence is prominent in his narrative, as he reflects upon what it means to be '*Intelligent enough*:'

Intelligent enough to be accepted at a prestigious British school, intelligent enough not to talk too much to the wrong people. Intelligent enough to be accepted for

¹⁸⁴ 'More than 60 percent of Oxford University Students Went to Private or Grammar School, Figures Show', May Bulman, (The Independent, September 2018)

something outside of this thing that he was, not intelligent enough to understand *what* this thing was.

Despite our society's ideals of apparent meritocracy, the discrepancies within the education system are evident from primary school, with factors such as catchment areas and more recently the policy of 'free schools' undoing much of the equalizing that a state school system should theoretically do. The identity of those teaching also has an impact on children's understanding of their own potential for achievement. My interest in teacher-student relationships and the varying power structures in schools, was influenced by working as a teaching assistant in a school in which the majority of students and staff were from Black and ethnic minority groups but all those with managerial roles were white. After reading *Children of a Lesser God*, I saw parallels between the school structure I observed, and the dynamic between hearing and Deaf staff described in the play. Ed refers directly to these structures of hierarchy in 'The Teacher':

You remind yourself that you are the only Deaf teacher at your school; that you have uprooted the stability of hierarchy that had otherwise been left untainted—*teaching assistants are deaf, teachers are hearing.*

Whilst working one to one with a child who was Deaf and autistic and also from a working class and non-white background, I became curious about the intersections of minority identities, and how their needs are served (or not) by middle class, non-disabled white people. These ideas are in 'The Dancer', albeit suggestive only, such as featuring the comically clueless recruiter, who appears entirely detached from the children he is ultimately recruiting for. Similarly, I wanted to portray the general lack of respect that I witnessed for roles deemed 'caring', by featuring Jools' reaction to Ellie's announcement of her new job. Jools appears to be embarrassed that she is working in a low-entry job dismissing it as 'care work' and saying that people are always 'desperate' for care workers, that she should do something 'beautiful, creative' instead. My interest in family cycles spurred the inferred irony in having Jools whose own path was to quit something prestigious in favour of something less so, to then be disapproving of her daughter doing the same. However, it was also to reference directly society's disregard for jobs that require a low level of education. In addition, Jools' apparent embarrassment is at the

mention of disability, and she herself has tried to ignore Ellie's disability. Ellie also infers a level of shame at her new job, and also links it back not only to her decision to leave university but also her inability to conform to the school system from childhood:

Ellie had chosen subjects she found interesting, she hadn't considered that there was some overarching theme she was supposed to be following, some box to be stepping into. But perhaps she didn't consider things properly at all; perhaps that was why she was sat on the carpet with a small boy she couldn't communicate with rather than rehearsing in a dance studio.

That all three of the main female protagonists drop out was partly to do with my interest in family cycles, and in female characters forging their own path, but largely to do with another kind of in between, in their rejection of the expected trajectory of academic success followed by a nine to five job. This path is taken by Jools and Ellie but both end up conforming eventually to the expectation of getting a job, with Ellie actually becoming a teacher within the education system. Zennor by contrast drops out of society altogether and quite literally joins the revolution. The heated conversation with Ellie before she travels to Syria depicts their contrasting attitudes to what they refer to as 'the system', with Zennor saying she is an anarchist and thus does not believe 'in there being a system' and Ellie asking 'do you think me and Ed would be able to help kids the way we do if we just dropped out because we didn't 'believe' in it?'

In 'Why We Are Here' Zennor reflects on how 'moving words around for an essay was flimsy, intangible, pointless', hinting at the conflation between the education system and the stagnancy of the actual societal change that she so longs for. Ellie's views by contrast suggest a softer approach, that we try to make what we have slightly better. My intention is not to suggest that either is a preferable approach, but simply to showcase the ambiguities and imperfections of both.

Geographical and emotional borders, and a literal space of in between

The identities associated with the single act of crossing borders are vast, ranging from 'philosopher', 'drop out', 'victim' to 'illegal alien'. Some of these depictions are explored in the collection across a range of minor and major characters. Alongside the different circumstances, choices and levels of privilege explored within the theme of travel in these

stories, I wanted also to suggest an element of shared vulnerability in the act of leaving home. This is intended as one means of conveying the ‘in between’ theme of the work, an attempt at exploring how this vulnerability could create a potential for an overlapping of otherwise separated people. Overall, my intention is that the novel highlights a humanity that is equally present in those whose travel is perceived as deviant as in those whose travel is perceived as life enhancing.

And All That Is In Between explores the theme of travel in relation to many different facets of human experience, and crossing borders plays a key role in many of the characters’ ‘journeys.’ That it is typical to use this word in fiction to describe a character arc (at least in the Bildungsroman genre, in which character growth is the main focus) is suggestive of the importance of imbedding physicality in internal change, of something having literally shifted. My aim is to acknowledge the extreme differences of both perception and end result that geographical movement brings to different bodies, and in some cases, at different periods of history. As such, the narratives bring these varying realities together within the same collection and at times often within the same story.

One of the more subtle ways in which the concept of travel and borders is present in *And All That Is In Between* is the use of the sea as a motif throughout. Emotionally revealing and significant conversations take place on the beach for numerous characters; this is where Ellie and Zennor’s heart -to -heart in ‘Why We Are Here’ takes place, Alice and Ina’s first kiss in ‘Ina’, and Kate and Mike’s wedding celebrations. The sea is used as a symbol for both privilege and danger from the beginning chapters; whilst Jools reflects on her good fortune in being given a room by the sea when becoming unexpectedly pregnant, Ed grieves his friend Ina who has drowned at sea in America. Ed’s musings on this particular beach’s name meaning ‘beautiful place,’ is intended to contain a degree of irony, and to signify the wider subtext— that the ocean is both a place of beauty and of danger.

This paradox leads to the most obvious intention in using the sea as a motif in many of the stories—as a fairly literal metaphor for a space between geographical borders. In terms of its connection to the mass displacement of people, the sea is a place of political significance and represents both visibility and invisibility. Whilst the general concept of ‘refugees’ as a collective are visible in media images of their precarious travel, the invisibility of a refugee as a unique individual is enhanced when they lose their life at

sea. The political potential for the sea lies in its substance; refugees are left to drown in the sea precisely because of the lack of government accountability its murky borderlines afford, and yet those who do arrive safely are demonised for crossing these intangible lines. Thus the sea as a metaphor for borders reinforces the paradox of borders being something that simultaneously have a massive effect on (certain) people's lives, whilst also being built from something that cannot be physically held onto. As such, the recurrent use of the sea in *And All That* functions as a symbol of the 'slipperiness' of the role that borders have, and to challenge their existence. The idea of these specific contradictions is referenced most explicitly in 'Good People', where Kate tries out what is to her a new, academic concept, that 'borders are a social construct', and Soban simply replies 'to you, maybe.'

These contradictions are intended to be most evident in the evolution of the principal family unit of the collection, in which the juxtaposition between the experiences from Eli to Zennor and Ellie is most obvious. Within the space of grandparent to grandchild, we move between a character, Eli, who is viewed as an 'alien' by his own country and is forced to leave his home to find safety, and Zennor, who is a person with the same racial privileges as any other white person in Britain, and who makes the choice to travel to a place of danger for her own beliefs.

The role of language is an explicit theme throughout, and language has an integral role to the perception of moving bodies. In a much-shared 2015 *Guardian* article entitled 'Why are white people expats when the rest of us are immigrants?' Mawuna Remarque Koutonin addresses the role that language plays in the perpetuation of these divides. Koutonin states: 'in the lexicon of human migration there are still hierarchical words, created with the purpose of putting white people above everyone else.'¹⁸⁵ Knowing the power that language holds, I found it difficult to decide upon my own language choices when referring to the inhabitants of the camp in the story 'Why We Are Here'. In initial drafts I referred to 'residents,' partly because this was a term I heard used when myself volunteering, as a means of emphasising that the camps are people's homes and thus respecting boundaries. Using this term in the story began to feel clunky in subsequent drafts, and an unintended irony emerged; both in association with the fact that refugees

¹⁸⁵ Mawuna Remarque Koutonin 'why are white people expats when the rest of us are immigrants?' (*The Guardian*, March 2015) <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/mar/13/white-people-expats-immigrants-migration> [date accessed 6/06/20]

have by definition left their actual homes out of desperation, and that in the eventual narrative I wrote, the temporary living place of the camp was burnt down.

Whilst the term 'refugee' connotes more empathy than 'immigrant' or indeed 'illegal immigrant' there is nevertheless a disempowerment and a loss of individuality associated with the term. As part of Amnesty International's 'my name is not refugee' campaign, Foni Joyce writes 'I am not just a refugee. I am a human being with dreams, goals and aspiration,' but states how whilst 'we all have names and identities that go far beyond "refugee"' too often we're just seen as a faceless influx.¹⁸⁶ When refugees are left to die en masse in oceans or in camps, they may not be being actively harmed but the passivity with which we treat their deaths illustrates that these are not lives that are seen as mattering. As such this becomes a stage in the process of dehumanisation and collective prejudice. To be precise, it is stage two, 'isolation and avoidance' on the Allport's scale. The Allport's scale was devised to show the stages of prejudice that result in genocide; number five on the scale is 'extermination'.¹⁸⁷ The UN's special advisor on the prevention of genocide, Adama Dieng, puts this theory into context, stating 'the Holocaust did not start with the gas chambers and the Rwandan genocide did not start with the slayings. It started with the dehumanization of a specific groups of persons.'¹⁸⁸

Whilst it is deeply uncomfortable to recognise, the entrenched structures of colonialism coupled with the media rhetoric towards refugees create a situation in which it is almost impossible for 'us' (not refugees) to see 'them' (refugees) as anything but a homogenous entity. The images we see are rarely of individual stories of people, but of groups gathered en masse: in camps, fleeing bombs, drowning in dinghies. In turn, the accompanying text to these images often lead to framing those seeking refuge either as fake opportunists or as victims in need of saviour. Both of these framings indicate a disconnection between the possibility of these people being like us, or indeed us ever being like them. As Steve Ali, a Syrian refugee explains, before he himself became a refugee, the term connoted something that could only ever happen 'to people "over there"'

¹⁸⁶ Foni Joyce quoted by Amnesty International for 'my name is not a refugee campaign', Amnesty International Website, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/i-welcome-community-2/stories-of-welcome/i-am-not-just-a-refugee/> [date accessed 6/06/20]

¹⁸⁷ Allport's Scale, devised by psychologist Gordon Allport in 1954

¹⁸⁸ Adama Dieng quoted in 'Genocide begins with 'dehumanization'; no single country is immune, warns official', on United Nation's website, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/12/485822-genocide-begins-dehumanization-no-single-country-immune-risk-warns-un-official> [date accessed 06/06/20]

pictured on the television and it was impossible that it could happen to the real -life people I knew', describing how when he arrived in London he remembered 'seeing the look in people's eyes—the look that said that nothing could ever happen to them. That was a familiar look because I used to have it.'¹⁸⁹

This process of dehumanisation was something I wanted to explore within the title story. My overall aim in this story was to capture the early stages of this othering process and avoid detailing the horrors of final stages of the holocaust. This was firstly because I did not want to be gratuitous, but also because I believe the examination of this gradual process is more helpful in recognising processes of dehumanisation than simply circulating images of the final results. As such the story disrupts chronological order to show the initial ordinariness of Arno and Eli's childhood friendship and then the gradual taking away of rights, dispersed with the adult Eli and Arno and the on-going ramifications of the events on their adult lives.

This decision was part of a wider idea that I wanted to explore, which is whether the term refugee denotes only a transitory status specific to a period in one's life, or whether it forms a constant component of one's life, and indeed whether this status will have an impact on future generations lives. There is no doubt that racial characteristics play a part in the experiences of descendants of refugees; for example racial discrimination based on appearance is easier to avoid for white Jews whose proximity to whiteness gives a greater chance of assimilation. Equally, whilst Jewish refugees who were able to settle in other countries during or after the Second World War still faced real prejudice, again their proximity to whiteness afforded them better protection than those migrants whose skin colour does not allow this visible assimilation. Of course this assimilation occurs on a scale, and while it is a form of privilege, it frequently comes at a cost, such as changing surnames, behaviours and faith practices.

The murkiness of this 'in between' that white Jews can occupy is addressed in 'The Interpreter' where it is revealed to Andrew that a relative of his, unable to escape due to financial reasons, was able to survive by pretending not to be Jewish and working as a photographer on behalf of the Nazi regime. This revelation was intended to illustrate the complexity of the 'perfect victim' model that is expected on migrants and refugees today,

¹⁸⁹ Steve Ali, 'We Are All Refugees Now', (*GQ Magazine*, April 2020), <https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/politics/article/coronavirus-refugees-isolation> [date accessed 11/06/20]

with the media frequently pointing out any sign that a migrant may overturn a stereotypical expectation. Andrew's mother explains how the relative took the job out of the need to provide for his family, pointing out that despite his apparent ability to blend in, he was of course fearful of being discovered at any time. Andrew's mother explains how when he eventually wrote to a relative living in safety in Switzerland in order to seek help, they declined because he was in their view 'a traitor'. 'Traitor' was used deliberately because it is a term associated with the language of war, often given to deserters, and much of the language in media depictions of refugees is the language of war; i.e. 'an invasion of migrants', and 'they should have stayed and fought for their country.' Michael Diedring, legal assistant at the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, writes:

Language that accompanies this security debate refers to 'illegal' entry and 'threats' to European society, and a 'war' on smugglers. This toxifies the discussion and gives politicians the remit to impose sanctions and justify the ill-treatment of people arriving without prior authorisation, to build fences, close borders, detain asylum seekers, and impose other legal barriers to asylum.¹⁹⁰

Furthermore, in using this language migrants are either othered, or the blame is placed on them; both allows those of us in the safety of our home to distance ourselves from their situation and our part in changing it. When Andrew's mother states that 'it just makes me rather sad, when people don't use what they have, when they have it', it could be read as a double meaning. The relative technically used what he had— his proximity to whiteness— to escape genocide, but she is actually referring to the family in Switzerland who refused to take him in because of this transgression rather than imagining themselves in his shoes.

As stated, Zennor's and Ellie's whiteness allows them acceptance and privilege in the UK, and this fact in relation to their grandfather's experience allows the arbitrary nature of race to be exposed. However, through Zennor and Ellie's characters I also explore the idea that their ancestry has an internal impact on them with the concept of generational trauma, and the references to their unconscious decisions and bodily

¹⁹⁰ Michael Diedring, 'Refugee Crisis, how language contributes to the fate of refugees,' (*The Elders*, October 2015), <https://www.theelders.org/news/refugee-crisis-how-language-contributes-fate-refugees> [date accessed, 11/06/20]

reactions. There are references to dreams and to bodily knowledge that are scattered throughout the collection: Ed talks about a connection with Ellie that ‘wasn’t cerebral’ and a ‘spooky’ ‘conviction that he could feel everything Ellie felt’; Zennor insists that ‘physicality is surely inherent’ in activism and must be ‘embodied’; and Eli asks where ‘this Jewishness resides in his body’. Crucially, he and Arno are treated as expendable because of perceived deviances in their bodies, with Arno commenting how ‘the state had taken away the freedom of their own bodies.’

The character of Ellie is perhaps the most in touch with an idea of bodily knowledge and this is intended to be one aspect of her evident sensitivity and emotional character. The depression she experiences in ‘In Paris’ is largely due to both environmental and racial injustices she is witnessing on a global level. Her disbelief in particular at the current US president causes her to disassociate, describing how ‘she is floating above the room, has left her body altogether,’ and is intended to be compounded with the confusion of her grandma who confuses the president for Hitler. In ‘Why We Are Here’, Ellie refers to the concept of generational trauma directly, through Ellie and Zennor’s conversation on the beach. This story gives one meaning to the title’s question, with Ellie suggesting they have an unconscious reaction to the current refugee crisis because of their family history, describing how her tears ‘(were) like a bodily reaction, like they weren’t my tears.’

The novel is also about power structures, and in particular this is due to my own reckoning with the arbitrariness of a body that in recent generations would have been perceived as deviant, but that now affords me privilege. Whilst racial and able-bodied privilege are two distinctly separate things, the collection explores power dynamics in both areas. The start of ‘The Interpreter’ refers to the uncomfortable feeling of recognizing privilege that has been arbitrarily placed upon us, in reference to ‘the weight of his hearing status, the dis-ease of his accidental power.’ Again, while the privileges are different, they have similarities particularly in relation to narratives of both disabled people and people from the economically poorer countries being constructed as victims in need of saving. I think the constantly shifting awareness of what constitutes ally-ship and what constitutes saviorism is a fascinating and important discussion to be continually reevaluating, and my aim particularly with Zennor’s journey was to explore this distinction. Zennor is the most overtly socially conscious character, and most explicitly embodies the physicality of partaking in ‘a movement.’ As such the trajectory of her

journey, which runs across three stories, is intended to raise questions about the ethical complexities of taking action and what it means to help.

In between life and death: putting language to grief

‘What The Words Looked like’, the first story in *All That Is In Between*, starts immediately after the death of Daniel, and a question from his daughter Ellie, ‘Can we still talk about him like we always have [...] not like a dead person?’ is the very first line. The immediacy with which the topic of death is addressed, and the way the topic frames the collection as a whole— the last, and title story also deals with death in multiple forms—highlights its reoccurring significance throughout the work. In addition, the nature of the question, how they will *talk* about Daniel now he is dead, is indicative of the consistent connection between grief and language in the collection.

In the film *Dead Good*, funeral celebrant Belinda Chapman states that ‘ritual is converting the spiritual into the physical— you do something physical to demonstrate that emotion or feeling’ giving lighting a candle or taking part in a walk as examples.¹⁹¹ In the last scene of ‘The Teacher’, the act of placing Ina’s bike on the wall is a symbolic act of making the emotions of the story physical and thus giving them validity. The dead exist solely in memory, specifically the memories of *other* people, and thus the desire for those grieving is to somehow make these memories tangible; the physical act of talking and writing are thus also attempts at ‘bringing them to life’. In this way, grief and language have an obvious connection to remembrance — to put into language, especially written language, is to remember. This is also notable because remembrance is often associated with silence: we have a moment’s silence on ‘Remembrance Day’, and in our condolences we repeat the common platitude ‘there are no words.’ It is perhaps more truthful to say that actually there are a lot of words, but both in expressing condolences and in expressing our own grief we are worried that our words are ‘wrong’, partly because talking about the subject at all is taboo. Therefore, one aim in making death and grief a repetitive feature of my creative work was to normalise it; by having the theme resurface over the course of different stories and characters, death ceases to become a shocking ‘event’ and instead the focus shifts onto different approaches to grieving.

¹⁹¹ Belinda Chapman quoted in *Dead Good*, directed by Rehana Rose (Ponder Productions, 2018)

In 'On a Bright Day' I describe how, in his grief, 'Daniel's language became submerged; speaking meant diving down to find each word, and it was exhausting.' In writing this passage, I was reminded of Ludwig Wittgenstein's claim that 'all I know is what I have words for' and this was reiterated when interviewing MS.¹⁹² She talked about her grandma who came from 'a very practical background. Like you're hungry, you're tired? There isn't like, 'I have a sense of no purpose in life and therefore...' and as a result MS wondered 'if she didn't have the words to express how she was feeling.'¹⁹³ Thus when MS commented that 'I wonder sometimes if language helps you to process things,' she was talking separately from the experience of her father who had been rendered literally unable to talk because of motor neurone disease, and instead about not being equipped with the emotional vocabulary to talk about certain emotional experiences.¹⁹⁴

The connection between 'processing' and death is addressed in 'The Teacher' in Ed and Ellie's conversation about her deceased father in which she comments '*Long time ago... but I think continue processing now,*' and Ed notes how 'she mouths the word *processing* while signing *thinking*' causing him to 'wonder about the difference' and ask himself the question 'is either of them a stage of grief?' The reference to 'stages' of grief reinforces that grieving is a process, and is also an indirect reference to Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's well-known identification of 'the five stages of grief'.¹⁹⁵ My intention is to reiterate the importance of acknowledging individuality of experience, which the allocation of a number to an emotion does not necessarily hold space for.

In this regard, 'in between' becomes a space for feelings and thoughts to change, to use language as a means of trying ideas out, not perfection. I wanted my characters wrestling with grief to embody this, and to suggest that it is ok not to have the 'right' words. To some degree then the aim was also to subvert the norm by placing characters in situations where they *do* talk about these experiences. A friend, on reading the scene in 'Ina' in which Alice talks with Ina about her dead mum, felt it was 'unrealistic' because the characters have only known each other a week or so. Whilst I initially sought to edit the passage, on further reflection I left it as it was because my intention is not solely to strive to be realistic but to use fiction as a means of presenting different

¹⁹² Interview 7, see appendix

¹⁹³ Interview 7, see appendix

¹⁹⁴ Interview 7, see appendix

¹⁹⁵ Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, Kubler-Ross Model outlined in *On Death And Dying* (The Macmillan Company, 1969)

ways of behaving. Conversely, whilst this friend was hearing (and so are these two characters), within the D/deaf community talking about such subjects within hours of meeting one another is much more normal. I often have interpreting clients who tell me, unprompted, all that is going on with their lives from suffering with depression to the death of a loved one, which was reiterated with my interview with MD, who told me how:

Deaf people are more blunt, we'll ask questions, maybe talk about salaries, we'll talk about random personal things with people that we've just met and that's completely normal.¹⁹⁶

Similarly, Ed reflects upon these differences in these cultural norms in 'The Teacher':

You think about the way hearing people ask each other how they are, walking past each other on the street, calling back at each other *fine thanks how are you*. You think about how embarrassed you were by your parents when you realized that the way they were with people, honest and open, wasn't the way that they were supposed to be.

Ed is intended to be a considered and thoughtful character, and consciously reflects on the different capabilities of his two languages, English and BSL, in expressing emotion. Linked to the '*fine how are you*' description, is the conversation with Ali who tells Ed that his dad's new interest in astrology had helped him cope with 'everything', meaning the death of his daughter. Ed reflects on the meaning of this word:

Everything: in English, a euphemism for all that is too much to be said, in sign: two hands travelling in opposite directions, uniting at the end of a circle, fingers seeming to hold on to the air between them.

Clearly in BSL it is linguistically possible to use 'everything' as a means of avoiding detailing specific events that may be considered too painful to talk about, or to ask someone how they are without really caring, and this extract is deliberately poetic in the

¹⁹⁶ Interview 8, see appendix

way it describes BSL. However, the purpose in reflecting on the mechanical differences of this particular word is that it is a ubiquitous and non-specific descriptor; 'everything' is not quantifiable in literal terms. As such it serves as a reminder of how language is a system of exchange that is reliant on cultural understanding, and therefore sometimes fails. The significance of the written description of this specific sign is to purposefully suggest an image of unity and space in between the two halves.

This is fitting with the rest of the story as 'The Teacher' has the most explicit references to 'in between' of the collection. Ed notes that the season feels 'stuck somewhere between summer and winter,' that he too 'feel(s) stuck', 'lost somewhere in transit,' he stays away from the staff room of mainly Deaf teaching assistants but doesn't feel connected to the hearing staff, and he is incapable of acting on his feelings for Ellie. Most notably he is unable to process his feelings of grief for Ina because he is unable to find words for a relationship that seems to be in between recognized terms; having been someone who just slept on his sofa a few weeks 'in between' moving countries and thus not 'even (his) friend.'

'The Teacher' is so named because that is the protagonist's job, but it is also about Ed's own learning journey, in which his grief acts as a teacher, and the specific lessons he has learnt from Ina, who he reflects was someone who was 'blind to the boundaries that exist between people.' Therefore, Ed's struggle with grief is in many ways linguistic; he cannot begin to process the emotions he is feeling without understanding the connection that does not seem to exist to him; 'what do you call someone who sleeps on your sofa and doesn't pay any of the bills?' As such the final image of Ina's bike on the wall, which prompts Ed to tell Ellie that it belongs to 'a friend' symbolizes an acceptance of this linguistic incongruence. Whilst 'friend' may not detail their specific relationship, it is a recognized manner of saying that Ina was someone that he cared for, and thus is allowed to grieve for. Thus like 'everything', it represents an acceptance that language is simply a system of exchange and it is by nature unable at times to account for the individualized nature of emotion. Yet simultaneously, language is also a means of relating to and understanding each other, of 'speaking' across the space the between us; however flawed or partial this system may be.

This desire for external validation of unknown emotion is illustrated not just by Ed but is implicit throughout the collection. In 'What The Words Looked Like', Jools' desire to find the right word is explicitly linked to gaining understanding from others;

'she would have liked to find that word— just a singular word— that summed everything up neatly, to be able to show to others, to say; *here— now you understand.*' These nameless yet significant relationships are present throughout the collection: Jools has never had a relationship to her father; her children in turn do not have a relationship with their granddad and yet their ancestry is tied up with the heaviness of his relationship to the Holocaust; Alice doesn't know how to name the grief she feels for her unknown mother; Daniel's friendship with Jake was significant to him even though he wasn't his 'best' friend.

The structural linguist Emile Benveniste writes that, 'There is no concept 'I' that incorporates all the *Is* that are uttered at every moment in the mouths of all speakers, in the sense that there is a concept 'tree' to which all the individual uses of *tree* refer.'¹⁹⁷ If 'I' referenced 'a particular individual' then there would be 'anarchy', and thus we have to accept these limitations in order for the system of language to function; as such we can accept that what grandparent or friend means to one person will not always translate to another.¹⁹⁸

However, I would argue that in losing someone these limitations become accentuated and there is a greater desire to override this linguistic shortfall, often by emphasizing how a lost loved one was a *best* friend or 'we were very close' etc. Whilst my intention was to explore how grief is difficult to find talk about in general, I wanted to specifically make space in my work to represent relationships that are difficult to define. Examples such as Jake explicitly not being Daniel's *best* friend and Ina not actually being a housemate, or for Ed to explicitly worry about not 'comparing' his own grief to Ellie's loss of her father, are intended to reiterate that relationships do not need to be conventional in order to be valid. An 'in between' approach to relationships is not about making comparisons, but arguing that there is space in art to explore many different types of human experience.

Eli's mother's death in the title story is perhaps a less obviously tragic than other, younger deaths in the novel, in that she is old, dying in bed with her adult son by her side, but it is still unusual for her to be described as 'happy' because she is 'finally dying.' By way of explanation, Eli describes how she has been 'convinced that something was killing

¹⁹⁷ Emile Benveniste, 'Subjectivity in Language' in *Identity: A Reader*, Paul du Guy, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman (Sage, 2000), p. 42

¹⁹⁸ Emile Benveniste, 'Subjectivity in Language' in *Identity: A Reader*, Paul du Guy, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman (Sage, 2000), p. 42

her for as long as she came to this country, for as long as something was not, in fact, killing her.’ This unusual attitude was in part inspired by the descriptions of a relative of mine who I never met, but who was always described to me as a hypochondriac. I wanted to explore the possibility that complaining about non-existent conditions was a way of expressing emotion that could not be expressed in other ways; none of my relatives ever talked about their experiences as refugees, and this is not an uncommon experience.

In Arlene Stein’s article ‘Stigma, Passing and Not Speaking about the Holocaust,’ she discusses the various explanations for why this is; one suggestion she gives is that ‘to draw fragments of an experience into a coherent narrative is a potentially devastating process if the experience was so overwhelming as to have been shattering.’¹⁹⁹ Thus the incoherence of the suggestion that Eli’s mother feels some relief in dying is one attempt at portraying this inability to make a ‘coherent narrative’ from an experience as extreme as fleeing genocide. Likewise, I imagined hypochondria as a means of making sense out of the senseless; believing she was dying from non-existent illnesses could have been a way of expressing repressed fear of her life having literally been in danger.

The line of Eli’s that he got away ‘Scot free’ from the Holocaust was taken verbatim from another relative of mine, who had lost both parents to the Nazis at the age of fourteen. This comment has stuck with me for many years because of its seemingly incoherent nature; of course, like the character of Eli, emotionally he had not got away scot-free. Eli’s emotionally guarded conversation style was my attempt at portraying a version of survivor’s guilt. I aimed to illustrate a specific type of closing down of communication attributed to Holocaust survivors who as Stein comments, ‘endured a series of traumatic experiences too horrible to share with others, so they unconsciously repressed these experiences, hiding them from themselves— and from others.’²⁰⁰ This idea is something that I tried to portray specifically in the breakdown in Eli’s relationship with Marie, when he comments that, ‘perhaps if Eli had lived an ordinary life he would ask her to marry him but he hasn’t and he is not looking for a savior’, detailing how ‘he builds a space between them and allows it to get bigger and bigger.’

¹⁹⁹ Arlene Stein, ‘As Far as They Knew I Came from France’: Stigma, Passing, and Not Speaking about the Holocaust.” *Symbolic Interaction*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2009, pp. 44–60. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/si.2009.32.1.44. [Date accessed 24/06/20]

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*

Yet Stein also points out that ‘immediately after the war, evidence shows there were many potential storytellers but few audiences’, continuing by underlining that ‘indescribability and undiscussability bleed into one another: it is difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle the two’.²⁰¹ In discussion with one of my interviewees, KD, he described the Holocaust as a ‘really good example of hidden narratives,’ explaining how ‘there are so many instances of people who obviously have died or have survived and were either too poor or too traumatized to talk about it.’²⁰² Thus Eli’s contemplation that he will never have the chance to ask questions of his mother about their past, and instead wonders whether ‘the rest would be the research of a future generation’ because ‘maybe it would be an easier story for them to tell’, aims to offer a sense of hope that the unraveling of lost stories will continue after the particular individuals have died; ‘his mother’s end’ is ‘not *the* end’.

By using death and grief as a repetitive feature of the collection I aim to highlight the absurdity of an ideology that validates people’s lives based on exterior characteristics; the suggestion is that whatever the range of experiences we experience in life, all of us grieve and all of us die. This is reinforced by references to the body in death, such as Daniel and his family at the end of his life being ‘four bodies on one bed’ and Ina’s assertion that ‘we’re all going to dissolve in this identical pot of ash’.

However, it is undeniable that even in death we are not all made equal, and that there is a concurrent complexity to the outward simplicity that notions of returning to ash suggests. Zennor’s life and death aims to address the issue of inequality in death with the nuance it deserves: firstly in her observations in witnessing the way in which Tesfay is remembered in ‘Why We Are Here’; and secondly in reflecting on her decision to take part in action that has a high probability of mortality in ‘In This Place’. Tesfay’s death is a catalyst for Zennor’s reflections on the importance of language in processing grief; ‘there would be no speeches made about him, no way of putting his life and his death into words’. This reality in particular troubles Zennor and causes her to contemplate the importance of language in the context of grief, again meant to be significant in the context of character who has a certain cynicism about the value of language.

Louis Althusser argues that ‘an individual is always-already a subject, even before he is born,’ evidencing this claim with the quotidian example that ‘everyone knows how

²⁰¹ Ibid

²⁰² Interview 9, see appendix

much and in what way an unborn child is expected [...] it is certain in advance that it will bear its Father's Name, and will therefore have an identity and be irreplaceable.'²⁰³ I wanted to portray the significance of a name, and its ability to convey the humanity of a life lost, particularly as opposed to a statistic, whilst also acknowledging the dearth of richness that is lost when this name, as in Tesfay's case, is *all* that is remembered. Tesfay loses his autonomy along with his individuality when his life is cut short in this way; Zennor's death in contrast, whilst also cut tragically short nevertheless contains a degree of privilege which she is aware of—as a white westerner, her death will be publicized more than the other women she is fighting alongside. In addition, she has autonomy in that she has made the decision to travel to Syria, as opposed to being forced by circumstance to fight. As she declares, whilst 'I am not aiming to die', she is '*willing to, for this cause, for the world that we are building here*' and in her mind 'that is a privilege, to find to something that you are willing to die for.'

Therefore, as a result of the disparity and nuance involved in the circumstance of dying, remembrance too is multi-layered and situational; the construction of 'Remembrance Day' is about remembering certain sets of populations and arguably is precisely about justifying on-going war and thus by default prioritising certain lives over others. As late veteran Harry Leslie Smith wrote in an article entitled, 'This Year I Will Wear My Poppy For The Last Time', 'from now on I will lament their passing in private because my despair is for those who live in this present world', emphasising that he 'will no longer allow my obligation as a veteran to remember those who died in the great wars to be co-opted by current or former politicians'.²⁰⁴

In choosing to view, through language use, certain people as the 'other', those lives have been seen dispensable and thus not equal, even in death. The TV Presenter in *In Paris* who states that, '*we're not talking about American children here, what we're talking about are alien children*,' was based upon the words of a Fox News co-host, Brian Kilmeade who in reference to the children being detained in cages at the American border that 'like it or not, these aren't our kids [...] it's not like he is doing this to the people of Idaho or Texas.'²⁰⁵ Whilst the word 'alien' was not actually used, I chose to use this word

²⁰³ Louis Althusser, 'Ideology Interpellates Individuals as Subjects,' in *Identity: A Reader*, p.34

²⁰⁴ Harry Leslie Smith, 'This year I Will Wear My Poppy for the Last Time,' (*The Guardian*, November 2013) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/08/poppy-last-time-remembrance-harry-leslie-smith> [date accessed 29/06/20]

²⁰⁵ Brian Kilmeade, 'Fox & Friends host: "these aren't our kids...it's not like [Trump] is doing this to people of Idaho or Texas"' (Media Matters for America, June 2018) <https://www.mediamatters.org/fox->

to make a direct connection between Eli's story where '*Alien* was the word written into his papers in the detention center.' Making this direct connection was my own refusal to accept the apparent reasonableness of Kilmeade's assertion, and to show the insidious ways in which people have used language, over eighty years apart, to dehumanize other people. In this way there is a direct link between time and language use. Ellie's out of body experience watching the American president get crowds to chant 'send them back', (this time the verbatim words of Trump at a 2019 rally) reflects her disbelief in the circular nature of time.²⁰⁶

My interest in the impact of playing with time was also behind the decision to place the knowledge of several prominent characters deaths first and 'their' story later in the collection. My aim in asking the reader to invest in Daniel and Ina's journey whilst already knowing they have died is to place importance on quality rather than quantity of time, something that is reinforced with the fact that both characters die young. Equally, the character of Daniel is pivotal in the most prominent characters— Ellie, Jools and Zennor's— lives despite readers knowing he has died within the first line of the novel. Similarly, in the story *Ina*, Alice's comment to Ina that 'life is long' is a dramatic irony to readers who know that Ina will die on this trip, but this is also aimed at challenging linear constructs of time. Ina's life defies convention in many ways; she will die without having had children, a long-term relationship or a career; all hallmark moments in our society's conception of a meaningful life. Ed's comment in *The Teacher* that 'Ina had that thing that people who die young all have; like she was actually in each moment and wanted to be there, noticing each part of it,' illustrates this character's defiance of the expectation to continuously be looking forward.

Similarly, Daniel's critique of the narrative surrounding Jake's death as that of wasted 'potential' is not intended to negate the tragedy of young death, but to embrace the fullness of every human life. Daniel argues against the 'potential' narrative by believing that the things we remember someone for are qualities not quantities; even though, as Daniel concedes 'none of these' (qualities) 'would be remembered in the future.' Conversely, Daniel's reference to remembrance of Jake being 'inevitably filtered through the sentiment reserved for the dead' acknowledges that speaking of those of have

[friends/fox-friends-host-these-arent-our-kids-its-not-trump-doing-people-idaho-or-texas](#) [date accessed 29/06/20]

²⁰⁶ 'Watch Trump rally crowd chants 'send her back' after he criticizes Rep. Illhan Omar' (PBS News Hour, July 2019) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oijKO9vrf0> [date accessed 29/06/20]

died can easily tend towards romanticism. Thus, the idea that ‘*all*’ people who die young have a certain quality is of course meant to be subjective (as is any character’s opinion).

However, by highlighting these specific aspects of death and grief at a young age in my work— such as Ina’s ability to be in the moment and Daniel’s observation that there was ‘a certain luxury in the time and disposition that youth afforded to be able to simply *hang out* together,’ I aim not to trivialize the deep sadness of a life cut short, but to challenge that young death is *only* tragic. However unfair and ‘unnatural’ young death may be, the experience of losing someone at a young age is nevertheless a common occurrence in many people’s lives; in this way there is by default normalcy within the shock. By viewing life as a series of interconnected lives, there is a sense that grief for the individual becomes more bearable, and a peace in the chaos of events unraveling the ways that they are meant to; as Zennor writes, ‘like the way trees know where to send the water, sensing where the earth is dry.’

It strikes me that there is a degree of irony in concluding this thesis about a concept of ‘in between’ with the topic of death. I think this irony resides in the apparent juxtaposition of the ideas that I have been attempting to convey— the many shades of grey, the room for error, uncertainty and for continuous and on-going questioning— with the absoluteness, finality and certainty of death. However, as I have aimed to reiterate throughout both the creative and critical components of my thesis, the most significant aspect ‘in between’ is the idea of interconnectedness, and a shift away from the ideological focus on the individual and towards community. In this way, the topic of death feels unavoidable, both for the fact that it is the ultimate unifying experience, and because in looking at the death head on, we are enabled to look beyond our own death, and to the world we leave for those whose lives that we are irrefutably connected to.

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Ethics form for interviews

Overview
Name of Applicant(s)
Sapphire Allard
Contact Details (Please include your UoK address, email and telephone number)
Sra27@kent.ac.uk 07947976558
Title of Project
In Between Language and Silence: Communicating Through Disability Caused Language Barriers
Lay summary. (Please provide a brief summary of the study)
<p>My Ph.D research is focusing on the relationships (of all natures- working, parental, friendship, romantic) between people where one has a language affecting disability.</p> <p>The end result of the research will take the form of a collection of short stories on the subject and a critical essay focusing on relevant literary texts.</p> <p>The qualitative research that I hope to undertake will consist of: reading of non-fiction and fiction texts and relevant research studies, and my own empirical research.</p> <p>This empirical research will consist of one to one interviews, the majority of which will be face to face, and some that may be conducted over the telephone or Skype where necessary. The interviews will play an integral role in informing my research.</p>
Summary of main issues. (Please summarise the main ethical and design issues arising from the study and explain how you have addressed them)
<p>Design issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The research will be entirely qualitative and not based in quantitative or statistical design. However, as this research is intended to provide an insight into an unusual and important topic, not to prove whether a particular hypothesis is true or false, I feel it does not warrant a quantitative design. • For ethical reasons I will be advertising the research but not contacting people directly, and I will also not be interviewing anybody who I am not entirely confident in their capacity to consent. This does leave the potential for important groups of people within this research question to be left out. I will write up my study with this awareness and explicit admission, and will aim to rectify gaps in my own data collection from a wide range of other available relevant studies. <p>Ethical issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have discussed at length the potential ethical issues and how I have addressed them on pages 3 and 4
What is the principle research question/objective?
The principle research objective of this study is to learn about the varying experiences of people who either a) self-identify as having a language affecting disability or b) have had some form of relationship with a person who has a language affecting disability.
What are the secondary research questions/objectives, if applicable?
My secondary research questions are:

How (if at all) has this experience of using a means of communication that is in some way unlike the majority of people around them, or attempting to communicate with someone who falls into this category a) altered their own sense of identity and belonging b) ideas on communication c) notions of 'intelligence'?	
How has the scientific/intellectual quality of the research been assessed?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Internal review	Details:
<input type="checkbox"/> Independent external review	
<input type="checkbox"/> None	
If none, please provide a scientific/intellectual justification for the study.	
I am undertaking research in this subject, because it is my belief that there are significant and unique insights into communication, and in particular its relation to commonly-held beliefs on intelligence and identity, that the relationships between those with and without language affecting disabilities can offer. Undertaking interviews with people who have had these experiences are an integral part of providing these insights.	
How have the statistical aspects of the research been reviewed (if relevant)?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Internal review	Details:
<input type="checkbox"/> Independent external review	
<input type="checkbox"/> None	
If none, please provide a justification for the sample size (if relevant)	
This research will inform my own writing and add an extra dimension to the theoretical component of my work, but its aim is to give an insight into an unusual and important topic, not to prove whether a particular hypothesis is true or false, and as such it does not warrant a statistical review.	
Please describe the methods of analysis (statistical or other appropriate methods, e.g. for qualitative research) by which the data will be evaluated to meet the study objectives	
I aim to interview between 20 and 30 people over the course of around one year.	
Exactly who I will interview and in particular what disabilities they have a relation to will have some dependence on who comes forward as due to the potentially sensitive nature of the topic, I will not be contacting people directly.	
However I will start to decline offers and/ re-advertise with a disclaimer that I am not looking to any more people with a particular disability i.e. people with dyslexia, if my sample is looking heavily skewed to one disability. The same applies to if I am only hearing from people with an experience of communicating with people with a disability, or only from a very narrow age group or only of one gender. However if this still persists to be the case, I will declare it in the methodology of my research and use the nonetheless valid data that I have collected to enhance a wide range of desk- based research.	
My research methodology will be entirely qualitative and will be combined of: fiction texts, non-fiction texts, other relevant research studies, and the interviews that I will conduct. It is not possible or desirable of me to aim to find or present a conclusive experience of 'all people with a language affecting disability' and thus all data will be used to enrich the findings about some specific insights.	
The research questions will be divided into three themes; identity and belonging, non-verbal and verbal features of communication and concepts of 'intelligence'. I will analyse the collected data through these filters, but it is also important to me to let the interviewee direct me to any particular issue that they feel is relevant to their own experience of this topic. If this issue becomes a reoccurring theme within the interviews then I will also add this as a filter through which I analyse the data.	

Please give a full summary of your design and methodology (it should be clear exactly what will happen to the research participant, how many times and in what order)

I will be conducting one face to face interview with each participant, lasting approximately one hour. There will be 20-30 participants in total. Please see above for further details.

Risks and ethical issues

Please list the principal inclusion and exclusion criteria

The principle inclusion criteria will be individuals who have, or who have had some form of language affecting disability and individuals who have, or who have had some form of relationship with someone who has a language affecting disability.

The principle exclusion criteria will be participants under the age of 16 and those without the capacity to consent to take part in the research.

How long will each research participant be in the study in total, from when they give informed consent until their last contact with the research team?

I will ensure that each participant will have one week to read and consider the informed consent declaration before the interview takes place, and eight weeks to withdraw their consent after the interview has taken place. I will be the only member of the research team and expect each interview to last around one hour.

What are the potential risks and burdens for research participants and how will you minimise them? (Describe any risks and burdens that could occur as a result of participation in the research, such as pain, discomfort, distress, intrusion, inconvenience or changes to lifestyle. Describe what steps would be taken to minimise risks and burdens as far as possible)

The potential risks to research participants and how I will minimise them are listed as follows:

Language barriers and misrepresentation- I will use qualified interpreters when appropriate. All participants will be informed that they are able to read the transcript of the interview if they so wish and request that certain parts, or all, be clarified, edited or deleted up to a month after the interview from the date I provide the transcript.

Mental capacity- Although I plan to interview some participants without the use of standard spoken English, I will not be interviewing anyone without full mental capacity.

Children- Although I will interview some participants about their relationships with their children or children that they have worked with, I will not be interviewing any participants under the age of 16 years old.

Discussing those without mental capacity and/or children- Some participants may be interviewed about their relationships with vulnerable people who do not have mental capacity as well as children. All identifying features of these people will be kept entirely anonymised, and participants will be encouraged to keep to discussing linguistic and philosophical questions surrounding this relationship, and not to divulge sensitive or intimate details about other people.

Clarity around use of information- The interviews will form one component of my Ph.D research and contributing material, alongside literary and theoretical texts and my own experience and imagination. As the end result of my project will be both a collection of stories and a critical essay, it will be necessary to inform participants how and where their information will be used. I plan to only use direct quotes and detailed information from participants as part of the critical essay, where they will be explicitly marked as taken from an interview. All creative work is unavoidably influenced by the writer's experience, and these interviews will form part of my experience. However, my intention is to broaden my knowledge of this topic and to add to the authenticity of my work. This may involve using certain aspects of something I have learnt whilst interviewing a participant to contribute to the authenticity of certain details in a story. It is not

<p>my intention to directly quote any participant in any of my creative work, or to directly use any participant's individual characteristics or life story as the basis of a particular story's plot or character within a story. These intentions will be clearly stated on the consent release form that I will send prior to the scheduled interview, and participants can opt out after reading this.</p>
<p>Please describe what measures you have in place in the event of any unexpected outcomes or adverse effects to participants arising from involvement in the project</p>
<p>I will make it clear that participants are completely within their rights to withdraw from the research up to two months after the interview has taken place. Additionally, if I am made aware that any particular participant has experienced any adverse effects from being included in the study I will withdraw their information from my research at any time up until final completion. I will turn to my supervisor and head of department for advice if I have any serious concern about an unexpected adverse effect on a participant.</p>
<p>Will interviews/questionnaires or group discussions include topics that might be sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting, or is it possible that criminal or other disclosures requiring action could occur during the study?</p>
<p>I will not be discussing anything of a criminal or embarrassing nature. Disability is a potentially sensitive or upsetting topic, but the focus will not be to garner embarrassing material, and the interviews will be sensitively managed</p>
<p>If yes, please describe the procedures in place to deal with these issues</p>
<p>I will not be asking any questions that I consider to be especially sensitive, and will certainly not be deliberately asking any intrusive or embarrassing questions. I have a strong background working with people with a variety of disabilities and feel I have a good awareness of what areas have potential to be upsetting or controversial, and will take care to minimise conversation around these topics. I will not ask anything that is irrelevant or unnecessary to the topic, and if I feel a certain subject is relevant but has the potential to be controversial or upsetting, for example the decision to use cochlear implants, I will place greater emphasis on ensuring that the participant feels comfortable discussing this, and that they are free to choose not to answer. Indeed, I will make it clear both in the information sheet and consent forms (which are attached) and in person before the start of the interview that they are free to choose not to answer any question that I ask them.</p>
<p>What is the potential benefit to research participants?</p>
<p>The potential benefit to research participants is the opportunity to talk in depth about an area of their life that they may not often get the chance to discuss or critically reflect on. Participants who agree to take part in this study will do so because they have an interest in this area and I feel it will be of benefit to them to have their input be highly valued and contribute to a piece of new research.</p>
<p>What are the potential risks to the researchers themselves?</p>
<p>The only researcher will be myself and I do not feel there is a high chance of risk involved in this study. I will not put myself in any circumstance that I feel uncomfortable in, nor travel to any dangerous location. All steps will be taken to avoid the risk of upsetting participants and thus risk damaging my reputation as a researcher.</p>
<p>Will there be any risks to the University? (Consider issues such as reputational risk; research that may give rise to contentious or controversial findings; could the funder be considered controversial or have the potential to cause reputational risk to the University?)</p>
<p>The research is primarily concerned with linguistic and philosophical thought and I do not deem it to be of a contentious or controversial nature. As such I feel there is a very minimal chance of any risk to the university.</p>

Will any intervention or procedure, which would normally be considered a party of routine care, be withheld from the research participants? (If yes, give details and justification). For example, the disturbance of a school child's day or access to their normal educational entitlement and curriculum).

No

Recruitment and informed consent

How and by whom will potential participants, records or samples be identified?

Potential participants will be identified by myself.

I will use a poster at university and a facebook post to advertise.

The facebook post will have comments turned off so that nobody will be able to comment directly on the post and thus be identified by anyone else. Instead I will include my email address and ask participants to contact me only by email.

The text that I intend to use for the Facebook post will be:

Looking for research participants

Hello!

I am looking for research participants for my Ph.D research on communication with a language affecting disability. I am looking for people (adults only) who are interested in being interviewed and either:

- Self identify as having some form of language-affecting disability.

OR

- Do not identify as having a language affecting disability, but have had some form of relationship (this could be personal, incidental or work related) with a person(s) that do have some form language –affecting disability.

n.b the terms 'language-affecting' and 'disability' in this instance are wide ranging and are up to your own interpretation/identification. If you do not identify as having a language affecting disability, but do identify as communicating in a means that is different from the majority, I am still very much interested in hearing from you.

For ethical reasons (privacy and data protection), comments are disabled on this post (and I'm asking people don't send me any sort of message via facebook about this for the same reasons). BUT- if you think you might be interested, or just want to know a bit more, please email me on: sra27@kent.ac.uk and please share this post!

Many thanks

The text that I intend to use for the poster will be the same as above, minus the details specific to facebook, and I have attached a prototype along with this application.

My facebook post will also be accompanied by a short video in BSL so that BSL users are not excluded from full comprehension of the advert.

Will this involve reviewing or screening identifiable personal information of potential participants or any other person? (If 'yes', give details)

Yes, to a certain extent.

When a person emails me showing an interest I will share with them the information sheet about the study and ask that they tell me in a couple of sentences why they would be relevant to the study, but this does not need to be anything deeply personal. Moreover, it will be them contacting me and self-revealing, rather than me approaching people personally and asking them if they may fit my study. I will have access to their email address but no other identifiable personal information. I may need their home address if the interview is conducted at their home, but this information will not be stored anywhere. The email addresses will be stored only in my own email account, which is password protected. I will not write their email address anywhere else.

Has prior consent been obtained or will it be obtained for access to identifiable personal information?
If participants choose to email me then this will be viewed as consent to have their address stored within my own password protected email account. No other identifiable personal information will be taken apart from names, which will be anonymised (and the consent form signed before the interview will state this.)
Will you obtain informed consent from or on behalf of research participants? (If 'yes' please give details. If you are not planning to gain consent, please explain why not).
I will obtain explicit consent from research participants, in what I see as a three- part process. The first stage will be my correspondence via email with the prospective participant who has initiated the contact following seeing my advertisement. In this contact I will send them the information sheet which explains what this study is about, and that their participation will involve a one-off face- to- face interview, and that their anonymised answers may be directly quoted in my Ph.D thesis, or preliminary work. I will send them the consent form for their consideration and tell them to read over it and not to hesitate to ask me any more questions. If they then state that they would be interested in taking part, I will arrange a date and place with them. The second part of the consent process would be at the time of the interview, where I will sit with them prior to the interview and go verbally go through the information sheet and consent form and ask if they need any clarification. If they decide not to go through with the interview at this point, this is also fine, and it will be re-iterated (by going through where it is stated on the consent form) that they do not need to answer any questions they feel uncomfortable with. The third and final part of the consent process will be after the interview, where they will be reminded that they can withdraw their participation for up to eight weeks after the date of the interview, by emailing me, and that no explanation is needed for this withdrawal.
Will you record informed consent in writing? (If 'no', how will it be recorded?)
Yes, the record of consent will be recorded on the consent form attached to this application.
How long will you allow potential participants to decide whether or not to take part?
I will be advertising and conducting interviews over the course of the year (for the entire project, only one interview per participant) or until I feel I have enough data and participants can decide to take part at any point over this time. Once they have taken part in an interview, they will have eight weeks to withdraw their information from the research.
What arrangements have been made for persons who might not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information given in English, or have special communication needs? (e.g. translation, use of interpreters?)
I will discuss any communication needs before arranging a date for the interview, and I will take responsibility for booking interpreters as and when desired or required by the participant. As I have a working level of British Sign Language an interpreter may not always be needed when interviewing deaf participants, but I will always be clear about my level of BSL before the interview and fully respect the wishes of a participant if they would prefer a qualified interpreter.
If no arrangements will be made, explain reasons (e.g. resource constraints)

Confidentiality

In this section personal data means any data relating to a participant who could potentially be identified. It includes pseudonymised data capable of being linked to a participant through a unique code number.

If you will be undertaking any of the following activities at any stage (including in the identification of potential participants) please give details and explain the safeguarding measures you will employ

- Electronic transfer by magnetic or optical media, email or computer networks
- Sharing of personal data outside the EEA
- Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers
- Publication of direct quotations from respondents
- Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals
- Use of audio/visual recording devices
- Storage of personal data on any of the following:
 - Manual files
 - University computers
 - Home or other personal computers
 - Private company computers
 - Laptop computers

How will you ensure the confidentiality of personal data? (e.g. anonymisation or pseudonymisation of data)

All information that could be used to directly identify a participant will be omitted from the final text, and pseudonyms will be used both in the written transcripts and the final text.
The only cases in which I will keep original names are if I interview relevant artists whose work and personal details are already within the public realm.

Who will have access to participants' personal data during the study?

I will be the only person with access participants' personal data –in this case, only their email address. My supervisor will be able to view the transcripts, if necessary, but only after they have been anonymised and they will contain no identifying data.

How long will personal data be stored or accessed after the study has ended? (If longer than 12 months, please justify)

All interview recordings will be taken on a pass-code locked phone, and will be written up as a transcript in which all identifying details are anonymised within one week of the interview. This audio will then be deleted from my phone. Written transcripts will be stored on a passcode locked personal computer. All written transcripts will be deleted once the Ph.D thesis has been submitted and marked. This will be less than twelve months after the study has ended. They will not be deleted before this in case there is any need of clarification.

Please note: as best practice, and as a requirement of many funders, where practical, researchers must develop a data management and sharing plan to enable the data to be made available for re-use, e.g. for secondary research, and so sufficient metadata must be conserved to enable this while maintaining confidentiality commitments and the security of data.

Incentives and payments

Will research participants receive any payments, reimbursement of expenses or any other benefits or incentives for taking part in this research? (If 'yes', please give details)

If an interpreter is required then I will pay, or apply for a research grant to pay, for this expense. This would be paid directly to the interpreter and not the participant.
If the participant chooses to meet in a café I will pay for the cost of a drink.
I will not be able to pay travel expenses, and as such will travel to where is convenient to the participant.

Will individual researchers receive any personal payment over and above normal salary, or any other benefits or incentives, for taking part in this research? (If 'yes', please give details)
No.
Does the Chief Investigator or any other investigator/collaborator have any direct personal involvement (e.g. financial, share holding, personal relationship, etc.) in the organisations sponsoring or funding the research that may give rise to a possible conflict of interest? (If 'yes', please give details)
At present there are no individuals or organisations sponsoring or funding the research. If this changes in the future and I think there could be any possible conflict of interest I will talk to my supervisor and head of department about this for advice.

Publication and dissemination
How do you intend to report and disseminate the results of the study? If you do not plan to report or disseminate the results please give your justification.
At the end of my Ph.D programme, I intend to write a collection of short stories and accompanying critical essay, in which these interviews will form part of my research. In the interim I hope to enter relevant essays and stories to be considered for publication in journals, of which these interviews may also contribute to part of the informing research
Will you inform participants of the results? (Please give details of how you will inform participants or justify if not doing so)
This is not a scientific study and as such there will be no definitive 'results' as such. Participants will be informed when my Ph.D is written up and offered the chance to read it if they wish. Any articles or creative pieces that I publish or talks that I make which draw on my research will also be advertised to the participants.

Management of the research
Other key investigators/collaborators. (Please include all grant co-applicants, protocol authors and other key members of the Chief Investigator's team, including non-doctoral student researchers)
None.
Has this or a similar application been previously rejected by a research Ethics Committee in the UK or another country? (If yes, please give details of rejected application and explain in the summary of main issues how the reasons for the unfavourable opinion have been addressed in this application)
Not to my knowledge.
How long do you expect the study to last?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planned start date: May 2018 • Planned end date: May 2019 • Total duration: 1 year
Where will the research take place?
Predominately in public places such as cafes and libraries within Kent, Sussex and London but may be necessary at times to visit participants homes in different parts of the U.K.

Insurance/indemnity
Does UoK's insurer need to be notified about your project before insurance cover can be provided? <i>The majority of research carried out at UoK is covered automatically by existing policies, however, if your project entails more than usual risk or involves an overseas country in the developing world or where there</i>

is or has recently been conflict, please check with the Insurance Office that cover can be provided. Please give details below.

Children

Do you plan to include any participants who are children under 16? (If no, go to next section)

No

Please specify the potential age range of children under 16 who will be included and give reasons for carrying out the research with this age group

Please describe the arrangements for seeking informed consent from a person with parental responsibility and/or from children able to give consent for themselves

If you intend to provide children under 16 with information about the research and seek their consent or agreement, please outline how this process will vary according to their age and level of understanding

Participants unable to consent for themselves

Do you plan to include any participants who are adults unable to consent for themselves through physical or mental incapacity? (If yes, the research must be reviewed by an NHS REC or SCREC)

Is the research related to the 'impairing condition' that causes the lack of capacity, or to the treatment of those with that condition?

Yes

If 'yes' proceed to next question

No

If 'no' the study should proceed without involving those who do not have the capacity to consent to participation

Could the research be undertaken as effectively with people who do have the capacity to consent to participate?

Yes

If 'yes' then the study should exclude those without the capacity to consent to participation

No

If 'no' then the inclusion of people without capacity in the study can be justified

Is it possible that the capacity of participants could fluctuate during the research? (If yes, the research must be reviewed by an NHS REC or SCREC)

No.

Who inside or outside the research team will decide whether or not the participants have the capacity to give consent? What training/experience will they have to enable them to reach this decision?

I will decide whether participants have the capacity to give consent. I have worked with adults and children with a wide range of disabilities, including a wide range of learning difficulties for eight years and have attended numerous trainings on the qualifiers and definition of capacity. If I have any query as to the ability of a potential participant to give consent I will not undertake the interview.

What will be the criteria for withdrawal of participants?

I will not interview anybody without capacity to consent.

Participants will be aware that they have eight weeks from the date of interview to inform me that they no longer wish to participate. After this date, up until final publication, if I am made aware of any distress caused to anyone because of participation I will remove any quotes of theirs that I may have used.

Declaration

To be signed by the Chief Investigator

- I agree to comply, and will ensure that all researchers involved with the study comply with all relevant legislation, accepted ethical practice, University of Kent policies and appropriate professional ethical guidelines during the conduct of this research project
- If any significant changes are made to the design of the research I will notify the Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics Advisory Group (REAG) and understand that further review may be required before I can proceed to implement the change(s)
- I agree that I will notify the Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics Advisory Group of any unexpected adverse events that may occur during my research
- I agree to notify the Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics Advisory Group of any complaints I receive in connection with this research project

Signed:

Date:

What to do next

Send your completed form, along with all supporting documentation, to the Faculties Support Office: fsoethics@kent.ac.uk

Checklist

Please ensure you have included the following with your application:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| • Participant information sheet | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Consent form | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Covering letter (if relevant) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Any questionnaires/interview schedules/topic guides to be used | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Any approved instruments/measures to be used | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Any advertising material to be used to recruit participants | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Confirmation that project is covered by UoK insurance policies (if necessary) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Interview Transcripts

Interview 1

Would you tell me a bit more about what you're doing with your work?

So I am a support worker. I work on a one to one basis with young adults with severe disabilities, with learning and physical disabilities, you know, a lot of them are in wheelchairs. So er, limited in their physical abilities and a lot of them have learning disabilities as well. Um and I support them on a one to one basis with all aspects of their care from personal care to social activities. The whole range of care.

Is that like in a home or is that out in the community?

It's an organization, it's a charity and they have got like an onsite school and a children's home and then they've also got a series of bungalows. So its started off as just a children's area and then they saw the children leaving the children's home and going off to old peoples homes and things like that so then they created a series of bungalows, which the bit that I work in there's four bungalows and each bungalow has five bedrooms, nearly all of them like ensuites so they've got like their own rooms and their own bathrooms, and nearly all of them have got a communal kitchen and a kind of living area and then on site they've also got a sensory room and music room and some of them go to college there. We've got like a hydrotherapy pool and we do rebound with them so yeah it is an amazing place and its got amazing facilities and stuff.

That sounds super sorted. And so you were mentioning before the different communication methods that you use. So are most of them verbal or..?

Mostly non- verbal. And again ...so we use a whole range of communication. There's one person I support who uses eye gaze technology and uses head switches to... have you seen eye gaze technology?

Someone I work with has cerebral palsy, he uses that.

So yeah so lots of people I support have cerebral palsy. So this one guy I support uses eye gaze and head switches. And other people use makaton, I'm on training to learn more with the makaton and also like picture cards.

And do you find them effective? or, how do you find them as a method of communication?

I find it's different with different people. and it's a conversation we've been having because there's a real push to use Makaton universally, with everyone on site. To use it as a day-to-day thing. And lots of people sort of say well what's the point because some people might have such great sensory loss that there not necessarily picking up anything from sign. And the speech and language therapist is kind of saying that that's not the point because any little thing you don't quite know how far that could be going and its just assisting. So yeah it could still be helping them understand something. But again yeah, sometimes it can be hard to know how much something is helping someone, or how not, especially when they ...when its hard to ask them!

Do you ever find it frustrating when you don't know if someone can understand or not? How does it make you feel if you're not completely sure if someone's getting what you're saying?

Um....yeah I guess its frustrating but in a way that's like ... I would love for them to be able to make choices on their own and say what they want. Because even if they can't communicate it, I'm sure that they have got preferences and things that they want, things that they like or dislike. So yeah its frustrating on that level that like, that I wish they were able to...so one girl that I work with a lot, she...there's a lot of shouting. Often

in a very cheeky way, you know shouting, and then having a giggle because everyone reacts to it that kind of (laughs) reactive behavior. But she's got one hand that's stronger, so for example if you're giving her two options of something to eat, she'll always favour one hand, and if you switch them around she'll pick the same one. So she'll still pick the one closer to her, rather than her choice. But I know that she's got things, which she does prefer. So its that level of I guess not quite knowing how to extend that support of how do I know...get her to communicate what she wants.

Do you ever feel that kind of thing gets lost ...you know every day there's obviously so much you've got to do, and in an ideal world you'd pick up on every little choice but then...

Yeah definitely, definitely. And I mean we're very fortunate in this place that it is one to one care. And I mean this is my first ever care job but I'm very aware that I'm very lucky in my place, that I just have one person I'm looking after in the day and very often it's the same person so you get to know them really well. But yeah definitely there are lots of other things you've got to do, just in the general day. And probably we could try harder as well to be honest. Its very easy to get into a routine of getting someone up or sorting their food out and then ...yeah I've been recently thinking, I don't know if that quite runs across communication lines...but I guess it does, of involving them more in the- *(implied involving them more in the activity of daily routines)*

Yeah totally. I mean, it makes open my eyes to what communication is, if someone can't speak. Because so much of our communication is not verbal anyway isn't it?
Mmm yeah.

Do you think that it's heightened your awareness of other kinds of communication, like your body movements and stuff?

I guess so yeah and there's especially quite a few people that I support that, yeah you have to be a lot more aware to their body language and their facial expressions to kind of decipher how they are and if they need anything from that.

So do you work with any young people that are just physically disabled and don't have any mental difficulties or is it everyone is a mix?

There's one girl, there's one person who that is yeah only physically disabled but I don't know yeah its mostly they have both and yeah it's a whole range of you know huge sensory loss to just a slight learning difficulty.

So you have to approach everyone with an open mind then I guess?

Yeah definitely. The whole range. And for us it can often be...it really makes you think sometimes, lots of people have I don't know, not class, but people get put under brackets of how severe their learning difficulty is and sometime you think like how severe is that actually? Like is it emphasized more because of their lack of communication? so there's one guy, who again I don't support directly but who's around, and he has cerebral palsy and he's moving his limbs all the time and he has very little control over his limbs and his body and his facial expressions to an extent as well. But then you think like how much is he really aware of how much is going on? How much is his understanding? That's something that I've been made really aware of that I might be supporting a lot of people who have a lot more understanding of what we're saying then we're actually aware of but because of their communication we're not actually able to like say that. Like when I did some training once they were talking about this boy who'd they presumed had very little understanding and had kind of put him on toddler level of understanding and they got him some kind of talker and he mastered it in this way, like quicker than anything that they'd ever seen. They had like the speech

therapist, the head teacher and the parents and they were just all in tears because ...yeah the person who was doing my training was like it was incredible, there was suddenly this whole person who was able to start communicating and picking up how to use the talker like incredibly quickly.

Wow. So I guess that's in a way quite scary in a way that someone might all that time be there and people not know ...that their whole personality is kind of waiting in a way?

Definitely yeah. It's quite mad. And amazing that we've got the technology now that can help people communicate on that level, where before they would have gone through their whole life and not been able to let people know that they're there.

So the eye gaze technology, I've seen it around but I haven't actually used it. Have you used it yourself?

Yeah I'm not quite sure of the technological side of it, it just seems quite a magic thing! But I know what he's got is its attached to his wheelchair on one of the, we call them talkers, I'm not sure that's the right word, but on like an ipad type screen, which we put onto his eye gaze and he has a whole range of, the whole alphabet they he can pick from and he focuses on letters, he's got one or two seconds I think it is that he has to look at them for, I think its two seconds and he just looks all over the board and it writes out different words for him and then its also got the kind of predictive text

I think that's what Stephen hawking, isn't that what he used something like that?

Quite possibly yeah.

It is extraordinary.

Yeah absolutely mad.

And you use the PECS as well?

Yeah we do. Again I think that's something that speech and language are desperately trying to put into place. For everyone to use, that everyone has on their chair for everyone to use with like a selection of pictures that they can use with them. And again I think its one of those things that you need to use so regularly for it to have any benefit and because lots of staff don't use it, then it doesn't get put into place as much as it could. Which is a real shame I guess. And then again I think some staff kind of think oh what's the point you don't really see to be getting anything back from the person.

Have you ever had an experience where you have been able to see that it has worked?

Yeah definitely so I was in a session once with a speech therapist and a girl and we were doing a thing where she was having piece of fruit and she was doing a thing where we started with a real simple one, where we had two images and she would touch one of them when she wanted another piece of fruit and she was touching one of them and then we were adding other ones and putting in different places and again she was touching the fruit one when she wanted another one which was brilliant to see. So yeah I definitely have seen it where it works with people and again I think its one of those things where if people used it all day with everything then it would be something that she would pick up but because people don't then she isn't able to use it as much as she could.

And what about sort of emotional aspects as well, if someone's upset then does you use the emotional aspects?

No we don't. I mean I'm sure they are all there but I haven't used them personally.

And do you work with people with autism?

So yeah there's one girl, she doesn't have autism but she has something very similar. But it's some very rare disease, Heller's syndrome? Some incredibly rare thing, but it comes under autism as something similar, but it's regressive, so she would have got to a certain age and then would have started to go back again. But yeah she has very similar things to people with autism.

And you use the pecs with her?

Yeah. So that was the fruit thing with her that she was learning to use.

So is it satisfying for you when you can see that it's worked?

Definitely, yeah.

So what do you think that you've learnt from working with these people, do you think there's any sort of transferable skills?

Um yeah I guess so. I guess a lot of it with patience (laughs) and also valuing my own life, the incredible range of things that I do in my every day life without even thinking of it. That I just take for granted, and that we all do, because it would be a bit too much if we were every single waking moment thinking about every time that we're putting the kettle on. But yeah I think that's a really good awareness to have.

In terms of communication, do you think there's any sort of communication skills that you can use when talking to other people?

Yeah I think so yeah because there's one girl I work with a lot that can be quite challenging, and yes I think definitely communication skills there with her and with the patience and being able to sit with someone and wait until they've got across what they're trying to say. And trying lots of different methods, especially if someone is not able to properly communicate what they want or need to make them feel better, then sort of trying lots of different things to help them with that. And I think that's probably something that in general life, communicating with people that would be quite a skill now I'm thinking about it because of not just giving one option and talking about one thing and that not working and 'that's it', that sort of working on something until that communication is definitely there.

So listening, and giving someone time to say what they actually want to say?

Yep, exactly.

A fairly abstract question perhaps- but if you're working with people that maybe don't talk that much, do you find that there is a lot of silence? Or is a quite a noisy environment that you work in?

I find, well particularly the bungalow I work in, we've got a particularly noisy one (laughing). And the person that I mostly work with, like I say, yeah she's sort of constantly sort of shouting and stuff.

So not so quiet then!

Not so quiet, but then again I have worked with people who aren't able to, if they don't have their communication aide, aren't able to directly talk to you. And at first that's something that I found quite difficult, and I remember when I first started being left on a room on my own, just starting with someone, the person was like I'll just be back in a moment, you know I was just shadowing, and I was just sat there with this lad who was just in bed and I was like what do say what do I do? (Laughing) because I could say 'how are you?' and wouldn't know, because he does this looking up for yes and looking down for no, stuff like that and I didn't know any of that yet, so it was just definitely that thing, but I've definitely picked up ways of just chatting away to people without getting that back. So for example going through someone's personal care routine in the morning and I'll chat away about everything that I'm doing, letting them know, ok I'm doing this next and now we're going to do that, or letting them know what they're going to do with the

day; 'ok we're going to have breakfast now, what do you think you're going to have for breakfast?' you know just keeping up the communication stuff like that. But then also making it ok to be, you know quiet as well.

Do you think it's quite important to fill those silences then? It seems like quite a skill to just keep that narrative up?

I think for me, I would want to, I wouldn't want to not be communicating with someone just because they wouldn't be able to respond back to me. So I'd want to try and keep up the similar level of conversation in a sense than if they could...because some of the people that I work with are able to talk verbally and so yeah I wouldn't want to be completely quiet with someone just because they weren't able to give that back to me.

Yeah, interesting. And I guess it feels important not to just sit there in silence.

Yeah, yeah. And I guess it does make me wonder as well, how much of that is from me not wanting to...you know the kind of fear of silence thing, and how much of that is for them.

Do you think maybe it's a learnt behavior as well? Do you copy what other staff are doing when you were first learning?

Mmm probably yep.

And in terms of your own communication skills, in terms of your ability to articulate yourself well...ideas on social status/intelligence and ability to speak well?

Yeah definitely and it gives people a platform doesn't it? A more accessible platform if you are able to articulate yourself well. And for me on a personal level, it's something that's really important, that I think about a lot- am I getting myself across how I want to? Is what I'm communicating being received in the way that I'm putting it out if that makes sense?

I think yeah and it makes me think again of that thing of someone being presumed that they have very little understanding just because they're not able to communicate and then people finding out that they do have a lot...yeah I definitely agree that our automatic response is probably to think that if someone isn't able to communicate, that they don't have something to say. Which yeah definitely isn't the case very often. And it makes me feel just very not worried, that isn't the right word, but it just makes me think, just 'ohhh' how much are the people I support and other people out there, right there and not able to communicate that they are. And technology, people are more and more able to get their words across ...

What if someone isn't able to articulate what he or she is thinking but also doesn't necessarily have the mental capacity to think that much...I mean, who are they? They can still have a personality?

Yes, an incredibly strong personality. And I guess that's it isn't it, the whole, like old perception casting people as stupid and dimwitted, that whole vocabulary that used to be used, that is used less now but I guess still is as well and that having the intelligence being put on math's and spelling and things like that doesn't necessarily mean-like someone can still have quite an acute emotional intelligence or social intelligence.

There's a girl I work with a lot who is, you know, she's got quite severe learning difficulties and physical difficulties and everything like that and she'll do something like- so the girl who's got something that's similar to autism, who doesn't really like being in the same room as everyone else, will be eating her food and the girl I'm supporting will suddenly kick up a HUGE ruckus, shouting, rocking her chair about and this other girl who's been quietly eating her food, rushes out the room shouting . And this other girl

will just sit in her chair giggling away like 'hehehe' cos (laughing) she knows, you know she's taking great pleasure in the fact that she's wound someone up, and that takes quite a lot of understanding of the scenario doesn't it?

And again, same girl, someone new was working with her and doing some personal care, and I could hear her just shouting and shouting, and I went in there and said quite firmly 'what are you doing, there's nothing wrong' in quite an abrupt way, and she stopped and kind of looked at me in a very surprised way and then I left the room and she was fine for the rest of it and it was that kind of 'oh there's someone new, how much can I play with this' and knowing that as well.

Does it make you want to carry on doing this job? Or have you thought much about what you want to do after this?

I wouldn't want to stay specifically just in a care job, in terms of, you can go into management and then it just stops there, I definitely would want to do more, but the whole communication side of it is what really fascinates me and when we have sessions from the speech therapist and the girl who has the autism type thing is doing when you mirror what they're doing?

Oh intensive interaction?

Yeah, so doing intensive interaction with her and getting so much back from her when you do that, real connection and eye contact and stuff like that and that really makes me want to continue working with people and supporting people and I don't know quite how I would do that and I'm not quite motivated enough to specialize in one area, I feel like I'm just generally interested in every sense but yeah I feel like its definitely an area that I want to stick around in.

Intensive interaction is interesting because its kind of instinctive in a way don't you think?

Yeah definitely, because a lot of us do...but when I started I thought oh is it bad to almost mimic the sounds someone makes? Because often we see that as kind of taking the mic but lots of them absolutely love it. One girl all she says is 'hiya', so you just say hiya back to her 'hiya', 'hiya'! Yeah a very instinctive thing, and I love it, you get so much back from it.

I find that really interesting because I had that thought as well that oh its mimicking them but when you actually learn what its about, its like no its validating what they're saying

Yeah exactly and communicating on their level, rather than trying to bring them to your thing, like ok this is how you're communicating now, I'm going to join you, rather than trying to figure out my side of it.

Interview 2

Would you consider yourself to have any sort of disability?

No.

You're not dyslexic or anything?

No.

And why did you start learning sign language?

I think the little person always fascinated me in my TV. And then when I joined Virgin, during our service training we had like one day where we got taught how to look after disabled passengers and we did a teeny bit of sign language that day. It was like 'tea' and 'coffee' and the alphabet and they offered a sign language course and so I was like ooh yeah maybe I'll sign up for that but when I actually looked into doing it, it was once class a month and I just thought I'm never going to remember everything so I then asked for some unpaid leave to go and do an intensive course over six weeks and they wouldn't give it to me even though they were laying people off at the time. Which seemed mad to me, so I left.

What you left because of that, so that you could learn sign language?

No, it was one of many reasons. But yeah and then we were engaged then, and we did all the wedding stuff and went and did all our season in Switzerland and then when we got back from that I was like right 'I'm joining a class', so that's when it started.

I never knew that it was because of Virgin, that's so cool. That's quite good that at least they did something.

Really good.

Do you think, did people actually use it then?

Yeah, I think if they knew they were going to have deaf passengers then they would try and get crew on that could sign a bit.

So I know some peoples idea of the deaf community is just deaf people, and others it includes interpreters and CODAs and stuff. Would you consider yourself to be part of the deaf community?

No, I don't think so.

Do you think you could ever become a part of it?

Ah, good question. Yeah I guess so. I think there have been times where I've been more a part of it. yeah I don't think its just deaf people. I think its just sort of spending more time hanging out with them and doing whatever they're doing.

What about if you were in a relationship with someone that was deaf?

Depends on the deaf person. Are they part of the deaf community?

So what do you think makes someone part of the deaf community?

I don't know, it's almost like a nationality in some respects isn't it? Like some people move to another country and only hang out with people from where they're from. And some people get really involved in life wherever they are. Like some deaf people only hang out with other deaf people and are quite snobbish about hearing people or deaf people that talk too much. Or like (name of deaf friend) got quite fed up with deaf people and didn't want to hang out with other deaf people for a while, because it was so gossipy and judgey.

Yeah he seemed to only want hearing girlfriends didn't he?

Yeah. So I think it's a choice even deaf people are making, whether they're part of that community or not.

So you think you can not be in it, even if you are deaf?

Yeah.

So you think its something you can actively decide to be in?

Yeah.

What about if your deaf and don't sign, do you think you can still be part of the deaf community?

Depends on your deaf community and how welcoming they are. I think yeah, if you wanted to be, obviously I think it helps..(if you have bsl) I think you would absorb some signing. yeah there's a deaf guy here who's very disparaging of people who don't sign, or who get cochlear implants 'ooh no I wouldn't stay friends with someone who got a cochlear'.

Really? Someone actually said that? Why do you think somebody would feel like that?

Oh because it's like 'you don't want to be deaf anymore' so 'why would I want to be friends with someone like that'.

It must be so hard though, especially for deaf children. Because deaf children get so little support at school as it is, and then its like when they have a cochlear implant apparently teachers think they don't need any help at all, because they don't think they're deaf anymore.

All of the girls that I support at the moment have cochlear implants, and maybe two of them can hear, if you're very close to them but they still need a signer.

Also you must have to re-learn to hear anyway?

Yeah, did you see that programme, 'The School Of Life and Deaf'? So one of the boys in that gets implants and they look at his journey with the speech and language therapist and stuff and he really struggles with it. And I went to a deaf event in Bristol that was run by 'See Hear' and there were a few people from that programme there, and they showed the programme and then did interviews afterwards and he doesn't wear his implants at the moment. It just involved a *lot* of hard work for a very small amount...I think he'd had dreams of suddenly being able to talk much better and hear much better and it just wasn't really like that.

There's those videos that go viral of them being turned on and suddenly people being able to hear...I'm not sure what help they are...

No...they make a big difference to some people, like particularly babies. But for older children or adults, you're really having to work hard aren't you?

So you know there's all these petitions now asking for BSL to be learnt in school, do you think that would be a good idea?

I think it would be an amazing idea, I think it's madness that we don't do it already. I think it would be good for everyone, even hearing people. Like how many times have you been on the other side of the room and been trying to communicate something to somebody? Or through a window? Like I saw my friend on the bus the other day; I was on the bus, she was on the street and we had a chat through the window, and I was like oh if only everyone could do that rather than (mouthing loudly) CALL ME LATER!

Especially in loud places, I hate shouting, I always get a sore throat.

Yeah and sore ears from somebody yelling in your ears. Anyway, those are obviously not the key reasons for thinking it's a good idea...I think if you could integrate a large group of people into society much more effectively, why would you not do that? And they live in your own country, it's a language in your own country and you'd rather teach French and Spanish?

Well you could teach both anyway, kids learn quickly...

Yeah. And its fun! I definitely think it helps you open up your mind about different ways to communicate, so I just think its good for your brain anyway. And I don't know why

they wouldn't want to do it, they're just wankers really aren't they? I couldn't believe it when they talked about it in parliament and then were like, yeah but no! Basically they were just like 'we think it's a lovely idea' but we're not going to do it.

Do you think there's any element of some deaf people wanting sign language to be just their language though? Like thinking that maybe the culture would be lost by hearing people learning it?

I'm sure it exists but I think it's very rare.

You haven't found that?

No. I'm sure I've heard it discussed as an idea, but very rarely have I found anyone to be anything less than very encouraging to a hearing person learning sign language. and yeah I think it encourages a continuation of the culture really because you can't really learn to sign without learning about deaf culture and the deaf community so its bringing more awareness to that because most people have no idea about deafness at all do they? Just not even the faintest clue other than the fact that you cannot hear, they have no idea about what a deaf person's life might be like, or that there even is a deaf culture.

But what about people who learn sign language online? Because you could in theory just keep learning online and thinking you know about deaf culture.

I think there's only so far you can go with that to be honest. Like you can do an online level six, there's a lady that offers that but its with a real human, you just Skype her rather than go to her classes so its not like watching videos and stuff. But yeah even for level three you have to prove that you have some involvement with the deaf community because they want you to have that knowledge and that involvement because you cant really evolve your signing if you don't. yeah I don't think it can be a bad thing for lots of people to learn it, I think it can only be a good thing. And also I know what people are saying about more people learning signing and less people needing it, but like what we were saying, cochlear implants aren't magical and even if you try and 'fix' the people who are born deaf, how many people do you know what weren't born deaf? (name of our friend) had meningitis didn't he? He wasn't born deaf, he went deaf. One of my teachers, she went deaf from a virus when she was a baby. Like half the people I know for sure went deaf. I could get hit by a car tomorrow and get some sort of brain damage that made me deaf, they cant fix that.

But another thing similar to that is, this idea of cultural appropriation. For example sign language being this new cool thing that's in pop videos- I see that and think, that's good it looks cool, maybe more people will want to learn, but I know there are some deaf people that feel that's cultural appropriation.

I think that's a very small number of people who feel like that.

It was on see hear, a whole programme about it.

Was it? and what did they say?

Well what they were saying actually I think is that a lot of the signers weren't actually very good at it, so it was kind of making a mockery of like 'look at this pretty thing' and they like, no this is our language.

Yeah, well that's a fair point. Are they talking about that video where that one guy is signing the whole thing?

I don't know, there's a lot of them.

I think he was CODA..

Oh yeah, he was for Ed sheeran and they were saying he was ok because he was actually good at it because he was CODA.

Interesting. Because he had absolutely no mouth pattern, did you notice? Very odd.

But that seemed like a stylistic thing that he'd been told to do

But you would never sign like that. I think that's not cultural appropriation, I think that's just people who aren't a high enough level signing things that they shouldn't be signing. which happens everywhere, its not just pop music, its all over the shop isn't it?

Nelson Mandela's funeral remember?

Oh god that was awful.

Have you seen any films or read any books that have any deaf characters in?

Yes, so recentlyI didn't see the shape of water, but she wasn't deaf was she?

Wonderstruck, its sort of set in two different time periods in new york, 1920s and 1970s and in the 1920s one there's a deaf child and then in the 1970s one there's a deafened child so he can talk, because he gets hit by lightning and goes deaf. And its sort of the way the stories are interwoven. But the girl who plays the deaf girl is a deaf actress and she's the same girl that's in that horror film, the quiet place or something? I don't watch horror films. I really loved wonderstruck, it was ASL so I didn't understand much of the signing, but it was very interesting because they address her education and the way her mum treats her, her parents treat her, just sort of shouting, like that's going to help her hear. And leaving her in the care of her teacher. And another film, the silent child. so I was having a discussion with one of my teachers about it (the silent child) and she was saying that some of the deaf community don't like it. it was one of those films that I saw that I was like, how can you not like it? how could you not like something that is raising awareness and making a very valid point- I saw lots of people on Facebook who said that is entirely my experience of education. and I feel like d's experience was very similar to that, and g's before he got pulled out of mainstream, that's how he describes it. but they're like, why is no one else in it deaf? Why are none of the producers or directors deaf? Get more deaf people involved in this, so for them its not good enough and like 'who is this girl', is it just popular because she's famous (the director)

Well I'm sure it helped get it made but-

Yeah that's what I said. I compared it to the new era estate in London that Russel brand got involved with, all of these people who lived their were campaigning and being ignored and then Russel Brand got involved and all of a sudden it was all over the television, all over the news, everyone was signing petitions and everyone got to stay because suddenly everyone gave a shit, and some people were like 'oh who's he to get up on his high horse when he lives in a massive house and he's rich'. And its like well yeah that may be, but these people still have their homes because he decided to give a shit so you could maybe shut up. So I can see what their point is, like do better, but maybe put that forward in a more encouraging fashion.

Well the main actress was deaf, the director was a CODA and her parents (the actress) were deaf too so I'm sure they gave input too...

Only her dad I think and he went deaf

No, both of them. because did you see that advert for Iceland? It was like deaf awareness week and for one week they had an advert with her and her actual mum and they're both deaf. Anyway, I thought you were going to say something like it was too pitying, or too much of a sad story or something..

No, I do think that some people probably feel like that. But I feel like its sort of drawn from very valid and relevant statistics, right? It's not like a made up story. And also you know people not getting any real support for their deaf children or not bothering to learn to sign is just nuts.

What do you think about in general about the representation of deaf and disabled people in the media?

I've never seen anyone pretending to be deaf, I've only ever seen deaf people played by deaf people.

Oh really? That's good. In that Babel film, is she actually deaf?

I didn't see it.

But the shape of water, there was a lot of uproar about her because she signs but she's not deaf

Hm well that's jolly mean isn't it. 'we only have this one way that you can communicate if you are deaf'.

No, as in they should have got a deaf actress to play her.

But she's not playing a deaf person is she

No but she's playing a signing person, so they should have got a signing person...as in they could have given that role to a deaf actress

Yeah...yeah I can see that. It's a valid point isn't it, foreign people played by not foreign people, like Scarlet Johansson playing that woman in *ghost in the shell* who's supposed to be what, Japanese?

Yeah that is weird. Do you think there is any truth in the idea that when there is a disabled character in a film or story there often there to represent something-like a blind person being 'I was blind but now I see' like some sort of metaphor imbued in the character rather than just being a character who happens to be blind?

Yeah, I think that's probably the case with all minorities isn't it, like a token black person, or a token woman on a talk show.

Do you think that affects reality?

It probably affects people who don't have any knowledge of that minority. It probably affects the way they think of them. cos like I know a guy in a wheelchair who does 'parachair' who's like a acrobat in the cheerleading team, he's amazing, and he posted an article yesterday online, and it was about how Sainsbury's had been colluding with the department for work and pensions, or whoever it is that deals with benefits, basically using Sainsbury's CCTV footage to try and 'catch out fake disabled people'

What the fuck!

Yeah! And they're also trying to use theme park footage to be like 'are you secretly having a nice time? You're not really disabled!' and it was talking about how over however many years people with disabilities have just been demonized by the government and have changed the view to just being scroungers, staying at home and being lazy and not people who are capable of making a valid contribution to society and just maybe need a bit of extra help, like they could literally be anyone of us, but instead they're some 'other' and that's been crafted have crafted this view of disabled people, and unless your paying attention, its easy to absorb those kinds of views that are being floated about by our nasty government.

Yeah, if you read the newspapers and it says those things are true, then it's quite hard to think no that's wrong

Exactly and a lot of people just think its in the newspaper so it must be true, it must be true because I read it in the daily mail.

Well yeah and the daily mail can actually lie about statistics as well, like that thing about Muslims '100% are terrorists' or whatever they said

And then they just print some tiny retraction the next day. I think, if the rule was that if you lie that you have to print your retraction on the same page as your original story in

the same size font they'd be a bit more careful wouldn't they? If they then had to waste their whole front page saying 'sorry we lied about that'.

Yeah... so what do you think about better representation of disabled people, what do you think the impact would be?

It would normalize it, because they're viewed as other and they're just people. It's the same as people who live in a village where they are no non-white people and have never met an immigrant and have all their angry views about immigrants. And then they meet one and they're like oh this one is very lovely, but the others are awful.

Or 'I do have black friends so I'm not racist but most black people...'

Yeah! And so I think the more that they're in the media being normal, living their normal lives and not just a representative of all deaf people or whatever.

Yeah I think I need to be careful in my own writing...its quite easy to fall into that, of making them symbolize something, like deaf people symbolize silence

So did you ever see that campaign 'end the awkward' that was about communicating with disabled people?

I think that rings a bell.

Have you or do you ever feel awkward about having a conversation with someone that's deaf?

Yeah ...well I think I'm inclined to awkwardness anyway. Personally I find it really hard when I feel I'm not communicating effectively, I hate it. So I'm more inclined to avoid the situation.

So like avoid speaking to someone?

Yeah.

If you didn't know how to say something in particular ?

Yeah. I'm better than I used to be, but I still have that thing of 'just avoid it and then everything will be fine'. It's very interesting seeing hearing people who don't sign interacting with deaf people, because they take all different approaches. Have you noticed this? Like some of them just talk at them like they can hear, like 'well this is how I communicate so I'm going to just carry on talking to you!' and others become very visual, like one of my friends doesn't sign but he's very ...animated and he just sort of became more so, and it did make him easier to understand I think. I found that campaign quite interesting because you could say 'speak to a person in a wheelchair like this' but all people in a wheelchair aren't the same and they don't all have the same opinion about how they want to be spoken to and whether they want to be asked whether they're in a wheelchair or not so that's a bit of an odd one anyway isn't it?

Yeah...I guess maybe its just acknowledging that it can be a thing but get over it

Yeah I think that is really good, to say people can feel like this but don't let it stop you from being a nice person or interacting with someone slightly different to you.

So you know when you were saying about avoiding the situation, would that be avoiding bringing up a particular topic if you don't know how to sign it, or would that be just avoiding going to where deaf people were if you didn't feel confident in your sign that day?

Both.

But even now or just in the past?

Now too probably, if I was feeling particularly rubbish at signing that day. Like we went to Bristol recently, me and three girls from my course, so we're all doing level six, and it was a see hear weekend where they were screening all sorts of movies and panel interviews and stuff and we were sitting at the café and the table next to us were deaf people, and the other girls were just merrily signing away to these deaf strangers and I

was just oh I wont get involved in this, just for this fear of what if I don't understand them? which is mad, because they're just people, you could just say that I didn't understand. But I think it's just always at the back of my head that I'm not going to be quite good enough.

Do you think that's a fear of being called out of 'oh you're crap at signing' or is it on their behalf that you think you'll offend them if you cant understand what they're saying?

I don't think I'm going to offend someone, I just don't like that, you know when you can only ask so many times 'can you say that again' 'oh one more time?' oh and again....

I know and fingerspelling is the worst for that, I just can't get it in my head. But also the thing is that you can always get someone to write something down if you really cant get it into your head.

Yeah so I don't do it as much as I used to but I am inclined to just avoid situations that I find difficult rather than embrace them which is ridiculous because that's the only way I will improve but...

And also presumably a deaf person would rather be engaged with badly than not at all

Definitely yeah.

Do you think in sign language that you can express in sign that you cant express speaking?

Yes, yes.

And what about the other way around?

I feel like English has a richer vocabulary and I love that, I love words and I find that difficult sometimes because I ask how would you sign this and there just oh you have to just work you're way around it don't you, approach it from a different direction, and it stops being about words but yeah I definitely think you can express concepts and feelings, because its visual I think you can imbue a lot more feeling into it. but also English people aren't inclined to be very emotional in their communication anyway, it's just what we're like I think, so its quite different in that respect.

I guess linguistically its very different because in English you have a lot more synonyms but in BSL the difference between 'sad' and 'devastated' for example its just a lot more facial expression, so it is like a whole different way of thinking

Yeah, yeah.

It is impossible in sign to have a blank face on isn't it?

Yeah. Well, you're not doing it properly if you do.

so obviously in England we have the class system and you can pinpoint someone straight away from their accent, which you don't have in bsl which is interesting in a way...but do you think there are judgments made about deaf people being un-intelligent?

Yeah I'm sure that's how they're perceived. Lots of deaf people are treated like they're stupid aren't they?

Well there is the whole 'deaf and dumb' thing...

Yes but that isn't what the dumb meant.

Dumb meant that you couldn't speak, but there was an idea about being unable to speak being unable to rationalize

Yeah, but then that whole dumb thing, its like children will turn anything they hear into an insult wont they? Like spastic used to just mean what, cerebral palsy? And then we couldn't use that word anymore because it came to mean 'you're an idiot'.

If you see (our deaf friend) and he writes something to you and obviously his English isn't very good, what does it make you think about him?

It makes me think that he was done an enormous disservice by whoever was educating him. it's a tricky one because I think obviously you can't assume, well it's madness to assume, that because someone can't hear that they're an idiot but you also can't ignore the fact that deaf education has been so appalling that a lot of people haven't been well educated so they don't necessarily have good English or they can't write a proper sentence or spell things.

Or they might have missed out of huge chunks of history or geography or whatever subject because they couldn't hear it

Exactly! Or because they weren't being taught that, they were being taught how to make sounds with their mouth, because that's obviously much more important, baffling...yeah so that's not intelligence is it? that's just someone not bothering to teach them the right things growing up, it's not inherent intelligence.

So what is intelligence? Is it something innate or is it how much education you've had?

I don't know. Do you know the answer?

No!

So I think that in the same way that some people think that black people are not as clever, they think deaf people are not clever but no, I think they are just the same as everybody else, except that a lot of them have been really badly educated.

Well obviously the black people thing is ridiculous because there's nothing about being black that affects your ability to learn. But also maybe we have such a streamlined version of what intelligence is, and maybe some people's intelligence is just different?

Yeah like people with autism, some people have incredible abilities, they're just not the same as ours, or people with dyslexia it doesn't meanlike I am very judgey about spelling and grammar and I know I shouldn't be because I know that just because some people have brains that literally don't allow them to work that stuff out properly, doesn't make them any less intelligent, it's just how their brains work.

It doesn't even mean that you can't use language, you can be a great storyteller and be dyslexic

Exactly, it's just writing stuff down is difficult isn't it, and reading.

I wonder why we have such a fascination with writing and reading.

I don't know, that feels very British doesn't it? 'reading, writing and arithmetic'

In what way?

It just feels like another sort of judgey factor, like a class thing, do you have good grammar, and the way you talk, the language you use, it's all used to judge whether you're intelligent.

Do you have any opinions on silence?

Science?

Lol no, *silence*. that would be a curveball wouldn't it 'what's your opinion on DNA?' no silence, and in relation to learning sign language, because my perception of it changed a lot since learning to sign and I find sometimes I really notice that transition of going from noisy world to signing world, a bit like stepping into a vacuum.

I don't think of it as silence because for me a complete lack of sound, and when I'm with a deaf person it's rarely in a completely silent place. But I do feel like that I'm in a bit of a

bubble which I like, you're in your own little communication bubble and I generally assume that nobody else can understand what we're saying, which I like.

You don't ever feel embarrassed that people are going to look at you?

No, no I think signing is beautiful I love it and that's one of the things I loved about it before I started learning it because its so fascinating and animated to look at and there are some signers particularly that are just gorgeous to watch, g particularly or (name of deaf friend whose an actress) she's at the globe at the moment! I feel like you could watch her for hours even if you have no idea what she's saying because it's just so beautiful to watch . no I've never felt embarrassed by it, which is odd, because I am prone to feeling embarrassed about all sorts of things, but it just feels like a means of communicating to someone. Which is also odd because if it was me trying to speak French for example, I probably would feel embarrassed.

About the French person or the people around you?

About MY French.

Interview 3

Do you consider yourself to have a disability of any sort?

No I don't.

And if I say 'language affecting disability' does anything come to mind?

Well I mean the context that I know you wanted to talk to me as having worked as physiotherapist, or training as a physiotherapist with people who have had brain injuries, so that's where my mind goes when you say that, but even within that there's quite a lot of range of language affecting disabilities so that could be something called aphasia- I mean you probably know all these terms – but aphasia and the kind of difficulty actually linking the thought to being able to express it.

I've heard of it but I actually don't know much about it

Yeah you kind of hear about aphasia or dysphasiapeople know the word but they just can't actually say it, its strange kind of watch someone do it. And if you give someone the word there'll be 'yes! That's the word' but they just cant link- the thought is there but they just cant transmit the thought to act on actually saying it. And sometimes people will be really close, and you can tell their close, but they just can't find it. That's often associated with brain injuries, people with strokes often have that. There's something called dysarthria which is actually a physical affecting of the muscles around the mouth which affects how you're able to say things so you'd be perfectly capable of having the thought and transmitting the thought but you actually physically struggle to say the word. For instance another guy I was working with, I hear people talk about locked in syndrome, I don't know if this is actually relevant to it, but he was completely fine cognitively he just couldn't actually vocalize.

Was he completely paralyzed?

He wasn't completely, but he was very high spasticity , so he had high tone for his muscles and so had very little control over his muscles and was very weak.

Is this placement the first time you've come across these sorts of disabilities?

Umm I feel like it can't be. Actually I've worked with someone with Asperger's syndrome and I feel like that could also be seen as language affecting disability but it's the first time I've worked with a brain injury group. And definitely the most experience I've had having to really think about how I use language and about communication within the job that I've been doing.

And do you get any specific training on how to do this or is it more learning on the job?

Id say its more learning on the job. Because I've been doing a work placement I have constant feedback and discussion who are assigned my educators but id say really what I've learnt is just from doing it

Because you get to watch other people as well?

Yes which is really helpful. It's helpful to have a go at trying to communicate and then watch someone else do it and kind of have that constant process

Is it actual techniques or is it certain things that you use like books or...?

I think a whole range. For instance this guy who's had an accident and has a brain injury from this, he could use an ipad , he had motion in his middle finger on his right hand side so he could click and so he could use an ipad to communicate or he could use this see through alphabet chart- I don't know if you've seen those- you have to meet your eye through the letter and so you can spell out words.

It's not the blinking one?

It's not blinking no. and yeah so it just takes a bit of time learning how to use that and I got a lot faster at it but you could see people who had been doing it for a while with him who could use it really quickly

And had he got really quick with it?

Yes and he started to play around with it a bit more. (laughing) You know he'd start messing about with it.

With spelling or?

With spellings and just kind of , sometimes he just almost just send you off the chart just to mess with format –

It must get so boring after a while

Yeah, I think with him the big thing was just boredom because there was only a few people who could communicate with him effectively I feel and so he often just got left alone and was bored.

Do you think people avoided him because they didn't know how to use the technique?

Yeah I think that's definitely part of it. I felt uneasy about the prospect of how to communicate with him and so it was useful having a job where I had to do it, I had to learn how to do it, because I felt like 'I don't know where to start' with someone who couldn't vocalize and using this system that I felt like I didn't know how to use.

So do you need to be able to imagine all the letters individually in your hand and then spell it out individually in your head?

No you just spell as you go so it would be as we got a word I just keep verbally checking with him is this what you meant? Or say where we were up to with the sentence so far.

That must take a long time?

Yeah it does take time and you can get quite quick at it as well. People who are really good at it could actually use it pretty quickly

You say it was messing about with it, so do you think you could get to the point where you could use language play with it?

Yeah definitely.

Or just how so much of language is so much not just is what actually is said but intonation and body language and stuff. Do you think you can still get that?

Yeah definitely I mean a lot is conveyed through just even the way he was like looking , you can convey a lot through facial expression, even when your facial muscles are affected by your disability. I think there is so much scope to play with things. I think I just learnt that it was a lot of social interactions that I took for granted ..the way people communicate. I don't know if I can describe it that well. So...for instance , he would make a lot of noise and I think initially that felt like there was something wrong , and I learnt quite quickly that this wasn't a sign at all that things were wrong he just needed to make sounds and I don't know if I really understood why. But if you checked with him he'd be like 'no I'm fine' and so just learning ...I feel like each person you need to learn what signs to pick up on and what signs not to pick up on, if you know what I mean?

You just have to get accustomed to them I guess? And then I guess you start noticing things that other people don't notice.

Yeah definitely.

I remember that from learning sign language from a woman that had some sort of palsy in her face which meant she had no movement and I remember thinking on the first day how I am going to learn sign from someone with no facial expression? But then literally so soon I just completely forgot about it because somehow she just had this way of being expressive without using her face.

Yeah you'll just use whatever you can, people just adapt and communicate how they need to.

So do you feel like you can have as valid or intimate a relationship with someone who doesn't use spoken language?

Yeah I think so. I think its possible. Hmm well I don't know, it's interesting. I guess one thing that seems really important, the patient group I was seeing was...for me it's a much bigger challenge if you have a brain injury that affects your cognition than affects how you communicate. So initially you might think, I'd think, it was easier to build a relationship with the patients who were affected more physically even if on the face of it, it might look more serious. So you know this guy who couldn't speak, other people who were very, very severely paralyzed or had facial weakness etc. that might initially seem a bigger challenger, but I think that actually in terms of trying to build a relationship its more difficult with patients whose cognition is affected in various ways.

Why do you think that is?

Because its difficult to...I don't know if someone is not engaged in the same way that...its difficult to answer I don't know. If someone is not able to engage with the same ideas or say have extreme memory loss or kind of gets very focused in on things ...its not so mutualistic I guess.

It doesn't feel as equal or...?

Yeah its like you cant. If they are really kind of stuck in one place it feels difficult to get some sort of mutualistic exchange I guess. So that can feel like a challenge if the relationship feels very one-way

Do you feel like you kind of naturally have more power? I mean I guess you have more power anyway in your situation because you're the professional there. But do you feel aware of a power dynamic in anyway?

Yeah definitely. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, you have a huge amount of power in that situation.

More than if they just had a physical disability?

I don't know. I think just in all those relationships, like if someone doesn't have the power to just call you or move themselves that's a big thing to just leave them. you have the power to just walk away and they can't do anything about it, that's a really big deal. And if someone finds it very difficult to communicate an idea, then its very easy for them to just not get asked. At my work there's a big thing about goal setting, and trying to work out with patients what their goals are and how they want their rehab to progress. And even with that process and the mission of patient centered goals which is something they talk about a lot, definitely patients were not always listened to or considered in that process. and it is difficult to work out levels of cognition and understanding and it's not always clear when someone is struggling with communicating how much they are cognitively understanding. I think that's a difficult process sometimes- people can sometimes give the impression of being completely fine with communication and then you kind of realize once you get to know them that they're actually not really understanding what's going on. And so you have a lot of power in that situation when you're trying to make that decision if that person is cognitively capable of making decisions about their own life. That's a big thing to say, to say this person does not have ...umm and that wouldn't be my role, as a physio to say that you know this person doesn't have, um

Capacity?

Capacity yeah.

So do you think some of the time that people aren't listened to its just because people don't know how to listen to them or they don't have time or...?

Yeah I think...there's loads of different things going on. People feel uncomfortable about it, don't want to take the time, they're in a rush, sometimes these things are cultural. There's a Muslim guy on the ward and I feel like he was considered less cognitively able than he was just because he communicated differently. He was very direct....I think some of that was cultural, not to do with the brain injury, but then everything got associated with the brain injury.

(have you seen any books or films with people with language affecting disability in them, can't think of any)

so if you haven't heard of many then do you think there should be more representation of disability?

yeah I think that people are uncomfortable with disability. There's a high level of uncomfortability with disability just in our society generally. And even representations of disability, for instance you know that French film about a guy whose quadriplegic ...because I've worked in basically that role and there's some really nice things about that film, I like it whenever disability is represented in film or in art in general but also so often its kind of sanitized and made like acceptable in some way.

Or sentimental maybe?

Yea definitely and that film is a really good example of it, and that film about Stephen Hawking...it feels like a lot of the time its trying to not make people feel more uncomfortable. I guess what's really important, what I've noticed, is how much people want to connect with other people and communicate and have relationships whatever their disability is, that people just really want that and I think that's a really important thing and I'm sure you could make amazing bits of art and film showing that , people trying to communicate despite disability. I mean maybe the diving bell and the butterfly did all that, I don't know.

Well at least it was written by somebody with the disability...it was just his memoir. So it's quite unusual in that way.

I think there's often a hero complex in some way, often films with disability there's often somebody there to try and save the person....

I think there's a lot of talk about representation in general, like scarlet Johansson playing a trans person when she's not trans and lack of racial diversitya lot of talk about who has the right to tell what story. Which I'm thinking a lot about in my work, do I have the right?

Yeah there's definitely quite a few examples of able-bodied actors playing disabled characters right? That's very, very common. It would be great to see more disabled actors on screen as well.

And especially if it wasn't that the film always centered around their disability....at your school growing up, can you remember if there were many children with disabilities there?

That's an interesting question. There were a few kids who had learning disabilities and my feeling about it is that they were in the same school but were often separate, in separate classes and I was not really aware of them. I don't know what that was about, like that maybe they were really clearly there and I just kind of didn't notice, or if there was more segregation within the school that just kind of meant that I didn't have contact with them. but I'm aware of the kids being there and I'm not aware of their names. Interestingly, my dad worked in the church of England and one of the things that he did was work for a school for kids with disabilities, which was a separate school and I think because of that and him talking about it , I grew up with the sense that it was better to have separate schools for children with disabilities with separate provision

and that it was better for them to be separate in some way because of this idea that you needed specialized support or something that couldn't be provided within a normal comprehensive. I really disagree with that now, I've changed my mind completely. I think one of the biggest issues is about segregation and about the invisibility and the way that people are separated and I think that fits in with films and stuff in terms of how visible people are. How there's a level of uncomfortability with disability.

I find this whole area such a mind-field, because the school I work at is mainstream but with autistic kids in it, and there's so many positive things in terms of what the mainstream kids learn about disability but also I feel its trying to fit these kids into this certain type of education that they just don't fit into and they're not actually learning anything. So sometimes to me it can feel more idealistic than practical. So sometimes I don't know what the solution is...

So where I was working, there was a lot of resource. People came in for long-term rehabilitation but had a dedicated team of occupational therapists, speech therapists...and it was a catered towards that group of people. now there's just such a discourse of disabled people taking up too much resource , requiring more time, more money, more effort...

You mean politically or?

I think the government but I think it's just a very widespread idea. And definitely the government often says things and acts in ways that doesn't help support that and I just think the whole frame work is very messed up around that. Yeah like its true, often people will need more support, more resource and that's not a problem, that's not a bad thing, that's definitely something that we can provide considering what other things get spent on.

Yeah, yeah. Its just working out the practical balance...like also just the term disability is just so broad, there's so many different types. Like for some children of course they should be in a mainstream school but for others it's not always the best thing for them.

I guess its just like, where does the segregation happen? Where do people get isolated because of their disability and how can that be thought about so that doesn't happen, even if they do have a lot of specialist needs.

I just feel like in my school sometimes there almost more segregated by being in a mainstream school because most of the time they actually cant keep up with anything so they're just alone with me and not with their friends, where if they were in a school with people more like them then maybe they would have more friends...

Yeah I understand that.

Do you have any thoughts on silence? Have you spent more time in silence in this job than before.

Yeah I think silence...you need to be able to listen to people, and its useful for when you're teaching someone something, and they are trying to explain something or learn something , its useful to have time where they just get to focus on what it is so just not making noise to allow someone to work out what it is they're trying to explain and so that's true of people who don't have communication affecting disabilities and definitely true with people who are struggling to communicate just being able to be silent and not have to fill the void constantly. I think that's a useful thing. But I don't know, that seems true for all people , I've always thought that it's useful to be comfortable with silence at times. For me, I think I struggle to feel sometimes to be able to feel the silence when the other person can't. Like if they cant make sound, I'm used to someone else being able to

do that and I think what I saw from some of the other physios was that it was sometimes useful for that person to have someone who was just able to chat and keep things interesting you know and make conversation without them being able to actually say anything and that was actually a useful thing for them to be able to do sometimes.

Do you think it put someone at ease that someone was just chatting away, not feeling like they were causing the silence I guess?

Yeah, yeah, yeah and we talked about boredom earlier, and I think just to have their minds engaged, to have someone chatting away, that's a useful thing sometimes.

Yeah I think I veer too much the other way sometimes. Because the kids I work with they don't really talk much and I'm kind of like totally happy in the silence and then I watch the other staff with them and there super chatty and I'm like oh that's probably more fun for them.

Well it's interesting because I think we often fall into one camp or the other. I sympathies with what your saying, I think I'm often more comfortable with the silence. And I've definitely seen lots of examples of people who are uncomfortable with silence and will just try to fill the space constantly and that not being useful. But it can be useful to be able to do as well! I guess being able to do both and being able to make some sort of judgment about what's best in each situation is a really useful thing to be able to do.

Totally, and it's a real skill and I think those skills are not valued enough, those kinds of jobs are not really seen as a thing...

Yep!

Do you think there's anything really positive that you've learnt from your work about communicating differently that's really unique to this experience?

I think what I said before about seeing just how much people want to communicate whatever the situation is, has been a really useful thing to see, that people just want to have connection and communication no matter what the situation is basically. That's my personal experience. And that its been useful to risk getting it wrong, I think to be able to communicate with people who have quite complex communication needs , you really need to be able to be happy with being clumsy and make mistakes, and the most important thing is to be able to try and communicate and learn how to do that rather than being fearful of making mistakes around people and then not communicating. And you know, you will inevitably do things that will annoy people, like I did things that were annoying to my patients, because they've seen it a thousand times, people make the same mistakes, act in 'stupid' ways, but its more important to risk doing that but keep on trying to communicate and build some kind of relationship than be scared to do it and then not be able to get that dialogue.

Do you think that's transferable to outside of your work?

Yeah I think that's just a general thing. I remember hearing once that the worst mistake was to never make a mistake, like that's such a useful...to be able to keep trying to do something, despite feeling uneasy with it, or making mistakes is a very useful thing to be able to do I think.

And last question...do you think there's any connection between status and worth, or people's ideas of status and worth and being able to use language well?

Oh hugely , yeah. There's a huge class thing, I think England is probably a particularly extreme example of that; very, very quickly we'll make all sorts of assumptions about people intelligence and capabilities depending on how they speak and accents. And people definitely...I can feel in myself, when you're talking to people who are having communication difficulties you don't get such a quick picture of them as a whole person, and for me I think you presume their lives are smaller than they are and maybe you

presume their minds are smaller than they are , because of maybe just not being able to show quite so much initially and so yeah, that's so tied in with status. And anyway, the whole thing of someone being a patient within a system is just such a disempowering role very quickly, and there's such a big pressure to just consent to the system and to lose your agency and I think that's a whole status thing, so that's difficult enough for patients who don't have communication difficulties, to have that on top of that is a big, big thing because you lose a huge amount of autonomy and agency when you're in that kind of patient role and I think that is something about status as well.

I wonder if someone was very physically disabled but spoke perfectly with a very middle class accent if they would be treated with more respect?

I'm sure that's true, definitely. I saw that with someone I used to work for who was paralyzed and he came from a very posh background and had a very strong sense of entitlement which had very good outcomes in some contexts. Because he wasn't willing to accept less as a disabled person in some way . this is something slightly different, but that was a guy on the ward , a patient who was pretty articulate but he was also incredibly positive, and if you went in just to help him, just out of the hoist onto the wheelchair, he'd constantly just be 'oh brilliant job!' 'Oh fantastic fantastic!, you are just wonderful, wonderful!' just constantly, whenever you walked past his room you could hear him saying it to other people and people just wanted to be around him, they wouldn't to treat it, they wanted to be able to do things with it, so that was interesting you know, just even the way he was, the way he communicated, affected the treatment he received.

Interview 4

Do you see dyslexia as being a disability?

Um well I think its got positives and negatives. A lot of the positives perhaps, are your brain working slightly differently and seeing things in a different way can make you good at other things. The negatives I think um, in situations where you're meant to fit into the mainstream you can feel inadequate, and not fitting in and struggle a bit.

Is that mainly school or...?

Yeah, I think mainly school. I think from experiences at school, it can make you a little bit , your confidence slightly wobbly even later on.

You mean that feeling can carry on now?

Yes, like I get little panics. Like at work recently I had to use a new sewing machine and I had to find instruction book and then I got nervous about using the instruction book because although I can read, sometimes when I get nervous I get this total blank and not be able to read at all (!)

What is it like? Do the letters sort of float around or...?

Well it's a weird sort of panic thing. I remember when I first started my teacher training, I wanted to get everyone's name on the register before I started so I could look at them. I was so nervous, I opened the register and I realized I couldn't read people's names out. And one good thing they said at the teacher training, with adults especially, is there's no point trying to con people. so I had the confidence just to say , 'oh I'm dyslexic, do you mind if someone else reads the register out?' and that was fine, but I might not have had that confidence when I was a kid, but I didn't really get a test until I was seventeen or eighteen.

Oh really? I thought you were much younger!

No, it wasn't really such a thing then really.

So what did people think then?

Slow. Just slow at reading. I didn't really realize what it was for ages. I was just thinking back before you came over, about my childhood, and I remember when I was first at primary school, noticing there was this thing called writing and I looked at it was lots of diddly lines with gaps in between, and so I diligently did a page of diddly lines with gaps in between and handed it in, and didn't quite get it that I hadn't done writing, I just visually saw patterns with gaps, and did little patterns with gaps.

That's really interesting because there's a little boy in one of my classes who will do that, pages and pages of little squirls. And when I ask him what it is, he'll make up this amazing story, and then I ask 'oh where's this particular bit on the page?' he'll make up this whole entirely new story. And then get really cross that I can't read what he's written.

These things that kept surprising me, there was a stand in teacher at my primary school, when I was seven or eight, and I was doing some writing, and I spelt 'of' 'ov' and she thought I was being naughty or something and sent me to the headmistress and I didn't really understand. And in primary school thing too, one other thing I remembered, is I didn't really read, and we used to have time to go to the library and pick a book and I always used to get Asterisk and Tintin, comic books, and it wasn't until the end of school that I realized that they were in there because they were in French, but because I wasn't bothering with the writing anyway, I was just looking at the pictures, I hadn't even attempted the bubbles that were in French. So I was sort of oblivious to what the problem was really at primary school. we did get read to a lot at home, mum and dad read to us all every night before bed, and as we were a range of ages we used to get

quite grown up books sometimes, so we always had lots of stories. I remember another thing, in fact when I was at Steiner school, everyone was supposed to go around the room taking it in turns to read, *dickens* or something at the Steiner school, but because I always looked very carefully at the person who was telling the story, I never followed where they were in the book, and then I couldn't find it and I always stumbled over the words and it would always be an awful experience reading out.

Did they not realize there either then?

They didn't really.. I did extra German. I can't really remember, I might have had some extra spelling or something like that.

Did they even know what dyslexia was?

I don't know really. We were only there for two years , but then the next school, we went to the comprehensive when I was about thirteen and I had remedial English there. I couldn't do any languages there any more because I had remedial English instead and it was really run by naughties. Not run by naughties! But it had all the naughty people in it mainly. And I remember when I was doing my o levels, I was the only one in my class, the remedial lot, that wanted to take the lowest gcse that could take – gse that s what it was called. I think I could have gotten better at English if we hadn't moved schools so much. I remember when I took the exam I had to sit outside the classroom because it was quieter than in the classroom and I was the only one that wanted to do it, so probably if I been to a school that gave you a bit more attention I might have got better. So I didn't do very well, stayed to do a-levels, try and get into art college, and you could choose things and I wanted to do English a level and they said I couldn't do it because my English language was too bad, but I really likes stories, and the only other option was this sort of general studies thing that I didn't fancy. So I insisted that I wanted to do English literature, because I could be a bit stubborn, and I really enjoyed it. We did wuthering heights, Julius Caesar and Chaucer and I really enjoyed them and remember them now.

How did you read them?

I think mum read them out to me. And I didn't pass, I was slow so I would maybe answer one question out of three.

And they didn't give you extra time?

They didn't, no. But I was glad that I did it, I sort of had an argument that I wanted to do it because I was bad at it or something.

So you sort of had something to prove?

Yeah. So that was school and then I went to Art College which was great and that's when I actually got my dyslexic test. I was doing the foundation course at Eastbourne, two years, and the second year was sort of pre-degree. And I wasn't very good at talking unless I was really cross. Mum went to the interview with me to get me into Art College and sort of did all the talking .

Could you just not show them stuff you'd done?

Going from school, yeah I did have stuff they I showed them, quite good stuff. At school I did actually get o level and a level art, grade A, but it wasn't like art these days where you have to do all that theory, it was just sort of straight painting and drawing so it seemed like an obvious choice to go to art college, mum had gone and stuff. But I didn't have any other qualifications apart from low grade English and human biology I think, which were sort of low grade o level things and they weren't quite as tight as they are now, but you were meant to have more than that. And there was this older woman who taught adult literacy at foundation and she said half way through my interviews she said

you should get a dyslexic test and organized for me and then in the pool choice I went to Newport with this bit of paper saying I had dyslexia.

But had you heard of it before?

Maybe vaguely. I remember some sort of test actually when I was young because I remember them saying I had something like a reading age of six but had a higher than average vocabulary. To test your vocabulary they would point to a picture and ask what it was, rather than saying 'do you know what X word means. And then the actual dyslexic test, they did things like, to see how your brain scan, they'd do crosses and see if you joined them up that way or that way, because if you joined that way it made it very difficult to read.

Which way?

Right to left.

But isn't that how Arabic and other languages are written?

Well I was talking to a Chinese person that goes up and down (the language) and she was saying that there wasn't such a thing as dyslexia in china. And also its symbols isn't it and also it scans up and down.

That's really interesting. But maybe they just haven't researched it yet?

Probably yes! But in fact I didn't have the backwards scanning. I don't think I'm sort of really severely dyslexic but when I was at art college we had sort of a few essays to write, and I had just scraped this low grade English, never really been taught how to write an essay, and I remember reading this book on degards and I'd get to the end of the sentence and then have to read it again, because when you read so slowly and you're decoding everything, if its slightly fancy language with a few difficult words in it its quite difficult to get the sense of what its about. And I remember plodding through this book trying to read it.

Have you ever read graphic novels?

Well I love comics.

Yeah, well it's the same sort of thing , because then you just see it all anyway.

There's this book, that mum had as a kid, this is a whole book of just wood engravings, and I can always read a story from pictures quite easily, you don't need words. I think it's often difficult, to verbalize things, I found it very difficult as a child even to talk to people. I was very shy as a child.

Do you think that's just who you were, or do you think that's related to the dyslexia, a confidence thing from that?

I think it was a little bit confidence (from dyslexia) and a little bit family stuff.

Do you think your nephew (also dyslexic) has had a better time at school than you did?

Yes. I think because he didn't move around like we did. And his mum tried to get him help at primary school, and because of funding and things I think you have to be quite severe really to get help or get the expensive test and it wasn't happening, and that's partly why she got him and his brother , who's sort of a little bit more...he's clever, but might forget to put his trousers on sort of clever, and gets very obsessive about certain sort of things, sort of like a little bit autistic, and she just thought they'd do better in smaller classes, and they went to the grammar school and they didn't do too badly. He does struggle a bit.

Do you think in general there is less stigma now?

Yeah, I do. I think , especially amongst arty people, most people are dyslexic. I think most people miss this now, but at one point you got a computer didn't you and that was cool, but I think that's gone now. now, ill just go back to 'rose's progress' and education.

so- art college, that was great, because I felt like rather than being the thicky, I was somewhere in the middle or on the good side of my contemporaries- that gave me confidence. But at the end, we did have to write a thesis (whispering)

(whispering) and you got somebody to write it for you didn't you?

Well, I sort of did...well again, I sort of didn't go and talk to people about it, it was just suddenly oh you've got to write a thesis in so many months and I did think of selling my bicycle and getting somebody to write it for me! But in the end, I did talk to them, and I should have really done something practical in the summer holidays and written about it, but I didn't, but I talked to them and in those days, all they could offer, if I was slow at reading, was some tapes and the only tape they had was called 'Shaupenauer's theory on abstraction'.

So theory books read out-loud, but only one of them?

(laughing) yes, so that was the only choice I had, and between me, the life model's husband, and in those days you had to get your thesis typed up because they didn't have laptops or anything, so you'd usually find an English student and get them to type it up for you, and I found this nice boy. And I paid him something (whispers) *kisses*

Was it kisses?!

(laughing) no, it wasn't! but between him and the life model's husband and me, we managed to write a thesis, which I had called 'why some abstract paintings make me cross' and then my typist had changed to 'coming to terms with the abstract'! I had bits of coloured paper here and there, and postcards...

So it was all your words?

Yeah, they just helped me organize it really. And I scraped through and saw an external examiner about it, the bits that I'd sort of put postcards in the middle of, I talked about. I sort of had an introduction and conclusion and then postcards in the middle but I got a 2:1 degree, which coming from being in remedial for everything was massive thing really.

Do you feel proud of that?

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I feel lucky to have had the chance really because it was free to go to college then, got a full grant and I've used it as a career so its been good. In between art college and teaching, I thought I might do teaching but I did quite a few attempts to get my English o level and that's when I started doing creative writing classes actually, because I was so bored of doing spelling, because the motivation of keeping going through the rather boring English o level curriculum...so I this class got you writing and then you sort of corrected your spellings and things and I got my English o level at forty, I got a grade c. But the one other little incident which I just thought I'd mention because this thing was a bit ironic. I was doing my teacher training and we were learning about different learning techniques and they did this thing at the beginning of the class where they asked have you got any disabilities and I put dyslexia, slow reader and the exact way they did a lot of the workshops was they gave students a lot of hand out notes, which you had to read quickly and then could discuss. But of course I looked at them, couldn't read them and then started to feel more and more anxious and upset when I couldn't join in with the discussions. So then although we were learning about different learning types I wasn't included, and in the end I didn't keep going with the training. Often they sort of know the problems but there isn't enough people to help or you haven't got enough confidence to make a fuss.

I think that's the same in primary school now, especially now you need to have a definite label and if they cant find one for you, kids just get left, even if its obvious to everyone they need help.

I think now especially, with the pinch going on further up, its all a bit thin on the ground the help that's available in education and you probably need some sort of champion shouting up to you or else you end up ...

But I feel like always you need privileged parents in order to demand you get help, or pay for you to go to private school.

Well my nephew when he was at college doing a foundation, we had to pay for him to get another dyslexic test for him which was about £400 and then it didn't seem to get him any advantages anyway.

Right! What else? I think I've finally got to the end of my education now!

Do you think there still is a societal connection to the idea of intelligence and status and the ability to use language in a certain way?

Yeah, I think so, in certain areas. I mean in a rather general way. I think in the art world you can see that people are very clever in other ways.

Apparently the majority of the dyslexic population can be split pretty evenly between being in prison or being an architect- which kind of shows you can either fall through the net completely or be completely brilliant

Well I know some people who teach literacy in prison and there's some amazing amount of young men in there who can't read, like 80%. But what are they going to do? and even when they get out. I mean it can be different, dyslexia and illiteracy and I remember when I was going to the friend's center for adult literacy lessons, there were people, a lot of men in their fifties who'd worked in industry, in a machine shop, very clever engineers with their hands but they were actually fairly illiterate and then they'd been made redundant and tried to get jobs, and couldn't fill in the forms, that sort of thing. But that's maybe not dyslexia, some people just slip through. I mean I guess not so long ago kids could leave at fifteen, get onto a building site and if they came from the sort of home that didn't do lots of reading then they could slip through and I think people do these days slip through probably.

Changing the subject a bit...you're a natural storyteller

I don't know about that.

You definitely are, you're an amazing storyteller. So it hasn't really affected your ability to verbalize things?

Well I think stories are a little bit to do with visualizing things in a way

It's funny, because I guess if you think of literature as a whole, then grammar and spelling are kind of opposite skills to having an imagination and being able to tell stories- one is mechanical and the other is creative

Yes well I think one is a tool to do the other, a bit like music and scales.

My brother he was very good at math's, he was doing advanced statistical maths but he still had to get mum to read out the question to him...there are a lot of different things. I mean, I never really learnt a structure for writing essays and things because I'd never really got advanced enough for that, so I tend to write in a bit of a speaky way because I never learnt a different way, but because I tried to do my English o level so many times I'm probably ok at grammar and things. I've been through the basics quite a few times! But yes, I do like stories. I daydreamed a lot when I was a kid as well, I would have lots of stories going on, playing with some sort of doll or something, some scenario could go on in episodes in my head for weeks! They used to say 'oh *day dreaming*' but in a way that's sort of having stories and pictures going on in your head.

What is your idea of 'using language well'? what do you think it means to use language well?

Well, I suppose its got lots of functions and the broad one would be to communicate whatever it is, your feelings, or if our making something together or whatever. So communication ...book language can also be entertaining or inspiring or funny. I suppose stories are communicating but in a more colourful way...I think that's why children like stories, don't they? To help them understand things. And also I suppose being able to empathize with someone in the story or an event.

Would you pick up a novel or something for pleasure now, or would that not be a relaxing thing to do?

No, it's too hard. It's too hard to read for pleasure. I should read more, it probably would get easier. But I listen to stories on the radio or whatever. Book at bedtime! Yeah, there's some great stuff on the radio and I should get into the technology but quite a lot of people at work have audio books, or when they're working they're listening to podcasts or something. And about the most reading that I normally do is Tim always gets the Sunday paper and I might take the magazine , and I'll be there for ages just reading a small article.

Is that frustrating?

It's tiring. I think I'm still always decoding, which means its quite hard work for me, reading.

Do you think there would have been techniques that maybe if you were at school now, that you would have learnt?

I think it would have been easier, and a lot of the stuff now, the spelling and stuff, like even texting makes you do little writing doesn't it? I think all that stuff would have helped and I think possibly even typing might be quite good because it's quite kind of connected up to your body.

What was the other thing I was going to say? Oh yes that, when I was at primary school, we learnt signing alphabet , I must have been about eight, and that's totally stuck in. so maybe there are certain sort of learning's...that just struck me as something that I remembered , that was more physical. Whole sort of body... and I'm sure if I read more I would get better at it, but I watch telly instead...

So at school, you didn't have those coloured glasses for reading or anything?

No, after...after I tried some of those things out , when I was trying to get my English o level, I used a green piece of paper.

Did it help?

It might have helped a little bit...because black and white can sometimes do a bit of a jumpy thing. But now I've got a good excuse if I get caught short and find I can't read something, I say I've forgotten my glasses!

So does it still feel weird to say to someone that you're dyslexic?

Usually yes it just feels a bit of a palava to say it. At work they kind of know, if I ask someone to read something or whatever, that's fine. But I'm not very, very dyslexic and if I'm not panicky I can read stuff, slowly. But its things like concentration sometimes , or when I'm texting or something , well I call them e-snails because I'm so slow... I get very grumpy if anyone bumps in with any little...I have to concentrate a lot more to really make it happen than I think some people do.

I think I'm like that with maths. I just see total black if I'm scared! Or when I'm working with the kids, it's so embarrassing sometimes because I feel already aged eight or something they've completely over taken me with their ability!

Well I did work in a nursery school and some of the basic spellings, things like spelling 'of', 'ov', I'd sort of be, now how do you spell 'was' or something really simple.

It's great you've kept up your signing...whenever there's one of those little men at the bottom of the TV, I'm always so drawn to them, because they're so animated.

But signing used to be banned because it was unsightly...

I suppose drama and body language and things is an awful lot of communication isn't it?

Yes...final question- of the beaten track- what are your feelings about silence, how do you feel in silence

Umm....well, I don't mind silence, I quite like it. but whether it's an awkward pause in conversation or a happy silence...mmm...its like that thing where...well when I was very shy and didn't speak, I kind of wanted to speak to people but couldn't quite think what to say and when to say it, so that was kind of loud silence. But yeah I like being comfortable enough with friends to sort of just be together and not have to talk...mm that's interesting, different types of silence...but yes comfortable in silence I'd say, but also there are some uncomfortable types of silences!

Interview 5

Do you have any opinion on the difference between disabilities that affects language in particular as opposed to just disability in general?

Let's look at S as a blind person. When you think of a baby, a toddler, they will point to objects because they can see them and then you will identify them, and obviously with S we couldn't do that. Obviously got to bear in mind that he only got his cochlear implant when he was six so obviously deafness is going to affect language without a shadow of a doubt but now if you bring the cochlear implant into the picture....with a hearing aid and still taking into account his blindness, it changed obviously, but still you have to take the world to S. I'll give you an example of what happened recently- we were sitting in the car and he had his processor and his hearing aid on, and I watched a boy that was playing with a ball by the side of the road, the ball went into the road and a car stopped to let the boy pick up the ball and go back to the side of the pavement. I relayed that concept, everything that happened, to S and he refers to it constantly, as 'dangers of the road', so whenever we talk about the road and the dangers of the road. So because he didn't see it, I had to give him all the information that I picked up and I relayed it, obviously via speech. A very similar thing happened the other day: a young boy was crossing at the pedestrian crossing and the car that stopped tooted at the little boy to let him know that he had dropped his money on the road. So S heard the 'toot toot' and he said 'what's that?' and I explained what had happened. So again, for someone who is blind you need to explain a lot more of what is going on. There's no, or there's very little, incidental learning in terms of S, although he has a hearing aid and a cochlear implant, he's not a hearing individual, he's a hearing impaired individual, because it is distorted, it's not how you and I hear.

That's so interesting because when I was thinking of S in terms of language I was thinking of the deafness but you went to the blindness. I think unless you know someone you don't normally associate blindness with language, but of course his idea of the world is different.

Yes, his perception his very distorted, yes. And R and I actually went to a weekend over In falmer, they had British blind sport were having a 'have a go day' and we took S along, and so of course here we are amongst more blind individuals than deaf individuals and we came across a lot of young people on S's team and obviously they are able to communicate verbally much better than S but again very much about having to describe to them what was actually going on, so you literally need to give them running commentary because they miss out on so many cues. And again when you're explaining something you've got to explain it again so that they understand exactly what you're talking about. So again, it's the language that you're using to explain something and from person to person it varies because of their perception, their understanding and also you have to consider what kind of blindness or visual impairment they have. Whether it was a gradual thing, whether they were born that way and so on. So it varies considerably.

Do you think you've got any more imaginative or creative in the way that you use language because of S?

Very much so. it makes me question a lot...and again you may find this with autism, how things are taken literally, so I've got to be careful not to say something like 'it's raining cats and dogs outside'. You can't say that, you can't use those types of things with S because he is literally going to think that's happening. A friend of mine, her son, I think

he had Asperger's, but he was undiagnosed, and she said to him one day, he was stomping on the bed and she said 'now jump off the bed' and he literally jump off the bed, but she didn't mean literally jump off the bed, it was just another way of saying and again, that's what I said to her, that's what I've got to be careful with, with S. Not to use that kind of language : you've got to tell him specifically what you want from him. literal language, that's very much an autistic trait as well.

But S doesn't have autism does he?

No, but when I took S to south Africa when he was three years old, I saw a lady who had done training with deaf blindness and so on and she said to me people are going to try and tell you that S is autistic, because deaf blind children/people, have autistic like tendencies and she said you must be very very careful not to let people label him autistic, and that was something I was very mindful of, and as time has gone by I can see exactly what she meant by that.

But that's just because of the way that he learns, the way he understands, yeah.

Everything with s, I think there is a lot of memory for him in tactile objects. He can touch something and it will trigger a memory. Its obviously not visual, its tactile. Or a smell for example, or a sound. Those are where his memories are. Obviously. Because that's pretty much what S is, you know. Everything except sight.

In a way that's like a different form of language isn't it?

Oh yes, it's definitely a language. I mean if you think aboutit triggers memories, which triggers his want to communicate what he's actually thinking, feeling and so on. It gives him an incentive to communicate what he's thinking or feeling. So that's very important. Because sometimes he can get very excited about something and he tends to make better sentences because he wants you to know what he's feeling at that moment and it's quite interesting because when he's getting excited, he did it last night, I told him that if he behaved himself he was going to get a toy (I have to use these little carrots still Saffy!) and when I told him that if he behaved himself, I let him touch the glow stick that I had for him and with that he started talking in full sentences and he started signing. so that's motivation, to let me know that he understands and he's going to behave.

Where he's at school now, do they sign, or how do they communicate with him?

Unfortunately the intervener that he's got now- I don't know if you remember H? H was his intervener from year two up to year 10, she was an excellent signer, she did very good hand under hand sign which is kind of unusual if you think about it, she was with S an unusually long time. It was what we kind of wanted because we know how important the relationship between an intervener and him was. Then we got another lady, she's fantastic with him but she signs a few words to him, if he needs clarification of how a word is spelt so he can repeat it correctly she can do deaf blind finger spelling, her signing, she's not that familiar with signing. but where he is now, as far as his language is progressing, he's able to understand more, or if he doesn't understand, he will say 'can you say that again I don't understand'. He has these techniques now, he can troubleshoot a lot better than what he used to be able to. So he's not reliant on sign, which is kind of good because he's obviously, having moved from secondary school to college, not many people around S knew him, so he had to get used to them and they had to get used to him so he had to be reminded to slow down his speech. Because he got complacent because people knew him and got to understand him, even though he wasn't speaking well, we all know what he mean, so we never really corrected him. so moving into a different environment forced him to make himself understood if that makes sense.

So it's been good for him then?

It's been good for him yes, definitely. And also for him to understand that sometimes people don't understand what he's saying so he has to explain himself, and he now knows how to strategize that and put that into action.

That's great, it sounds like he's come on a lot.

oh he has, he has. I mean there are things, like we went camping recently, and we went to this place where they make baskets and they're made from willow and getting him to say the word 'willow', I thought he was saying 'renaut' like a car . because at this place you were able to buy willow kits and he kept saying , what was he saying? I thought he was saying 'renaut making kits' so I had to go over how to pronounce the letter 'l' and that is a very tricky sound for him, so we went over and over and over it, so we've still got to go over certain sounds, even though he's almost nineteen because he's missed out on those crucial learning moments and they need constant re-visiting , because he'll be fine for a while and then he'll get lazy again, so you've got to keep prompting him, keep reminding him that he's not being understood.

Do you think he gets tired as well?

Oh yeah yeah yeah. He has quite a bit of downtime and we can sort of judge when he gets tired, but it is very tiring because if you think about it, he's using his remaining senses , they're heightened, so especially at college he's on alert a lot of the time. And for anyone, that would be very, very tiring. And that was picked up at primary school, and the teacher of the deaf would always say you know, we've got to be mindful of the fact that he's got a one to one, and very few children have a one to one, so every now and then, just like when I was at school say, I could sort of look out the window, daydream you know, whereas he was never, ever allowed to do that , he's got that constant attention 'S, do this, do that, pay attention' and they do need that 'ok , work for so many minutes and then lets just chill' and you need that balance, you absolutely need that balance, and it is very tiring.

Having the one to one, does that get in the way of making friends? Or how's he's found that?

Oh no, I think if you look at the role of the intervenor, the intervenor is there to facilitate communication , so as long as the intervenor is aware of their role, then I think they're more of a help than a hindrance, so that's what their role is there to be, and that's how it is with A, she's there to facilitate. I'm much the same, I've got to be a little bit careful because I can be like...I finish his sentences for him, because I know him so well, and that's where you've got to be a little bit like, ok I've got to step back now, I've got to let him correct himself as opposed to me being a helicopter mum! It's very hard not to be a helicopter mum, because I've been so involved with him , but you need to allow him that time to self correct and for somebody else to get to know what he's saying and so on. And so there are times as an intervenor that we've got to remember that, we've got to give him the space and the time to communicate.

And has he made friends at this school?

Yes, he has made friends. R and I have actually been to a couple of eighteenth birthday party and some of the young people will come up and talk to S and that has been really, really nice to see and he talks about them and if S talks about someone you know they've had an impact on him. And that is really good, yes it is. And again, that is something that he can't do on his own, that is something where he needs an intervenor to facilitate that, that's very, very important because as a deaf blind person, if they don't have that, they become very isolated.

Do you mean physically taking them to the person or...?

Yes you have to draw their attention to the fact that that person is there and take them to them, and you've got to be very prepared to do that, you've got to be very driven to do that.

Is there a deaf-blind community, do you think?

Well, we did have sense. Sense had a little support group in his area, it used to run little events and things, but they lost their funding. So in terms of deaf blind support in east Sussex, it's very poor. I think Kent has a much better deaf blind support net work actually, through Kent association for the blind, because their funding is sorted out differently, I was told that we have a family association liaison officer from the national deaf children's society. They run an advocacy service, that they run free of charge for families with a deaf child. Our liaison officer got involved when S was six and she was the one that told me more about the funding and training. All sorts of different training services, support services and so on. Very, very good. So I think I'm going to tap into that, especially now as S is moving into adult social services, because we don't have the expertise here in east Sussex to support deaf blind adults, or children for that matter but because we're going into adult services it's not really education now, it's moving into a whole different area. But again, this is where as a family you need to make sure that you are getting the support because you see again, it comes down to communication, I was actually having a conversation on Friday with the new support worker that's been allocated to work with S and I had to answer questions over the phone and I had to try and explain to him that communication is vital, that is where S's biggest barrier is really, with people who don't know him, there's a tendency that they don't understand him. And that's obviously vital, for S to be able to tell somebody if he needs any support, if he's got any concerns, but if people aren't trained in that field, they have no idea what's going on, or how to deal with him. so it's really important that they get their act together and sort that out, so that's what my driving force is, is making sure that this support is here for S, and communication is key. Because as I explained to him, because as I said to him, S's communication needs are in one word 'complex' and it's very important that they are aware of this, or he could slip through the net very easily. Because he's not going to pick up the phone and call somebody, he doesn't know to do that, so he could be one of those people sitting in his home and nobody knows he's there. So there you go. And that's all down to communication, or lack there of.

And I guess he doesn't fit neatly into any sort of category?

No, no he doesn't. And again, it's very unusual for someone who's deaf blind not to have learning disabilities. S doesn't have learning disabilities, he has delayed learning, which is completely different.

And do you think there's a tendency for people who meet him to undervalue his intelligence?

Absolutely yes, most definitely.

And why do you think that is?

I think his appearance, the fact that he doesn't just come out and start talking in the way that you and I talk, they probably think oh well, he's probably not all there you know? But when you get to know him you realize he can build a circuit, grade one brail, he reads his books and so on. He had the ability to read brail which is very unusual in a deaf blind person, very unusual that they're able to learn brail. And he's never gone on to learn grade two brail, reason being that in grade one brail you have the full word and in grade two you have contracted brail. But it's actually very important in terms of speech and language development for S that he has the whole word spelt out so that

he's able to pronounce in correctly, whereas contracted... he would not have done very well with contracted brail.

Do you think the way that people use language influences other people's understanding or perception of how intelligent they are?

Yeah, I think so. yeah definitely, yes. I think that's the thing as well, there was a bbc programme that you may be interested in seeing, it was about this young boy and he had this condition which meant he was non-verbal but he used his eyes and between his mum and his teacher they came up with a system where this boy, he looked at certain letters and was able to communicate. And through that system that they used, he was actually able to write letters, and he expressed himself and it was just like you and I, I mean he was able to express himself just like you and I. he was in a wheelchair, he was not able to move on his own or anything, but that was amazing. And again, how intelligent he is, but looking at him you would think, no he doesn't know what's going on, but he most certainly does. Bit of a tearjerker unfortunately that one was for me! But I said to R, it just goes to show, people who don't talk it doesn't mean that they're not there, that they don't understand, that they don't feel, they don't think. It's a big eye opener.

Have you seen any other films or books with people with disabilities in- your ideas on representation of disability?

Well, a long, long time ago, when I was younger, which I suppose has probably influenced my thinking now, back in the eighties, there was a film called *children of a lesser god*, so that one really stayed in my mind and that has really influenced a lot of my decision making with S.

In what way?

Well, just watching, she's a deaf actress, marlee matlin, just watching her, being able to communicate. And I don't know if I've ever mentioned it to you, but when I was a lot younger, I used to wonder how somebody who was deaf could communicate with someone who was blind, and I was quite fascinated by that. So when I had S, I did think, wow I did think about this you know! I didn't picture this particular scenario but anyway...so that got me thinking, you know, watching that movie was quite interesting. Did I ever lend you the video of the deaf blind triplets from America? So I've got a video of these deaf triplets, they made a documentary and that was a real eye opener, so now you've got obviously three young girls with varying degrees of deaf blindness and each one was an individual let me tell you, they were all so, so different, so watching that was very interesting. Watching how Helen keller's language developed was very interesting. Another very interesting thing – let me ask B- what was that psychology thing about your brain and your eyes, do you remember? That you see something that you can't work out what the tune is, unless you know the tune. This is something that was on YouTube. So what it was saffy, there trying t explain how your mind plays tricks on you and they showed this video and of you knew the song, you would hear the song, but I didn't know the song so I didn't hear the song, ok? And then L said to me, what is that song? And then he played it to me, and so then I looked into the original track, went back to the other video, and what I had previously not been able to pick out, I then started to hear it- does that make sense to you?

Yes, sort of....

It's like how your mind plays tricks on you, using your eyes and your ears. And that made me realize, even though S knows some things, even though he's got his cochlear, it doesn't draw his attention. So for example, I'll give you an example: he was very interested in the weather, and he was drawing comparisons between the temperature

in winter and the temperature in summer, and I said ok so lets get you a thermometer and the thermometer actually said 'the indoor temperature is blah blah Celsius, the outdoor temperature is 'bladebladeblad Celsius'. So I was in the car one day and I had the temperature on and then I heard the weather report come on, and s was talking in the background and I said 'listen, the lady is talking about the weather' and with that he stopped and he picked out the lady saying 'degrees Celsius', but its only because I drew his attention to the fact that she was talking about the weather that he put two and two together and was able to pick out those words that were familiar to him,

I guess its like learning a new language or something- if you know a few words of French and you have the context you can put things together, but if you don't have that context its really hard.

Precisely, so If someone was only blind and didn't have problems with their hearing then they would be able to pick up on that , but he doesn't pick up on things unless you draw his attention to it and unless he's familiar with it. so now whenever he hears 'degrees Celsius' his ears prick up.

Going back to children of a lesser god, in what way did it influence you?

What it did is it drove me...what you've got to bare in mind is that when S was born we were living in Zimbabwe at the time with very little support, so I thought, right how am I going to get this child to sign, so what I did is I went online and I found an American website and so I applied to a course with them. so it made me look at ways to communicate with S because we didn't have the resources available in Zimbabwe so they sent me out the (sign language) pack and funnily enough I went through I went through the pack the other day, and that's how I learnt to communicate with S, that was where I got my information from. Had I not seen that movie, I really would have not known where to start. I must be honest with you. I just knew, and it wasn't obviously, it was also American sign language because it was an American course but it wasn't like the uk did anything like that, America did and still does, they offer a lot of online courses for people who are deaf blind, they offer a lot of free resources for families and I only found that out because I was determined to do something to help S learn. So that's what drove me (the film.)

So in that way, good representation is really important then, if it got you to do this?

Yes, so important.

Do you think you can have as valid a connection with someone who doesn't communicate in a typical way?

Definitely. I think for me, if someone isn't able to communicate, or communicate well, I generally look at body language now. I look for gestures because when I look back to when S was pre language he was giving off a lot of gestures, let's put it that way. That at the time I didn't pick up on. But I've got videos, and when I look back at the videos I'm actually able to see 'oh' he was trying to mimic what I was doing but I didn't pick up on it. And its only now that I realize the significance of that – it's massive. If someone who is non-verbal is trying to mimic what you are actually physically doing, your gestures with their gestures.

Wow, but he couldn't see your gestures.

I know, exactly. But If you look at the video, what I used to do with my boys when they were young is I'd take their hand and I would sort of like go 'ahhhh' on my mouth, I just used to do that, it was like a game I used to play with them. and I'm actually holding S, and this was before I knew that he was deaf, I just thought that he was blind. So I'm

going 'ahhhh', I've got his hand in my hand and I'm touching his hand onto my mouth and going 'ahhhh' and the next thing, he took his hand and he did the same thing with his own mouth. And I didn't notice that until later on, years later I watched that video. Because I find it quite hard to watch videos of S when he was younger, but anyway I built up the courage and then I was sort of watching it and I thought wow I don't believe it he's actually doing it. He could have picked up sign way back then and I didn't know. That would have been when he was two. He was two years old.

And he got the cochlear at six did he?

Six, he was almost six.

So that must have massively changed things?

It changed over night, overnight. So he had the implant, then you've got to wait for everything to heal and then you come back from the switch on. The switch on, you know how sometimes you see those videos of babies, everyone looks at the baby, the baby looks at the mum and the baby starts smiling, S did not do that obviously because he couldn't see and he started screaming. Because I think, the best way that I can imagine what he was going through is all of a sudden his head filled with something, that we knew as noise that he just knew as nothing, and he was thinking what is this. So he actually got himself very worked up, it wasn't a happy experience I have to tell you. so we had to go back to the hotel, I think he was in shock. And S never sleeps in the afternoon but he actually fell asleep that afternoon. And it was a little disconcerting to be honest with you. But anyway, cut a long story short, we got home and then L got his guitar out and I said L, bring your guitar over here, and so L was strumming your guitar and then I said ok now stop and then I said to S, I pointed to S's mouth and I said to him now say 'go, go', and S did, he said 'go, go' and then I said to L, now when S says 'go', strum. And so with that, S did, that was his first word was 'go' and I said to l, every time he says go, play- I wanted him to realize it was cause and effect.

That's so clever! You should write a book or something.

No, no no! Anyway, so that again was just another way that we got him to talk. Because it was very, very tricky to get him to keep his processor on, it was a....we eventually had to get hold of the psychologist at great Ormond Street because he refused to keep the processor on. And we had to do it in tiny, literally it started off as a minute, we had him keep it on for a minute and after every minute he got a sticker, he likes stickers, he sticks them on his head, so after every minute of keeping it on he got a sticker. And then it went up to two minutes. I mean it was painstaking. But then eventually he realized how beneficial the processor was and then he wanted to keep it on, it really was, and a credit to the staff at the school because they literally sat there minute by minute by minute doing that. So it wasn't, you sort of think 'oh well the child's going to have a cochlear implant, it's going to be great', not always. Some of them, you know some children with hearing aids they actually throw them down the toilet, they know that's one way of getting rid of them, or in the bin, they don't want them. so yes, that's life isn't it.

Well there is so much controversy in the deaf community about them, but for S it must have been life changing.

Oh it was a life changer. It opened up his world. Without that, he wouldn't be the person he was today, it changed his life. I consider S more blind than deaf to be honest with you, if someone said what's his worst disability, what's the one he has to overcome more obstacles, its his blindness. And he knows he's deaf blind and he will often say, I don't want to be blind, I don't like being blind. He knows he cant see, its actually quite an interesting concept, over time we've actually explained to him more what it is, and I'm

pretty confident that he is fully aware that we can see things that he cant and that he is different in that respect. Its like with the boy on the road, the boy with the money, he knows that I can see something and its happening, he can hear the hooter so he knows that something's going on, he just needs someone to put it all into a form that he understands.

Interview 6

I remember when I moved to England people assumed, or I felt they put me in a place of not being very intelligent, but actually it was just because I didn't have access to as many words as I do in my mother tongue.

But you can express yourself fluently in English?

Yeah but not the same way as when I came originally in 2011. I could speak English, but more like to travel around, my English wasn't as strong.

So how did you find doing a drama degree, which is so much about expressing yourself?

It was really hard. Especially because some of teachers they treated me like I was stupid. One of the teachers always went down on her knee when she spoke to me, she didn't do that with anyone else. She just assumed that I was young and that ...I remember we has an anatomy class, which was half movement and half anatomy, and when I came (to England) I had come straight from nurse school, so I knew quite a lot but I couldn't express it at all, because I didn't have any of the words in English, but I knew way more than I think even the teacher who taught it did. It was frustrating.

Do you have in Denmark the different accents, like we have here, that people attribute less or more intelligence to?

Yeah, I have the accent where you are not assuming that people are very clever. I'm from working class.

That's so weird to me, because it's so weird that I just don't know that part of you and I just assume automatically that you're middle class

I think it would be a bit like countryside working class, that's my accent in Danish. It's not as strong anymore because I've lived in Copenhagen a long time, but its still there and its still one of the things that gets commented on the most. Because its very particular my accent, and its not that common, my parents are not even from that area, but for some reason I just adapted it straight away when I was a kid. And then after I moved back from England after such long time my accent had gone really strong again, it was almost gone before I went away and then it came back. But I've seen that happen a lot where people move away and learn a second language, when they come back they get the original accent from their first accent, even if for a long time they had lost it. Yeah so even though it isn't the same as having a disability, I definitely know that feeling in my body of being met with that assumption of not being intelligent because of my experience living in another country where I speak with a language where I'm limited. But I don't know if it is because of being an actor...I think I was always like this is a kid though, I'm sensitive to humans, I don't always communicate through the language but more through connection and I think that's why when I worked at the special needs school I just connected quite quickly with the students.

Do you think it's more to do with that natural instinct that it was to do with your experience with your mum?

Probably a mix, but I think it's more to do with something natural...kids does it, and I think I never grew out fully of doing that. When I was a kid I went to Italy and I don't speak Italian , and I would always get friends like this (instantly) and I would be friends with half the people in the camping area where we were staying and I would go out and have dinner with their families, I don't know how I did it, I don't know what we talked about, but I felt like I had talked to people and I had had fun. You know, just communicating. But I think it's just ..It's beyond language. I think all has it when they are a kid, and then when we grow up we take it away and we become so focused on the

spoken language and the written language and its like I never...I just continued playing. I like playing around with the kids at school

Yeah...I think what I found hard, not the not being able to connect through the language, because you can totally connect with little kids with play and games, but with the children with autism I found it hard often not being able to do that either because of lack of eye contact...just hard to connect at all sometimes.

mmm...I had some nice experiences with kids who didn't really connect with anyone but often they connected just with me, and I did it not by wanting the eye contact but for example copying their movements.

Which has got a fancy name- that's intensive interaction isn't it?

Yeah, fancy name, language again...but yeah, that always worked for me and build it up realllly slowly and at some point they would notice me doing it and either liking it or not but just having a reaction to it, and that would be the first point of contact. And then just sort of develop somehow, I would say a game. Especially one guy we had, I remember the speech and language therapist spent one time an hour filming us doing it because she'd seen us do it in the playground and she was like 'no-one can get contact with him, and here you are playing around with him'. And that's all I did, and I didn't force it, I didn't force him to do it- I did it, and when he was ready, he would join in. and it didn't come from a place of 'I have thought about this and I want to do it', it just came from playing, in the playground and so on, and then a teacher noticing this and saying 'oh wow its interesting what you're doing with him', but it came not out of a forced situation, I build up a way of doing things with a kid until anyone came and watched.

Do you miss it, working there?

Yeah actually I do, it was a bit more...It gave a bit more than the work I do now.

Than which work that you do now? The directing?

No, I prefer to direct. I mean the swimming pool. It was a job with meaning, whereas the job now is just for earning money.

I mean you are responsible for saving peoples lives...

That's not always how it feels but yes I guess I am!

But you know like, sometimes I felt like ...because I was just a TA I couldn't do that in the long run because I didn't have enough of a voice. I know that sounds a bit arrogant, but sometimes I felt like I had better ideas. I mean the teacher I worked for, he was amazing, like sometimes I led the classes but a lot of them, they were like no, you're a TA you need to fit into this hierarchy.

At that school, there were a lot of actors. I know that was partly as it worked with their time, but do you think there was something in it for the school as well?

Yes, definitely, they all said it made a massive difference in the school. it happened at some point- one started and then a friend came and in the end we were all actors and all from the same school, we knew each other very well, and they say it made a massive difference- a completely new energy came to the school because we all played. I think it's the playfulness, because we all played. We interacted with them in a different way. You referred to my mum before, I played with my mum as well, I didn't spend as much time trying to have conversations because she could answer like a three year old, so whats the point? I put really loud music on, and danced around her, or span her around the whole retirement home in her wheelchair, and she loved it; she'd be laughing and laughing and laughing- screaming down the hall- she loved it, she thought it was hilarious.

Do you think other people in your family were embarrassed to do that sort of thing?

Yeah, embarrassed, and at the same time...especially my dad could see how much my mum loved it. or like, I would take a balloon and blow it up and play balloon with her, and I think there's that limit where sometimes my dad would be like she's not a baby and I'd be like yes, I know she's not a baby but she's training her motor skills when we do it, so that's fine.

Mmm I guess its that balance, because she's not a baby, she's a fully grown adult so of course you don't want to patronize, but also its about meeting someone where they actually are

Yeah, exactly. And I think sometimes it can be even more patronizing actually attempting to have a conversation with someone who can't have a conversation, because often what I heard was people speaking in a weird way to her (sing song baby voice) 'oh lisa, I guess its time for us to have a bit of food' and its like, no *we're* not having food, you're going to feed her food. So I would say to her- hey mum, I'm going to feed you some dinner now, I would never say we were eating if I wasn't eating too. I did talk to her a lot as well, but she could understand everything, she just didn't have the capacity to answer back, or she didn't have any short term memory. But I would say things, things I knew made her happy, ask her questions I didn't need an answer for, but give her two options, like 'oh I don't know which shirt to wear for this party, mum' and I would show her both 'which one do you think?' and I would get her to point at which one and I could tell how happy she felt, because she felt like she had helped me, or been included. And actually I didn't need her help, but I did that quite a lot.

But how did you know how to do that, do you think?

I just did it.

Because that's how you would be trained to work with kids with autism, they always say to give the children two options like that- the red or blue, this thing to eat or this thing- so theres still that sense of having choice but not just an open ended question like 'what do you want to eat' because they wouldn't know what to say.

I think for me it was a mix of just following my gut and then a lot from having worked with kids of all ages, I worked with very small kids and then I worked with kids who have a lot of challenges, and then also having observed the professionals working with my mum. Especially when she spent half a year at the rehabilitation centre, and they were amazing, they were so good. I think I wasn't consciously aware, but I think constantly I was watching and adapted some of that. And I think, yes ok, there was one massive difference ...a lot of my actor colleagues who worked at the special needs school, although they were very good at all the playing as well, they all had to get past being used to being around people with a disability whereas I think when its your mum, its not a thing to get past, I was in the process- I was in the process next to her when she was in the coma, and I was in the process when she woke up and had to learn to use her fingers. The process was somehow natural because I joined every step of it, it was never strange or a weird thing, it was just natural. So in that sense when I joined the school I had a lot of experience having had a brain damaged mum because its not weird for me to be around someone who is you know, an adult and still use a diaper, or who cant communicate, at least in the way that we expect to communicate.

But was it not weird for a while, to get used to having a different mum, in a way?

Yes. And it was weird the first time I had to change her diaper, without a doubt, definitely that was not nice in anyway. but then when I then worked at a school and had to change a sixteen year old diaper, that wasn't weird at all, because if you can change your mums diaper...and of course in that way I had learnt a lot, because I had learnt how

to use a life, how to technically, with the diaper, its not like changing a baby...so in that way I had learnt a lot of skills. But then also I had learn that from being at the nurse school because we got trained in that from being at the nurse school as well

Whats the schooling like in Denmark, do they have special needs schools or is it integrated?

To be completely honest I don't know enough about it. the kids Ive worked with in Denmark have been those with special needs but of a different kind- like they're an orphan, for example- or with challenging behavior because of emotional circumstances. But I do have two friends, one with a son with autism and one with a son with downs syndrome, and they both go to special needs schools that they're really happy with. The school I went to, when I was a child myself, was a mixed school, so we shared some of the same buildings...that was really good, I think all schools should be like that. We didn't actually come together that much, but we shared the same building, so we saw each other around, so growing up it was normal for me to see kids in a wheelchair, or with tubes. Maybe sometimes if they had to go to the sensory room, they would have to pass our classroom and then we would say hello...they did have their own department on the school. I think now in Denmark its becoming like England more and more where they do try to integrate everybody all together, but the problem is that one teacher doesn't have the ability to reach everybody and those with a special need. And often those will pay are those with the special needs who wont get the help they need.

Yeah, when I worked in a mainstream school as a one to one with a deaf and autistic boy, he couldn't follow any of the classes, he was just stuck in the corner with me all day, he couldn't make any friends, he was so angry and frustrated all the time. Whereas when I worked in a special needs school, the pace of the days could actually fit with these kids needs, so much more gentle, so the kids were so much happier and they had friends...

I really think that the way that it was when I grew up was amazing, because they had the ability to have exactly their schedule, work in their way. Also have different kind of classrooms because they need different things...but at the same time, have a mixed environment. Just a thing that it becomes natural...like when we did school schools, they were invited in and then saw it. I don't know, I think that's really important.

Yeah, I think its tricky, because if people with disabilities are totally segregated that's obviously not good either. Toms said at his school they had a similar thing to you, different buildings, but for example they shared music classes together...

Yeah it not common for Denmark, that's just how it was at my school.

Did your parents choose that on purpose?

No they actually wanted me at a different school. I'm from...that's weird to say in England where things can be way more rough...but for MY town, I'm from the rough part of the city and we went to a tiny little school. the school actually didn't have a very good reputation, but I liked it there.

You've done a lot of acting as well that's not verbal, haven't you?

Yes, everything I do in Denmark. That's actually really nice. I have a theatre company in Denmark, its not of choice, we might do something with words, but so far- we have three shows running, one has words and the other two are completely non verbal. And the one that has words is about democracy and females right to vote, and it's a bit more an educational piece of theatre , where two others are completely non verbal and we go around all sorts of places, and we also every year go back to a special needs school, and its really interesting because they love it so much.

The play with the words or the ones without?

The ones without. They are so into it, they love it.

Isn't it a much harder skill to be able to act without lines?

I like it more. I think I developed that skill more when I came to England and I felt a little bit limited on stage because I didn't have my own language. Also we did clowning for a long time and I found out that clowning really suited me. For several reasons, my clown didn't speak, I didn't have any words and that character pretty much went straight into a show and then a similar character went into a show that I then took on and travelled around with. And its interesting because we did it in Edinburgh and I remember I got a lot of really good reviews, and I was not the main character but I was constantly on stage, and I was just walking around. And its all about the game, its all about finding the game. And I think that's the key.

What does that mean, finding the game?

That's like, being playful. And it's a lot about timing, and its the same when you communicate with people without language I find. I can't say everyone, because I would struggle more with a deaf person because I don't do sign language and of course its silly for me to just be over expressive...

No, but that's the thing because when S (a mutual friend) has met any of my deaf friends, they've all just adored her, because she's got no embarrassment about not wanting to insult them by acting childish...but deaf people are generally much more expressive anyway. she's just always so, so expressive and she gets her point across and they just revert back to mime and they have somehow a conversation.

It's the same with my family, they don't speak English, but when they came to visit, they loved her. Its because she speaks like a child when she speaks to them! shes very good at adapting, she's so clear.

My first boyfriend was deaf, and I was so jealous after she met him, because sometimes we couldn't even understand each other, even though I could sign but she just had this whole conversation with him through mime and he was like, you need to be more like her! It is having lack of inhibitions. It's a bit like the intensive interaction thing, I remember thinking it was a bit stupid when I first heard of it because it's a bit like giving a name to something everyone does naturally with babies – you just copy what they do all the time. If they make a noise, you don't correct them, you just copy what they do back. But when it's a child or someone who should be at the age where they can talk then its wrong to copy what they say, you should correct them. but actually, the whole point of intensive interaction is that you meet them where they are and you respect what they're saying as being a real thing.

Exactly. I never felt I was being condescending to my mum, never. I respected her sooo much but that's where she was, she didn't have the language. what can be hard, of course for a lot of people, is that they do have the understanding, they understand everything that is being said, but they can't say it, that is a hard balance and I think that's where its really easy to be an idiot. My mum was a funny case, because it depended a lot how much she understood on how tired she was, from day to day. On a really good day she was really clever and she could understand everything but not communicate back. Its hard to say, because she couldn't communicate so I could only guess but for example she could be laughing at things on the TV, where you were like 'woah, how did you get that?' it was small things like that. Or like one time I remember, a man got undressed on TV and she went 'ooooo' and we were laughing so much just because we didn't expect...for a few reasons. We all thought she was asleep , so we

didn't think she was even present but also we also very wrongly, thought that she didn't have those desires or thoughts like that, but of course, she's a grown up woman, of course she's thinking like that. That's a whole other subject, working with teenagers with special needs, working with sexuality. That's something we talked a lot about at the school, or me and M (teacher of her class) talked about and tried to bring up but they were closed down about it. like, they should be taught about masturbation or they had one student in the oldest group who masturbated a lot, and luckily he was with a really good teacher. And i said, we need to teach him that he needs to go to the toilet when he wants to masturbate, the problem is not the masturbation, the problem is that he would just start doing it in the class. Its not teaching him that its wrong to masturbate, its teaching him where is it appropriate for him to masturbate. And that, a few teachers were really good about, and those ones were not british teachers I have to say, whereas a lot were like no, no we cant talk about it.

So how did your dad talk to your mum, was it the same as he always had or...?

We all changed a bit, so did I, I would lie if I said not. And also I was only eighteen you know? I was very aware of not speaking down to her, speaking to her like she was a child, and once in a while I heard myself saying things where I was like oof...but it was hard because, for example, she could get a bit attention seeking sometimes if she felt like she wasnt getting enough attention and then she would start throwing the food, or playing with her fork. And I would have to say 'mum, can you stop doing that' and as soon as you start asking someone to behave differently, you are the adult and they are the child. that was weird sometimes. There were situations that were weird. Like most of the time she had no idea about needing the toilet, but once in a while she went 'oh I need a wee' and I thought every time she did that we should take her to the toilet but the staff in a place like that, they don't have the time, and what happened was that they'd take her every time she said that, and then when she got to the toilet nothing happened. So they kind of said no. its very hard to say to your mum 'you just need to just ...let go'. She would look at me like 'I cant wee myself'.

So she had moments of real clarity then?

Yes, it came very rarely but it came once in a while, she was very clear. Like one time she looked at me and she said 'I cant walk, can i?' and I said 'no you can't' and she just (mimes bursting into tears). And then she forget two seconds later. that was quite hard those situations. That's something I think a lot about. I hated it so much when staff came in and said- you know in Denmark you often say to a small kid 'oh shall we give you a clean bum?' and it danish its sounds sweet, it's a way of saying it when you are changing them and often staff, very wrongly, would say the same to my mum and I would stop them every time and say DON'T speak like that. And I think that became an advantage working in a special needs school with students who were ten and above. You do not use the same language as you do with a toddler, because its not the same.

That lucidity...I think that's hard. I worked with a girl for a long time, who was fourteen when I started, over the years of 14 and 18 I worked with her on and off and changed her nappy, but she was very much like a child I guess so that's not embarrassing at all, but I think it would find it really hard with someone who was even at all compis mentis, if they were an adult, to do that. To know how to speak to them in that situation.

The first time I changed my mum, she cried when I did it. I talked to her and I said 'I can see that you're upset'. She had no language at that point, the language came a bit later. I was really sensitive to find out – do you prefer that I leave? But in the very beginning we did it, with the idea that hopefully at some point she could home and then I would need

to know how to do it. but then it became clear that she wasn't coming home and then to protect and actually mostly to protect myself I stopped doing it unless it was absolutely necessary. And then it wasn't hard because it was like of course im going to help my mum if she really needs it, and I found a good way of making it clear like 'ok mum, theres not enough staff, I'm going to do it, is that ok?' and my mum adored me so she was always like yes, yes , yes. I showered her a few times as well.

You said you showered your dad even?

(laughing) Yeah I did. My dad broke his leg, and as he already only has one leg he couldn't do anything so I had to help him.

But you said he wasn't very happy about it?

No...it was very intimate. In the beginning I was like right you're going to wash your bum yourself, but then it was so complicated for him to do it, it was just like right ok. It was horrible and then at the same time, it was easier because we could talk about it, so we could both express 'this is not very nice, this is a necessity'.

Could he not have someone come in and do it?

This is how Denmark isn't very good; you can have a shower once every 14th day **14th day?! Bloody hell! You'd stink!**

Exactly, especially seeing as he's very relatively big, he walks with his whole weight every time he moves, he sweats. It was summer. That's a disgusting. But normally he had a shower every day. That way, that has really affected by life, being different, because although its not the same, he only has one leg, it is a disability, so it has always has been a natural thing.

Can you ever remember being embarrassed about it?

No. no...I one time did with my mum but that was because I worked as a supply teacher and I'd been out for a walk with my mum and some of the students had seen me and the next day some of them yelled 'hey I saw you the other day when you were out with that spazzer' and of course they were just young and immature. And this was when everything was quite new, my mum had been sick for maybe a year, I was nineteen years old but I just took a deep breath and I thought this is my time to teach them something. And I said 'actually , I was out with my mum'. And they were completely still. And I said 'do you have any questions, im willing to answer anything.' And then I just gave them 15 minutes where they could ask anything. They asked me many. And there was this other teacher that then reported back that they had talked so much about it afterwards. They saw me out walking somebody in a wheelchair and they had an idea about that and they were then completely shocked when they then realized that that was my mum.

Its like then she becomes a real person.

Then she becomes a real person, exactly. 'How could she have you like that?' 'well she wasn't like that when she had me, she became sick later on' and it was this whole new world for them.

Its almost as if disabled people were a whole new species, and its like oh well she must have been a real person at one point if she had a baby...

But that's what so many people who don't have a natural link to people with disabilities, that's what disabled people become to them, a whole new species in a way, especially when they are without language.

There is a big festival for theatre every year in Denmark and I went last year and this guy, this deaf guy came to my show and he loved it , and of course he could understand it because it had no words. But he just loved it. he was with a translator and I had a long conversation with him and now I meet him once at a while, and ive spent quite a lot of

time with him. And it is awkward, I remember the first time when we spoke for a bit longer than just hello, I was really awkward because I couldn't work out how to ...

You mean how to speak to him with the interpreter?

Yes- am I looking at her, am I looking at him? and then I thought, come on relax , you're looking at him, he's who you're talking to. But even for me, who is pretty used to being around a lot of different people this was a new thing, I've never been around anyone who was just deaf. And I was getting a bit , like, disturbed that she was there, I just wanted to talk only with him but because I can't sign that was not an option. Sometimes, after a few times having met him with his interpreter, I've bumped into him out without an interpreter and I've enjoyed meeting him without but the conversation is shorter because you just go with (mouthing) how are you I'm FINE THANKS, YOU? and then we give each other a hug and we smile, we hug again, it's a little bit more simple, we don't go so far.

Do you ever write stuff down?

No, because it's always been at the theatre

That's what's quite good about phones is people always have them on them, so you don't need a pen and paper, you just text stuff

That's quite smart, I've never thought of that. But yeah, his play was about – he's an actor too- he did a play about a deaf boy and his sister.

In sign language?

She speaks, and they sign together. They've done it really cleverly, kind of in the way they do the conversation, because she explains a lot to us, or she talks and signs, or she repeats his question, it makes sense, it doesn't feel condescending...it's really well done. I was never in doubt what was going on, even when they were properly arguing in sign, because as you said before, deaf people tend to be a little bit more expressive, so I could read his body language. yeah I might not know exactly what word he thought of at her but I could tell that he was really angry .

Does it make you want to learn sign language?

Yeah...but now it's going to make me sound like such a dick 'yeah I would like to but I just can't find the time' ...but yeah I would. I saw a youtube clip with a british girl who's brother uses sign and she's made it her mission to teach people to sign over youtube.

How does silence make you feel?

It depends on the situation. But I think I am generally more comfortable in silence than most people. I feel so many people feel awkward in silence but it's nice sometimes not to try and fill up the gaps with talk, it's nice to be with someone in silence. I did that quite a lot with my mum, I would just sit and hold her hand, just be with her like that. That's another thing, in general in the western world, well especially Denmark and England I can speak of, we are very uncomfortable with physical contact. We're not that physical. And it is a very big help to be more physical. I'm not saying that just because you have a disability you will want people to touch you, of course not, and some people misunderstand, a bit like people think we can just touch babies, very wrongly people think they have the permission to just touch people who are disabled. And you can't. but at the same time, for example with my mum, a bit like some autistic people, she really responded well to deep pressure. She had one of those heavy duvets as well. Because she couldn't feel herself, so she got very tense and scared, but if you got her relaxed she had less pain, because she wasn't tensing up and stuff. I could do it, and also some of the workers had just a natural way of giving her squeezes that relaxed her and then the communication was better.

And laughter. Lets find that source, its so freeing, lets laugh together. If I know how to make you laugh, lets do that and that's a space to be in as well, to laugh. Even just ...I'm not sure about this, but I think when we laugh we release some endorphin in our brain. Its something about...when we really laugh, we let go and when we let go , we are equal. And that's the trick, its finding the equality because the equality so often goes out the window when one has language and one doesn't. and I think that's the hard one; how do we become equal when in some way we're not? I wasn't equal with my mum, because I had to feed her, but at the same time I had a very big awareness that 'you gave birth to me, its because of you I'm on this planet, so I will forever be well below you and looking up to you and respecting you'. but of course a lot of people looking after someone wouldn't have that relationship with someone and then I can see how its easy to feel that you are above , I guess that's the challenge in our society , how do we create equality when we're not...well we are because in the end we're all just humans.

And any of us is capable of just changing over night, as you know.

Yeah and my god do I hope I die before that happens, having gone through that process and seen because its not ...I mean in some ways my mum wasn't really aware of what was happening so most of the time I think she was actually really happy, she laughed a lot, she laughed an awful lot. But we care a lot about is this person having a good life, is this a *worthy* life, is this person living a worthy life. What are they going to go around and start killing each other? as long as they are not doing that, and I'm not doing that then yes, if you are breathing , then lets make everyones life a worthy life.

I did a really interesting workshop, which was at the dinorama theatre, it was because I had a show on in the main space, and if you have a show on in the main space with them then it's a demand that you have captions in one performance and one relaxed performance. They can bring a carer or don't turn lights off completely, its completely fine to talk. I met this guy in Denmark who was really enthusastic about bringing it to Denmark and set up all these fancy meetings with me and one was with the opera who were going to do it, but in the end they said oh no its too complicated. But its really frustrating because once you've done it you realize that actually its not that complicated but it can seem so complicated, or some people think it will compromise the artistic vision or whatever but its not true, its so giving, so amazing and it feels so right when you do it. now I would never dream of not having that access for everyone. Did you ever see backstage at biscuit land? It was just so touching hearing her story, and so horrible thinking about how she had to sit in the sound booth.

I found it really challenging because it made me really honestly assess how I would have felt if I had bought expensive tickets and someone was making an annoying noise..

But the thing is, when we make so really not ok, we are stressing all these people out who potentially have a disability , and it makes it worse. I was once at the theatre and there was this man that I thought was just being rude and making annoying noises and then looking back I realized no he just had a disability.

To be honest, I think if I knew that someone just had tourettes it wouldn't annoy me. its like when there's a neighbor making noise late at night because they're just rude it really pisses me off, but if it's a baby crying I don't care because I know they're obviously not being rude.

But then how does that work? Do we then start putting posters on the doors of shows saying 'hey sorry but there's somebody with tourettes in tonight?'

No but I think if people generally were just more aware of what turrets was, or autism etc, then you would just know.

Exactly, and its so rewarding when you do it, and its so giving to perform to people with special needs for example, because they are just so present. They have kept some of that child like reaction to what they see because that's how they express themselves, so they will go 'ahhhh!' and make all these noises, and you can quickly start to read these noises as are they scared, are they excited and its lovely to play against, you get an immediate reaction- feed that back to me, and then you can start using it and playing with them, its amazing.

Interview 7

What is your perception of silence?

It depends on the context I think. Sometimes it can be really peaceful but if it's a silence that is imposed on you, like if you're silent because you feel like you can't speak because you'll be judged or you can't physically speak, then not comfortable. So I think it depends on the context of the silence.

Sometimes I think silence its in own language in that way...

But like when I studied radio, basically we were taught that we should not have silence because silence and radio, unless its like very artsy radio, its dead. Because people are going to think that the radio's broken.

Really? Even when you were writing radio plays?

Maybe not radio plays, its just we don't really have a culture of radio plays in Brazil so much. But I think we're just so encouraged about having opinions and just talking and talking and talking and not really pausing...like if you were having an interview on the radio in Brazil you just have to be like 'er, um, errr' just so people knew you were still there!

Being a writer, do you think language plays more of a part in shaping your identity than most people, or do you think language is a part of everyone's identity?

I think its part of everyone's identity but I think because I'm a writer I reflect more on that than maybe other people? I think some people only associate language with grammar or books and they forget that everything else is language and movements are language and you can cover so many other thoughts and ideas through other things that are not like... 'classical language' that I think people think language is, like speech or speaking a different language. so I think I think more about language but I think everyone is embedded in language.

What do you mean by movements are language?

Um, like even for instance like flirting is a language and the absence of movement is also a language. like if you see a dad and son together and they aren't touching, why aren't they touching?

But that's interesting to me, because I see that from you being not just a writer but a film writer, because you write down all those actions- isn't a lot of film scripts just directions rather than dialogue?

Yeah, its like 'show don't tell' because you don't to be 'I'm touching you because I like you!' you just want to show that through movement.

And how were you taught how to write dialogue? I remember being taught that you want to make dialogue seem realistic but you don't want it to actually be real- because real dialogue is really boring

I think it depends on the kind of film you want to make. I like films with really quick, funny dialogue and I also like films where nobody says anything in fifteen minutes. I think the dialogue has to serve a purpose for the story and the tone of the story, I think that's one of the reasons I like film so much because every single aspect of it reflects the story that you want to tell, every single decision and wardrobe and actors and dialogue and direction and editing and pace- everything is language in a sense, what the person is wearing at that moment is showing who they are and um...

All communicating something?

Yeah, yeah.

So I wonder in that way if communication and language are different things? I guess I've often thought of language and silence as almost diametric opposites that work together to make communication ...

Maybe do you think that language is a system with a number of signs that everyone has an agreement that they all understand?

You've just quoted Saussure

I've just quoted what?

You know Friedrich Saussure that's just what he says!

(laughing) oh maybe I've read it before and now I'm like 'I've just had this incredible idea!' But for instance there's this Brazilian writer who created a lot of words, so he would be writing and then he would combine two words to make a new word, and then just by the context or the sound of it you would understand what he wanted to say. I had to do a paper about him when I was in high school and I invented this new word for the title of the paper and then my teacher said it was wrong and I was like 'yes but im doing what he's doing' and she just said that's not a real word, she just didn't get it.

Did she not realize that he made up new words?

I think she just didn't think that I was that clever. But I think that's just interesting because he's inventing these words that people don't know what it is but just from the sound and the combination that he's making people understand.

I don't know whether this is a particularly English thing but nonsense poems are like that, just a load of made up noises but you have this sense that they mean something but when you look at them written down it really is just a load of made up words. But that's how children learn isn't it?

But even if you think like Charlie Brown, the comic, peanuts- its just the children who use language, the adults are all just like 'mwha ohh ah ee'

Or like pingu...and the clangers...makes me think about my niece, whenever adults laugh at something she will just laugh along too, even though she doesn't understand the joke

So in England we can recognize whether somebody is 'middle' or 'working' class just from the way they speak, do you have that in Brazil as well?

I think its not as much as here, I think here it can be quite specific. But you definitely have 'proper' grammar and incorrect grammar- like if you mix single and plural together you are probably from a more working class background or you didn't attend school that much. I think sometimes what happens also in brazil, depending or where you go, is sort of an inverse bullying in the sense that people don't joke about the way you sound if you sound working class, they joke if you sound posh.

Really? What do you sound like?

I sound more posh, in terms of words that I use and being more accurate with my grammar

But not an accent?

Not really no, I think that's the difference between San Paulo and London. Most people from San Paulo are from San Paulo, and then you can really recognize whether someone is from the north or the south but then you're just from the north or the south... but san Paulo is quite a flat accent, I wouldn't even know how to say that this is what a San Paulo accent sounds like.

When you came to England could you tell the difference between a working class and a middle class accent?

Not really no.

Can you now?

I mean...probably not. I mean I know more now where people are from geographically but I wouldn't be able to say whether that relates to working class or middle class.

Its interesting because of course you being from brazil means people can listen to your accent and be like 'foreigner!' but in another way it's a kind of a safety zone, in that people cant tell what background your from, because they don't know it.

I guess it's a bit of a shield with no preconceptions. I think I also haven't been exposed to that many different brazillan accents to be honest, I haven't travelled that much.

Do people stay in their areas?

I think people mostly migrate, either if they need work, or if they're travelling, which can be really expensive because we don't have a train system so you have to fly so its only wealthy people really who travel. So we are kind of confined in our own little divisions. But its funny the English accent thing too, because my mum when she first met (friends name) she was like 'oh he has such a nice accent!' because he sounds like the people she's heard on the films, that's the thing, I think maybe there's more (accents) now, but especially period dramas you don't exactly hear any ken loach type accents and even when I watch Ken Loach films now I need subtitles!

How do you think it's influenced you creatively having two languages? And do you ever write creatively in Portuguese?

I can't remember the last time I wrote something creative in Portuguese.

What age was it then you started writing in English? When did you even learn it?

I started learning English when I was seven, we have private language schools in Brazil, so you go to school and then in afternoon you have an hour twice a week in English. It was very fun, as a kid you're basically just playing around in English.

Did everyone go?

No it was more middle class.

Did you parents think it was really important then?

Yeah they thought it was important. My dad always liked to travel and his English wasn't very good so he thought id have an advantage, and my mum was a translator.

So it's always been a second language I guess?

Yeah I think so. I think I started writing scripts in English when I was like eighteen.

Interesting. Because now you write characters that are set in England, but before you had lived in England you were writing scripts in English- weren't they not set in brazil? How did that work?

But that's the thing I think ive always written stories that took place anywhere, like they weren't very specific. Like I remember I wrote a script in Portuguese that was about this woman who falls in love with a butcher and then the butcher disappears and then everybodys like, she killed him?? but it was like, a little town, but it could be a little town in brazil, or a little town in england. I think my stories are never very geographically centered. My first script in English was about these two people who swap bags at the airport by mistake and then they get home and they are trying to figure out who the other person is by their belongings- that could be in any language. I think it gets more specific depending on what you have- you could play with brands or place names but in general it could be any language.

That's so funny because when I write I feel like I have to know their backstory and then I always think where their from is such an integral part of that

Well that's why I think I have a lot of imposter syndrome because I feel like, even the stories I'm writing now I'm like can I connect to these stories enough if they're English and I'm not? Like do I know enough if im not from there. But then at the same time I

don't just want to write characters who are from Brazil and then move to England because I think that's quite boring!

But you could write characters that are living in Brazil- I would find that really interesting!

But then all my friends feel like I'm not Brazilian enough, like I seem not to fall in a category, I feel like I'm in limbo and I think that's why I like magical realism so much because its like this fantastic thing that I don't have to belong anywhere to write about it because its just like fairy tales, grown up fairy tales in a way.

Was your dad Portuguese?

He was from Maderia and he moved to Brazil when he was eight years old or something like that, he was quite young, but he was the youngest out of his siblings

And your mum ...?

Brazilian—her parents moved to Brazil.

So it's not like you grew up with the sense of being from somewhere else or anything?

No but its quite weird because when my dad was alive, theres a massive Portuguese community in Brazil, and I was watching videos from when I was little and we would all meet up and we'd listen to Portuguese music and dance to Portuguese music and eat Portuguese music.

So he was pretty attached to his roots?

Oh yeah, he was so attached, like so much.

What did he do again?

So he studied as a journalist and then he made a film and then he worked a bit as a journalist and then he opened ...he really liked supermarkets and food stores and stuff like that, like businesses selling food, so he first opened a supermarket with his siblings and then he opened a little shop in a Jewish neighbourhood in San Paulo.

Jewish neighbourhood?

Yeah! I knew everything about Jewish cuisine thanks to my dad.

He wasn't Jewish though was he?

No he wasn't. I say that my dad was a religious slut because he just loved everything religious.

But he wasn't religious?

A bit, like he was very spiritual that's the thing, like he wanted us to get baptized but at the same time he loved the jewish religion and he was also really into budhism! But it happened to be in the jewish neighborhood so he got lots of suppliers selling Matzah ... he really liked people, and then when he passed away my mum managed it for a bit but she hated it. she likes the people that she likes you know? But if you do sales you have to work with a lot of people that are not very nice

Before your dad died, how long was he ill for?

About two and a half years

And his language was affected?

Yeah by the end he couldn't speak at all...I don't know in terms of time line, I just remember that we created that cardboard thing , we put like letters of the alphabet and we'd be like 'a,b,c' and he had to blink at the letter to create the speech.

The same as Diving Bell and the Butterfly?

Yeah but I think they probably had a better system...that was the first time when I was like 'oh shit somebody did that!' I think they had a better system because I think they put the letters that were most used in the French language at the beginning whereas we

had it in alphabetical order which meant we always had to go back to the beginning and I think organically there are probably more letters that you use, where if they were at the beginning then it would have been less work

Was it an occupational therapist that came up with it?

I think so, he had a nurse and he had some therapies and some people doing physio so I think one of them probably came up with that

Can you remember using it?

No, it would have been too confusing for me, I was too little, it would have been too frustrating

So how did you communicate?

Just ...touch I think? I'd say things and....but I think at some point communication just stopped because it was just too hard. Like even that was just used for bare necessities because it was just so hard to form a sentence that it had to be quite important.

That must have been so hard, to have had such a huge change....to go your whole life living in one way and then live in such a different way

Yeah, and I think really quite hellish, because imagine like he would have an itch or he was in a position that was hurting and he would have to spend five minutes spelling it out just to be like 'oh you have to move a bit!' its like I think its also because there was no support from like health(care) I think. I don't know how it was now but at the time nobody knew anything about the disease so it was just learning on the job a bit.

Was it the whole time he was ill he was unable to speak?

No, but it moved quite fast, or maybe that's my own memories. I remember him well and then I remember him really sick, I don't remember an in between.

Has your mum talked to you more about what it was like communicating with him?

Not really, no. I mean recently I've become quite interested but I also get a little bit scared that it might hurt a bit. Like I think my mum is glad that for a long time she wanted to talk about it and my brother and I just didn't want to talk about it because it was too painful and then I went to therapy and I could talk about it and then I was really interested, mainly knowing more about my dad and I think she was really happy because she wanted me to address it but especially now that she lives alone and stuff I get a little bit scared about talking too much about it because I think there's a limit now that I'm learning, that you don't have to talk about it *all* the time. Like I think its bad if you're hiding because you're afraid but also if its going to make you sad then you don't have to go there constantly. And even now the last time I went to Brazil I love looking at pictures and stuff and I was looking at old pictures and at some point it was making me a bit sad.

I guess that's why its hard talking about grief, because whenever I've gone through it I've been so angry that nobody talks to me the way I want to be talked to but then I try talking to people the way I would have wanted it and they're like fuck off...like there's no right way.

I think its also not just the grief its also the process of the disease that he had. I think the most painful thing for us wasn't the losing him, which was very, very painful but it was the how. I had to help my mum basically carry my dad and he had to be fed through a tube and he got super, super thin, like nothing on his bones and it was just a bit scary seeing your parent turn into this thing so I think its not just the dying but like how. I think talking about my dad in the good moments is ok for my mum and I think talking about missing him is ok but I think maybe the disease part can be quite hard. But its also financial insecurities , like it was really expensive the treatment stuff and then we had to

paid bills and were at a very expensive school so I think she must have been stressed with so many things.

Do you think you've had a different experience than somebody who lost a parent very quickly then?

I think so because I kind of contemplated my dad being dead for a very long time. I think if somebody lost their dad in a car accident it would be very different. I don't know which one is worse to be honest but I think its just very different. And its just so unique, even a parent who had cancer, it's a different disease, they might be speaking until the very last day.

Do you think of your dad when he was well as being the same person or do you think of him as almost a different person?

When he got sick? I think it changes your identity for sure but I think deep down...I think you're just under layers. Like my dad he was very expressive , he liked dancing and singing and you lose half of that when you cant actually move or talk. So I think your identity goes with that and maybe you develop a new one. But I think your identity is still kept in some sort of soul. But yeah...its terrible.

It must be so different to have language and then lose it...just when I think of like A who I've worked with a long time, she's never had any language but you don't get any sense of sadness from her about that.

How do you communicate?

You can ask her things and she can understand some things you ask her and she does have some of her own signs but she'll just use the same signs over and over again, she just wants to be in the conversation and she'll use her eyes and mannerisms. But I guess there is a lot of movement in that and you're dad couldn't move

But I also think its like that thing, you must feel so...the loss of power. Because I even see with my brother, he speaks English but he doesn't speak English as well as he speaks Portuguese and he's a very intelligent guy and I can see him sometimes be quite frustrated when he cant get a idea across, just because he wants to use complex words that he doesn't know in English. And I can see that's a little bit like my dad except in relation to *everything*. This is a man who was a journalist and now he cant even say 'my.back. hurts.' You know?

Totally, I think its that loss of power. I also think its that contrast between what you can think and what you can say. Like A is perfect as she is but she doesn't have the ability to comprehend the same system of communication that we have, its not like there's a horrible gap between what shes thinking and what she's saying.

But I wonder sometimes if language helps you process things because my grandma left school when she was thirteen and then she was very religious and she suffered a bit from depression and she didn't enjoy going to therapy that much. And I wonder a bit if she didn't even have the words to express how she was feeling. Because she came from a very practical background. Like you're hungry, you're tired? There isn't like 'I have a sense of no purpose in life and therefore...' she didn't have that. so I think it must have been quite like difficult for her to feel sad or whatever it was she was feeling and not even be able to explain.

I think that's such an interesting point. Because there's apparently quite a big correlation between autism and clinical depression and of course a lot of people with autism struggle to communicate. So yeah, totally, not having the ability to express how you feel...

Even to yourself. Because I remember sometimes a technique I developed when I was having panic attacks was telling myself what was happening- in my head, I wouldn't just down the street talking down out loud! So I'd be like 'so your heart is racing, you're anxious but it's going to be ok'

That's CBT! That's what I had to be taught- did you just figure that out yourself?

Yeah, I just developed these tiny monologues for myself and I was like, well this is helping.

How did you know that? That's literally what I went to classes for. I did a work book!

I don't know how or why!

I think that's such an interesting point ...I remember an old school teacher of mine was like oh bloody westerners, they just fabricate problems in therapy because they have too much time, in the olden days blah blah. But its like yeah, probably people didn't have the time in the past to talk through their feelings, but it didn't mean they didn't have the feelings.

Yeah because I was reading this article about this man that does a lot of research into therapy in Africa, because people say that people don't have depression in under-developed countries but when he started investigating in his village he realized that a lot of people had mental health problems, its just they didn't have the time or money to go to therapy. So you had a lot of really depressed people going to work every day. And so because therapy was so expensive, he developed this 'bench' therapy where he would teach a whole load of people ...just to be the best therapist that they could be, and people would just sit down on this bench every day and have conversations. It was just a way of sharing how they were feeling. So I think that people have always felt like that but now we have names, and I think names can be good and bad. Like I remember when I started doing therapy I didn't know what I had. I wanted to know what I had so that I could know the cure, and my therapist would never say. And then eventually I was like 'I think I'm depressed'. But I think it was quite good, because I think it can be quite easy to label it and not reflect on it. so I think labels can be good and bad.

Yeah its interesting because I get really irrationally annoyed that ALL my students seem to have anxiety and part of me is just like uhhh its just a modern thing but then looking into it im like oh right I clearly have anxiety too. I used to say about myself growing up 'im such an anxious person' and my mum did too about herself but now I'm like oh she clearly has anxiety - and actually its good to be like its something that I HAVE rather than I AM

Anyway, ok I have another nice, light question- do you find it easier to write about grief than to talk about it?

I think it depends because when I'm writing about it it's a bit more professional, in the sense that I want it to be a good piece of writing, whereas when I'm talking about it, unless I was giving a talk- which I never have!- I feel like I'm more spontaneous. When I'm writing I have more of an editors approach, whereas when I'm talking I just have a conversation. Do you mean hard as in personally hard? I think that depends, because when I'm writing I really have to think about it a lot, but then when I'm talking about it its almost like I have a visual of it.

How do you find- cos obviously you write about death a lot!- but you write fiction, lots of different characters- do you think its therapeutic in some way, placing the experience of grief in a fictional setting?

I think it is, I think it's a bit cathartic. I think I can have characters do things that didn't do, and put myself in fake scenarios in a way, which is quite nice! Play God a bit! I think I

like writing characters who are not necessarily worse than me, but I like writing characters who are flawed, because I think I can be quite harsh on myself and writing characters who are awful sometimes its like, well everyone can be awful sometimes. And just seeing myself as different people- like now I'm writing a dad and a mum, so its oh how did my dad feel? And how did my brother and mum feel? And just thinking in this story the dad is worrying about having kids cos of climate change and thinking oh my parents probably did actually think about that so its quite interesting.

I think death is seen as something uncomfortable and also impolite – like if you say 'oh yeah I lost my dad' then somebody should just move on the conversation. You shouldn't say oh how? Where?! And obviously you have to understand and read the room a bit but I been speaking to some people recently where there a bit different.

When you think of your dad as being ill- do you think of him as being ill or as being disabled? Do you think there's a difference?

I think there's a difference. I mean, maybe I'm wrong but I think disabled is something that you have to live with and it doesn't necessarily have a cure but you can still have a life with it. Like you can not see or not talk and still have a life and I understand there are difficulties, but he was either going to be cured-which there is no cure- or he was going to see. It was definitely a disease , so I didn't see him as being disabled.

If there's a taboo about death, do you think there is a taboo about illness as well?

I think yeah...that's basically why I don't speak to my dad's family is because they basically left when he was sick, they didn't want to see him like that. it wasn't pretty and I was really embarrassed. Like now that I reflect on it, I didn't want to bring friends home, I didn't want to tell them what my dad had. Like a lot of my friends, speaking to them a long time after they were like yeah you never mentioned your dad so I didn't want to ask anything , like I thought your parents had maybe separated. And then I found out that my brother would actually lie to his friends and say that his dad was travelling, so definitely yeah. I think especially when its not a pretty disease. Like maybe if he was dying but he was still walking around then it would be fine. But actually when you're pissing standing up and you're drooling, its not pretty and nobody wants to be next to it.

I guess that's more than being a taboo then, cos its not just oh I don't want to talk about it, its just that it feels really sad and awful to be around or think about

I think later on I had a lot of regrets like I could have been nicer or funnier and I could have made my dad laugh but I think I almost created a film version of it – you know when you watch a film and they have cancer and there still really funny? Its like oh I could have been that person! And then my therapist was like 'you were twelve and your dad was dying, I don't think you wanted to be funny'. And that's quite a grown up though to have you know.

That's interesting that you mention humour though, because all of your stuff is really funny

Yeah, but its from a distance. One of the things, because we've been talking about doing a new version of my play and one of the things the director is saying is that she wants me to talk more about the pain in it- she was like, keep the humor, but just really talk about whats painful in it. I think im trying to address that more but I think if it's a 'work of art' I think it needs to be entertaining as well, you don't want to see something that's just totally depressing and that's why I get the films that have the humor, because you need that.

And also, I mean everyone's experiences are different but like, my friend that died, there is humor- especially in hospital and stuff. I don't know whether its just rose tinted glasses but looking back there was definitely stuff that was really funny.

Yeah I remember this time at the start when my dad could still walk a bit, I used to help him and my mum walk to the bed- and this one time my dad was like 'ok, there is a cockroach there' and my mum hated cockroaches and so my dad waited for her to put him down on the chair first because he was afraid that if he told her that she would drop him! not on purpose but just that she would be so scared that she would drop him. and then my mum went to find somebody to kill the cockroach and I stayed with my dad in the room just looking at the cockroach. It was so hilarious.

I guess that's why the humor is there too, because death is part of life, and life is funny.

And I also think you have to give something to people, like you want them some sort of reward, like you want them to reflect on that story so you don't want to drag them completely down

I know we've touched on this a bit, but what's your thoughts on connections between status and using language 'well'?

I think it comes down to power and I think its also about groups...so when I said that people would make fun of the way I spoke, even though it was the 'correct' way, I think more people spoke the 'wrong' way, so there the ones in power. So even though grammatically speaking they're in the wrong, they're the ones that make the rules because they are a bigger group

I guess that's to do with fitting in isn't it? I think humans have the ability to adapt so quickly...like when I worked at that school and I started saying 'I'm going toilet' because I thought everyone would take the piss if I said 'I'm going to the toilet'

But I also think, its maybe not the same in England because nobody sounds like Theresa may but in Brazil, the people in power are not at all wonderful communicators, they can barely put two sentences together, its quite horrible actually.

I think its so interesting that connection, because if you think of like the Daily Mail, it has the most readers of all uk papers but its absolute shit and anyone with any education can see that its absolute shit but the majority of people don't or they need something simply written and so that's going to have the power. I guess that's the power of language- especially written language, when something is written down, its like everyone believes it must be true.

And also if you think that a major part of Brazil cant read or write and I think that really affects understanding speech as well, even if its not written, I think if you don't have the experience of being exposed to dialogue, you cant make sense of a sentence so everything's quite clunky and things just don't flow very well. Its almost like- not believing in global warming- like if global warming is just a word for you and you don't understand it how are you going to make sense of it? so I think yeah its quite it feels like something so basic and so important and so far apart from daily lives of a lot of people, almost like a superfluous thing- like I need to eat and sleep and work, and I don't need to understand this big complex thing even though this thing is going to affect their daily lives and their future.

It's a disconnect between language and reality?

Yeah and even like if we go back to that whole thing of feelings and the disconnect and now I'm thinking of how men don't talk about their feelings, like verbalization.

It's like babies when they don't know what language is there really happy and then they get to the point where they know what it is but they cant fully use it yet and they get really frustrated ...

But I also think its like, I'm quite talkative and I'm really into different languages and stuff but I think that's because my parents were and I was reading that babies they smile if their parents smile- like smiling is something that there they're taught- and I just imagine like a really sad baby, like can you imagine growing up when nobody talks or smiles at you....almost like an emotional handicap in a way. Imagine like a baby not being hugged or touched, imagine in the future and somebody touches them, how weird that would be.

Would you think of language as a lack of sound or language or both or neither...?!

Both in a way. I think there is still language without sound. There is language in silence. The language of love!

Interview 8

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

Yes, yes I do consider myself to have a disability. I know some people with deafness feel that its not a disability but just the fact that you cannot hear , scientifically I have a disability, yeah. Medically, not scientifically, but yeah.

You know you wrote that article that you showed me, I was really interested in it that you wrote how the D/deaf distinction can be quite divisive. I found that really interesting as I've always been told its polite to write both. Could you tell me a bit more about that?

I think when it comes to writing research papers or articles, for research purposes, I think people like to write D/deaf rather than explaining ...its easier just to write D/deaf for clarity but I think , I never knew, until I wrote that article and put D/deaf and I was talking to my friend and she said just be careful because it can be quite controversial because already within the deaf community there's lots of segregation in terms of 'you wear a hearing aid' 'you wear a cochlear implant', 'you speak' 'you can't sign'. So I think already there is division within the deaf community but then to further divide people into 'you're medically deaf', 'you're culturally deaf' and some people would say oh you're kind of separated from the deaf community even more so it can be a bit of a tricky area.

I guess its just that there must be so many people that are deafened that wouldn't probably even know that a deaf community exists, and so many deaf babies are born to hearing parents aren't they?

Yes, most are.

So going back to the D/deaf do you think it's a myth that there is such a big divide- do you think most people are firmly in one place, or do you most actually live somewhere in between?

Yeah like me, I am big d or small d depending on situations. So at work...I've actually read some things where people say they are both of them. so at work situations for me I would say I use my voice, I probably seem like small d because I probably function pretty much as 'normal' if that's the right word, but then with my deaf friends I'm big d because I'll pretty likely not use my voice, I'll be signing , very much like part of the deaf community. So within the deaf community I don't feel disabled or that kind of thing, so I wouldn't say I'm big d or small d, I'm both really so even then you can't really divide people into one or the other.

Do you think some people would be 'oh I'm one or the other?'

Yes, some people would be, some people don't feel like they're part of the deaf community so they would feel purely, medically deaf. Maybe those that were raised in hearing families or maybe deafened later on in life.

So you have hearing friends and deaf friends. Do you feel any different with each of them?

Yeah, so obviously I express myself differently with deaf people than I do with hearing people. With hearing people its hard because I actually sometimes struggle to express myself sometimes without using facial expressions. So maybe there is something that I want to convey that I need to, want to act out and then I find that my colleagues are like 'what are you doing?' like I wanted to explain something that this lady was doing outside and I think hearing people would probably say, it was about this lady that was a bit loopy and she was like spitting at the ground, and I think hearing people would say 'she moved away and she spat' but I was like (acting out woman spitting with a lot of

expression) and they were like 'what are you doing?' Or sometimes that there's an expression for something that I don't know what the word is for it, so sometimes I do struggle.

Is it always that way round, or would you ever struggle to find a sign for an English word?

Yeah sometimes there might be a word that I don't know the sign for, but that happens all the time, maybe like scientific word or a word I don't know the sign for, but you just spell it out really and that's what we normally do anyway.

I guess it's hard because in English you have 'sad' for example and then also 'devastated' but in sign it would be (signs both) which is just more facial expression. So maybe some hearing people think oh its not as sophisticated a language, but its just different isn't it?

Yeah, it's a rich language, and I guess hearing people probably feel that expressing themselves through facial expressions is not really necessary because they can convey emotion through tone of voice, whereas deaf people convey emotion through facial expression which I think that deaf people are generally pretty visual people, so they appreciate facial expression and gesture but I don't know if hearing people look at this and think 'wow it's a new way of expressing yourself, how fantastic' or would they be like 'I don't really get the depth of what's expressed', you know?

Do you think that hearing people can be part of the deaf community? Like interpreters for example?

Yeah they can but I think they have a lot to learn. Even my hearing friend, she's learning sign language but I think even then the things that deaf people do, like we're very tactile, it sounds awful but we're very touchy feely, we'll touch each other and I think she was a bit like 'this is strange, you're touching me' but I had to explain that deaf people, we're generally like that. Deaf people are more blunt, we'll ask questions, maybe talk about salary, we'll talk about random personal things with people that we've just met and that's completely normal. So I think there's a lot of etiquette that deaf people do that hearing people need to learn before, or not before, but as they go into it, they need to go in with an open mind I think. But yeah hearing people can be part of the deaf community but I think the most important thing is for acceptance is learning to sign really. Because even if you can only sign like level one, that level can open the doors to being involved in the deaf community and they're more, like, welcoming if you have some basic sign language. which is really difficult when deaf people have hearing partners, introducing them. like j (her boyfriend) , I'm worried about inviting him to deaf events and things because I know that he cant sign and its not frowned upon but its just like 'do you know how to sign' and then its 'oh right...' (signs going off/disinterested). Lots of deaf people cant be bothered to really try to gesture; its a if you're not going to bother, why should I kind of thing.

Well I guess deaf people have to make the effort all the time, and in their space, you would expect hearing people to make an effort.

It's their space, that's basically what it is, yes.

So I'm really interested in deaf education. I know its something that people have a lot of strong opinions about. I know you went to an oral school...is it something you have a strong opinion on, which choices to make?

Yeah I think its really bad that...I know there's a lot of research now to prove that access to language is the most important thing in anybody, but especially deaf people's (education) and that my school was very hearing orientated- not hearing but being able

to hear- like cochlear implants plugged in, the teacher had microphones and everything, lip reading etc but they didn't think that having access to language is so important, especially for those who, like I had friends in my class who couldn't understand the teacher so I would have to telling her or him what the teacher was saying and then the teacher would get angry with me because I should be focusing on my work and I would say but they cant understand what you're saying. And that's really , really bad and it would happen all the time; quite a lot of children that wouldn't understand the teachers.

Did they sign as well as speaking, the teachers?

They all had to learn level one to become teachers of the deaf but they weren't allowed to use it in class so its really , really bad and really backwards because obviously to teach deaf children you need to be able to sign

Why do you think they say teachers cant use it, as well as speech?

Because they believe that teaching your child to be able to hear well and speak well is the answer to integration in the hearing world after school, but they forget to include access to language. like writing on the board and stuff, that some deaf children they need to fully understand , they need the picture to be drawn in sign language. but im interested to see if (name of her school) will adopt signing in classes.

Did you learn to sign at home?

Yeah, I grew up speaking and signing at the same time, from whenever a child learns to sign, like a few months old.

Did you have friends with hearing parents, who couldn't sign?

Yeah, plenty. Plenty of them have hearing families who couldn't sign

So they just didn't learn to sign?

The problem is it starts in the hospitals when the child is born, and the doctors approach deafness as something to be sorry about, 'I'm really sorry your child is deaf and then the hearing parents, for them its something completely new so the doctors then advise hearing aids, cochlear implants, speech therapy. But I think they lack , I'm not sure, but I've heard they forget to include learning sign language to give the child access to language from day one. so for a lot of deaf children from hearing families they have a speech delay, language delay because they don't have that access to language , which is sad. I was quite fortunate obviously to have deaf parents, well hearing father but he can sign, his parents are deaf, so both of them signed, read me lots of books, nursery rhymes, songs and things, so I had a great access to language since I was a baby. So its really sad that lots of deaf children don't have that because of lack of education for the parents when it comes to raising deaf children.

Do you think what you had then, was the best?

Not for everyone; I don't believe that the best way is speech and being able to speak, because obviously lots of deaf people get by not being able to speak and they're perfectly happy so for what worked for me-hearing aids, I decided to get my cochlear implants much later, but hearing aids worked for me. but lots of deaf parents don't agree with giving their child hearing aids until they're older and they can decide for themselves but that's their opinion, their choice. One way of raising a child doesn't trump over another but as long as the language is there.

So you just think as long as language is there?

Preferably. I think some people would be like its fine, not being able to write English because they feel my language is sign language – following written English, oral English language structure is not their language so everybody has their different opinions.

Do you think you would have got your job that you have now if you didn't have such good speech?

Um, I would like to say I would have still got it but it would be more difficult because obviously there's lots of client contact and being able to talk with clients is a huge part of the job. I don't know, I've not met many other deaf nurses or people in the medical field that don't have speech or language. I'm sure that there's ways around it like writing things down but obviously that takes time and I'm not sure that my boss would have offered me the job if I didn't have speech.

Just to clarify, when you say 'language', do you mean any language or do you mean written language?

Um...I'm not sure actually. I think being able to understand, to be able to read and write is obviously important.

So if you in the future had a deaf child, where do you think you would send them to school?

It would depend on the child, but preferably I would send them to a deaf school because I think a lot of confidence, identity, comes from being around other deaf children and I don't think I would be who I was if I went to a hearing school secondary school- I went to a hearing primary school and I did ok but obviously up to the age of eleven conversations with other friends and children is not in depth and I think I would have become really excluded and isolated if I went to a hearing secondary school. so I would preferably send them to a deaf school but it obviously depends on where I live. I would like to send them to (her school) but I think things are not fantastic there because like funding, because obviously you need to take on children with lots of additional needs in order to get funding.

I think its so interesting because all the deaf people I meet say how important deaf schools are for their confidence and identity but then obviously the government are closing them down in the name of inclusion and most people who don't know about the deaf community would agree that inclusion is best. But having worked in a lot of mainstream schools with deaf units myself, I don't think it works.

It doesn't work. They have a different group and it makes them feel even worse, like they're surrounded by hearing people but they're like excluded at the same time, like 'oh there's that special group in the middle'.

Do you think in the best world ever, where there were mainstream schools where everyone could sign, do you think it would still be important to have separate deaf schools?

It's hard because obviously there's a lot of cultural, social differences. Its not only learning the language, I think there would still be separation to a certain extent because of the cultural things. I'm sure there would be those hearing people who learn to sign well amongst the deaf people but I think there would be some segregation too.

Thinking about representation of deaf people- books films etc- have you seen any particularly good or particularly bad representation of deaf people?

I know Hollyoaks, they have a deaf boy, and though he is quite young, but his part- he's there and they talk to him- but I feel he should have a bit more of a talking part because he's just there and everybody knows he's deaf and sometimes his parents sign to him and its very brief and never really a conversation. But maybe it will come later when he's a bit older.

Even thinking like- you know they have a lot of music videos with signing now

I haven't seen any.... I think there is more and more awareness and recognition- people nowadays seem to be more aware and more understanding.

I've heard that there has been a fair bit of controversy about these music videos , like its cultural appropriation maybe having hearing people signing in these videos?

Yeah I think maybe when it comes to deaf people in films and music videos , I think sometimes its actually played by a hearing person pretending to be deaf when you have a whole community of deaf people probably more than happy to help and to be there. I think the problem is they probably feel it would be more time effective to just take on a hearing person who can sign because obviously the communication is there and its just straightforward rather than having a deaf person and needing an interpreter, probably costs more money, probably easier to convey what they want. So I think there could be actual deaf people in films and tv shows. Actually, you know the malteasers advert?

There was a woman signing there, and the first time I watched it, second, third time- I didn't have a clue what she was saying- and I was like, what is she actually saying? And I read somewhere that the woman was actually hearing and was just given a hearing aid to wear. The thing is, people that are filming probably don't have any signing experience so what they see, they don't question, whereas a deaf person will pick up any quality issues up straight away. But it's probably hard for them to have access to the deaf community.

Moving on to stereotypes. Have you had experience of people saying anything to you, that you felt was a stereotype because you're deaf?

Yeah I think like a lot of people think that I won't be able to hear at all, even if they see that I have a hearing aid and they'll be like 'can you hear me?' and I'm like yeah, that's why I have a hearing aid, to be able to hear. But yeah I think mostly it's the surprise that I can speak, can speak well. But yeah its like, deaf people can speak.

Is it important for you personally to see deaf people represented in films or books?

I think so yes. Its hard because we are the centre of our universe or whatever, and there's probably people with other disabilities who say 'I want to be included, I want to have my disability represented on screen' so its probably hard to please everyone but yeah its always nice to see that some thought has been put into deaf characters, especially when they take on deaf actors, and see how they can be made a part of the story and when you see other actors and actresses take on learning sign language. like, the silent child for example, and the actress learnt to sign , her signing is so natural, everyone was like its amazing, because she obviously put a lot of time into learning it so its really nice to see. And obviously the film raised awareness of what can be a hidden disability sometimes.

I met deaf people who have been angry that they didn't have a deaf person play the woman as well.

Yeah, yeah. Its hard because obviously there isn't any, well there are some major actors and actresses (who are deaf) but obviously they wanted a big name.

So you know the stigma about deaf people not being as intelligent, do you think you face it to a lesser extent because you can speak well?

Yeah but it (speech) does not equal intelligence and I'm a perfect example of that!

No you're not! You're a vet and your sisters a doctor!

I know, I know. But I think that hearing people think that deaf people who are unable to speak are not as intelligent. Maybe not everybody but I think that is a general idea of the general thought.

Why do you think that is?

I think it goes back to the olden days where people who couldn't speak were classed as deaf and dumb even though the sign just means deaf and mute basically, but I think that just carried on basically. I think there's a lot of intelligent deaf people out there but I think it's obviously a struggle-possibly to find work, but also to have a full time interpreter so I think there could be a lot of barriers that could limit those people that don't have speech and it's quite sad. And it's all about having a good understanding boss and colleagues who learn how to work with you.

Do you think its also that deaf children on average to worse at school because of that lack of language access and so on paper they look less intelligent?

Yeah definitely.

If you met a hearing person that was having a deaf baby, what would you tell them?

I would obviously make it very clear that they should really learn sign language and sign to their child, and constantly be engaged with them. Also try and take them to organisations like NDCS and try to get them to mix with other deaf people, other deaf children. Yeah just make sure that they know that it's not a bad thing to be deaf. It may be more difficult in terms of making sure they have the right education, making sure that they are on par with their hearing peers...I think a lot of hearing parents panic and have this image of no education, no language but I think just making sure they don't panic is the important thing.

I know there was a lot of controversy when cochlear implants started- do you think that's died down now?

No!

It's still controversial?

Yeah. Deaf people criticizing other deaf people is rife when it comes to choice of being able to hear- hearing aids versus cochlear implants, signing versus speech, and you can debate until you're blue in the face with another deaf person about which is better – not necessarily better...but deaf people need to accept that everyone is different, everyone has different ways of bringing up a child. because you'll have lots of deaf people that will be like why hearing aids? Why do I want to hear? You're deaf- why do you want to hear, why do you want to speak like a hearing person, thinking you're so great. Sometimes I'll meet other deaf people and when they find out I can hear, they are like you can speak ? oh (mimes turning nose up at her) like oh I see... so sometimes I feel really embarrassed that I should speak, and I shouldn't feel embarrassed that I can speak. Or sometimes they're like 'oh cochlear implant, went to oral school, oh I see' so there's a lot of hierarchy, which shouldn't happen because we all have the same disability and everybody has their own way of coping, or preferences of communicating.

Do you think its ok to give a cochlear to a baby?

It's difficult, it's a difficult topic. If my child had no hearing with the hearing aid, like they maxed out everything and it still wasn't working and the cochlear implant was the only solution than yes, but it wouldn't be the first thing I would go for. I'd obviously go for the hearing aid first...for me hearing aids got me up to the age of nineteen, twenty before realizing that actually I wanted to be able to hear more, that was my own decision. Preferably it would be my child's own decision to make about whether to have a cochlear implant but obviously I want to give them everything possible, everything when they're younger and then they can choose. If my child decided one day to not use their voice- that's fine, that's your decision, but I've given you the opportunity to use your voice, use your hearing aid, and if you decide to stop wearing your hearing aid or cochlear implant, if you want to take it off later, than that's your decision.

I guess you're in a good position because you know what its like to be deaf and you can sign and have a cochlear whereas most hearing people, it would be hard to know what to do.

They just go straight for the cochlear, well I'm sure they don't go straight to the cochlear implant but...because when you're younger, if you're under 18, the hospital they give you two cochlear implants, but when you're older...because naturally they give you two hearing aids, maybe the way that your brain works, they only give you one when you're older. Have pay for it, if you want a second one.

Do you think all hearing people should learn to sign? That it should be taught at school?

I think it should be an option to have on the curriculum because obviously we learn other languages to communicate with people but what about learning a language to communicate with people within your own country? And learning (British) sign language opens up the opportunity to communicate with deaf people in other countries because although its not exactly the same, if you have an understanding of gesturing and similar signs then you can communicate with anybody, any deaf person. I've had that conversation with foreign deaf people purely by gesturing and we have a completely different language so I think its a good skill to have.

Do you think it's at risk as a language?

Well it seems to be officially recognized in Scotland so I think that's a good movement, good progress. Because I think the world is basically watching and will use Scotland as an example of how BSL is officially a language with its own structure and everything so I think its looking good for the future. But whether it is dying down now, with the rapid increase in use of cochlear implants in deaf children; possibly. Because I remember when I was in school, I was in sixth form , or even year 11, none of the year sevens could sign, or maybe like a few, but loads of them had cochlear implants and we were like wow, big difference from the olden days when everybody mostly had hearing aids. And in my year I think only 2 or 3 people had cochlear, everybody else hearing aids. So I think things are changing, but it's hard for me to know.

Interview 9

Do you identify as a writer?

Yes I do, I do identify as a writer.

You don't have trouble saying that? I do!

No, I don't that's me though! I don't identify as an author, obviously. Even though I guess I am scientifically. But I do identify as a writer. I think we should all identify as writers.

Everyone?

No, but if you're creating work. Otherwise ...I don't know, sometimes it feels like there's this weird stigma of calling yourself a writer. But you are- I mean, you're literally writing! And you might not be writing a book, or a play or a piece of poetry – you might just be writing aimlessly, but that's still creating isn't it?

I guess it's that association of making money from it...

Most of the writers we respect now died in poverty.

Why do you think you write?

I used to write just because I enjoyed it. And then you get positive reinforcements from like teachers or other people saying 'oh you're good at writing' so then you keep writing. But actually I think the main turning point for me was doing that writing course. Because it enabled me to realize that anyone can write a full length piece of work, you don't need to not have a job and be supported by someone and just write full time 9-5 in order to write a book. You can write a book very slowly around other commitments in your life.

Do you ever write because you have something specific to say, or because you get inspired by something that happens, or is it more just a creative thing?

Yeah I think its more of a creative thing for me. I can see what you're asking because sometimes you'll read something on the news and think 'oh that's terrible, someone should write about that' ...but ...that's never me! You know I was thinking about all the people they found who died in the lorry recently , all the Vietnamese people. And I was thinking that's so disgusting, that's so awful, someone should write about that and I spent the whole day when I was at work thinking how would I write about this? But then I realize no, this isn't going to work. You know some people are really good at doing those reactionary short stories? Actually like I suppose the best example is Margaret Attwood. When she first wrote the handmaids tale; that was reacting to everything that was happening in the world to women. And she cohesively made a story from that.

So seeing as you brought up refugees, if you had felt able to write a story about the Vietnamese people, would you have felt comfortable doing so? Seeing as you're not a refugee or Vietnamese yourself?

No I wouldn't. I think I might have told you that there's a Black British female character in the novel I'm writing who is quite pivotal. But I don't know how I feel about writing her voice. So I have been trying to read some more black, feminist literature...but then I also feel that there's the problem of just copying someone else's voice. So I'm not talking about copying a specific vernacular but I do feel really conflicted about writing characters that aren't me specifically. But also then that completely limits you as a writer.

Yeah because then you're just writing yourself hanging out with yourself...!

Yeah just being you, hanging out in your late twenties in london, haha. sally rooney has already got that covered hasn't she? I wonder though if I knew about Vietnam, lets say if I really wanted to write this story, then I would go and research this properly, I would

go and find out about these smuggling gangs. But then maybe I wouldn't write from the perspective of the victims, maybe I would write it from the perspective of the guy that smuggled them- the actual lorry driver. Because that's a voice that I can authentically reproduce.

I mean, you're not a people smuggler...?

No, but I think he's Irish.... He's like young, male, I think lower working class, possibly had experience with other criminal convictions in the past. That's a voice that I have had experience with in my life.

You mean in terms of meeting?

Yeah meeting and knowing quite well what his motives might be. Which is probably just money in his case. And that is a voice I could more authentically write with.

So you think its about research and authenticity- not necessarily about your 'right' to do so; is it about whether you can do it well?

Its interesting isn't it...you, as in one person writing.. shall we stick to the Vietnamese thing? So say if someone British wrote the Vietnamese story - if you have researched that properly, then I don't believe that you're taking that away from someone who is Vietnamese, if you've done the research properly. Because actually by making place in the market for this story then hopefully it will enable other voices to come in as well. But then that could be really problematic what I'm saying.

No, its really interesting. Because I was reading an article where they interviewed like 20 writers and basically asked them the same question that im asking you and there was one writer, quite famous I think, a white woman and she basically said the same- that its important to write these voices to show there's a market. But I was thinking, if you were from a more disadvantaged background and you cant get published writing your own story but then someone white and privileged does it and gets praise, surely that's an extra kick in the teeth? But I don't know...its complicated.

It is really complicated and actually I think we've picked a really difficult one to talk about as well because like East Asian writers are even more unrepresented in the literary world. I was thinking about that poet who did 'night wounds in the sky', he's really famous. He recently published a book and he is American Vietnamese, he came as a refugee, couldn't speak English, and he writes about the Vietnamese war and being an American. When you read interviews with him he talks about how the Vietnamese war was decades ago and there were loads of white Americans writing about it but there were no Vietnamese voices. But I understand what we're trying to say because if you've done the research about this issue and you feel like you can write it- should you not write it? Should you hold it back and wait for somebody else?

Yeah and then it might not get written at all. I guess what I also struggle with is the creative process for me is not that analytical - I don't sit and think right, this is what I'm writing and why. I can start with one idea but most of the times things just appear on the page and I'm not quite sure what they mean until afterwards. And also, even though I'm of course not a refugee, we've been living god knows how many years of our formative years with this refugee crisis happening around us, so I find it personally really hard not to be influenced by that. Or just pretend its not happening. I guess Sally Rooney actually does it well because yes she is writing as basically herself, but they are always having these background conversations about class and race and stuff so I wonder if that's the most 'correct' way that you can do it....

Do you think its maybe imitating other people's voices that's the problem, rather than addressing the issues?

Yeah, and I think that's the biggest issue. That's when you cross the line between being a writer who's promoting issues to being a writer... with issues! I should rephrase that ...but that's when you cross the line to it being stereotypes or parody or very negative, when it imitates the vernacular for no reason. You know when someone for example, now I'm thinking about a lot of slavery era novels or novels that are set in that era, I think it is always very problematic when someone imitates the voice of black people at that time rather than, if they wanted to do a novel about slavery, thinking how they could do that sensitively but also from a perspective that hasn't been done before. Which isn't necessarily you representing someone else. I think in your work though (if I'm allowed to talk about your work?!) I think, what you've done really well, the story in where is it -Samos?

Calais...well based on it.

Ah that's why that's guy is French, makes sense. But what you've done well is that you've chosen voices that you can write well. What you haven't decided to do, what might be more difficult, but I'm not saying its impossible, is writing the story completely from the perspective of the refugees. But I know you've been there and I know you read up on it and you know it quite well so for me, I wouldn't have an issue per se if you were going to do that. But for me, I couldn't write a story from a perspective of a refugee in Calais because I've never been there and I only have a very superficial knowledge.

Mmm, I mean I would argue I also have a very superficial knowledge. And I've spoken to people who have worked as a volunteer for like six months or more in Greece and are still like no, I would never write about that because its there's (the refugees). And I know other people who have said they want to write about it but said they wouldn't feel comfortable. The only person I know who's done it, was my friend who wrote a play about it; it was from her perspective as a volunteer and she used puppets to play out certain scenes with refugees- its hard to explain but it was very, very tastefully done and she explicitly addressed 'is it my story to tell?'

But yeah I was thinking more about my story about the holocaust- nobody would question my using a jewish character but although people don't talk about disability as much as race, from my research, I think it is as sensitive a topic and so should I be having a deaf character? But for me the point of not just leaving them as separate topics is that if we don't show how they're connected- that there's always been somebody whose been scapegoated then we never see the bigger picture and the parallels with today. So I guess its just how do you make these connections without being told that you're being insensitive?

Mm but you have a very profound knowledge- for a hearing person- of british sign language.

Yes but I know there would still be deaf people who would read my work and say this isn't ok.

Did you read that zadie smith article?

Yes and I read another few around that topic. And then I read another article also talking about that event that she was talking at. Yeah, what did you think about that article?!

Yeah it was interesting for me because obviously there's loads of white people and specifically white men maybe, saying 'I'm going to write about whatever the fuck I want!' but its interesting that as a person of colour she's saying 'I'm not a

'mixed race woman' I'm a zadie.' And that if a white person had said that we'd be like well of course you think that, you've been allowed a complicated identity because you're white, so it was interesting to have the tables turned in that way and for her to say, no- I'm also as complicated a person. And also what she said about not being called out for writing from different ethnic backgrounds that she wasn't from, because people were like, oh well its fine because you're also brown. ...what did you think?

Yeah I agree with you, it was really interesting. Whenever I read something from Zadie Smith it always takes me a while to understand what she's actually saying! But I think she was saying some really, really interesting things. About like identity politics and things like that. She *does* write from a lot of perspectives, and you're right- in other cases someone would have brought it up that like- hey, it's a bit problematic that Sally Rooney, for example, was writing from the perspective of all these people. And its also interesting because I think Zadie Smith grew up in quite a working class area, and she didn't go to private school I don't think. But she's now transcended into a completely different class and lifestyle. Which she is really open about which is really good but also nobody says 'hey you write about working class middle age women' – she writes from the perspective of them but nobody says 'hey you're not actually them anymore'. but she has lived experience with it all doesn't she, being around them, if not being them exactly.

Do you think though that, for example, although she's not Bangladeshi for example, she still has more right to write from that perspective than a white person does, or that she's more able to do it authentically, because she does at least have an understanding of what its like to be 'othered' or racialised in some way?

But then its really conflicting because she says herself about not being mixed race but being a Zadie...I don't think coming from a minority background that you necessarily have the right to write about other minority backgrounds. If you take just British Asians for example- if you take Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani – the levels of discrimination they face are homogenously higher than white populations, but within the Asian population, they all face different levels of stigma and discrimination. Like I think the Bangladeshi community is one of the most disadvantaged communities in Britain whereas the Indian community is still disadvantaged in general, but compared to the Bangladeshi community it doesn't face the same level of discrimination and stigma that they do. So like, I wouldn't feel comfortable writing a story about a Bangladeshi person, even though I live in East London, in like Bangla town. No, I wouldn't feel comfortable doing it.

So I remember talking to (mutual female friend) and she was saying she wouldn't ever write from a male perspective – she was really sure that no, how would I do that? Which to me just blew my mind a bit. Because I know we obviously, as men or women, we have different experiences with lots of things but I think that's all constructs, I don't think that fundamentally our thoughts and actions are that different...? I don't think that I wouldn't be capable of it I mean.

I feel comfortable writing from different gender perspectives, with most of the things I write about, but I suppose if I was going to write about?

Getting your period?!

Yeah exactly or I don't know, the Suffragettes, from the perspective of the Suffragettes that would be slightly problematic. Whereas I could write about the Suffragettes from the perspective of one of their husbands but something that's so fundamental to that

characters gender or ethnicity, I think you should really feel carefully about writing about it, unless you have like specific experience in that skill. So if I was a suffragette historian, then like, yeah, I could write successfully about that. But otherwise you have to have specific research and you have to have spent time either with that community or researching about that community.

What do you think about the idea that 'writing is an act of empathy?'

I think that sounds good on paper. But then...so have you read 'Middle sex?'

Yeah

So I loved that book when I first read it, I can't remember how old I was, really young I think. But having re-read it towards the end of university I was like, this is a bit weird. And then I've only recently found out that he did no research on intersex people, he just decided to write about intersex.

I wonder if that's really true? Because mark haddon said the same thing about curious incident but he can't have done no research because so many of the things he writes about are so specific to autistic people that he can't have not done any.

Yeah I can't believe that he hadn't done any either, I was shocked.

But maybe they just do it to cover their tracks? I mean make that statement like 'I'm a writer I don't have to do research' because that's mark haddon's thing, he says we shouldn't be thinking in terms of autistic/lesbian/woman/man blah blah we should just be thinking in terms of people; 'Is this voice authentic or not?' And 'I wish I'd never said he was autistic.' But he has had so much backlash. But also obviously lots of praise and done very well! But anyway, so what do you think about 'is writing an act of empathy?'

I think that's a really problematic statement. I think its like a blanket rule and blanket rules are normally bad. I think I find empathy as a term quite problematic as well because the whole idea is that you put yourself in somebody else's shoes. Which I think that you can do in the real world, you can think about it, but you cant ever be that voice for someone. Its like in mental health- I can be really empathetic to someone who's got schrizophrenia about his or her voice hearings but I've never experienced them myself so what I need to be able to do is empower them to either be in a place where they can write it themselves...or I don't know, what am I saying? This is so difficult. I don't think writing itself is an act of empathy. I think that's really dangerous as a statement to follow blindly.

So what about reading? Is reading an act of empathy? Or do you think reading encourages empathy?

No, yeah, definitely; I agree with that completely.

So then I guess writing is the thing that causes that...? Because I do think however problematic mark haddon's book was seen to be, it definitely increased awareness of what autism was and understanding of why people have meltdowns and stuff like that. Even if it wasn't 100% accurate all the time.

But was he doing it to be empathetic? Sometimes I get the feeling that people just add these weird quirks to people without thinking about it, to just be like 'oh this is a weird person' with this thing that makes them different.

Mmm I guess that...well a lot of the criticism from autistic people was that the boy's parents break up and the mum writes this letter saying how hard it was to cope with him, and autistic people have said how dare you suggest we are uncopeable with? But I just think that what writing does is it shows people to be human, for their flaws as well, and these were the parents flaws. And actually there are parents who find it hard to cope with their SEN kids and maybe it's a

voice for them? It's not saying its everyone, just saying this is how it could be for some people. And he's not making out Christopher to be this awful person that nobody would want to be around. I just think that what good writing does, is it shows people as being 3D...and I guess that process between writer and reader does involve some kind of empathy.

But then it raises the issue that if....if you want to create this 3D model of a character but they're autistic, you need to speak to people with autism, you need to understand that they're not just this one trait, they're also multi-faceted. And I think that's when it becomes problematic when people write voices that aren't themselves when you realize that their character just represents this one thing, like that they're the token member of this minority, they're not multi-faceted. So if you're writing a character that isn't you, then you need to be acutely aware that that character is more than that trait that you've given them. Actually this is really exemplified by when men write about female characters and they just write about their female body or their 'sexualness', you know just their boobs or the way she looks as if that's a character and that's all that she represents. She doesn't have other aspects to her character.

So I was reading some statistics today and I cant remember them exactly but apparently women include male characters as much as they include women whereas men barely ever write women, and when they do they take up a tiny amount of space. But then I thinks that's interesting because that's seen to be a bad thing but equally if they were writing about women more then maybe women would be saying no that's not your place? Also I personally can't recall ever reading a text where I'm like, oh this is such a bad depiction of a woman, by a man.

But then isn't that a bit of selective bias? Because we don't read shit; we don't read Jeffrey Archer, do we? I imagine he's the worst.

Who's he?

He's a really famous author! He writes like pop fiction, you know he's been churning them out since the eighties or something.

But maybe that hits the nail on the head though, maybe its about good writing then rather than hard and fast rules. Surely good writing can transcend some potentially problematic ideas?

Mm yeah I mean yeah it can. I think a good writer won't have a character that's just one dimensional or just represents one thing. I mean of novels, I think it can be different in plays. But in novels you shouldn't have a character that just does one thing and then is never seen again. A good writer will have characters that are multi-faceted. You know like if you read writing that's about a child and this child has one specific personality trait- a good writer will write about that child also not liking brussel sprouts and also being really cheeky and like, dropping crayons in fish tank or something. You know like because it's a real child isn't it? Its not just 'child with X.' Because that's how children really are.

Yeah I think that a lot of children in tv shows just yell 'I hate you!' and storm out...so what do you think of the creative process then? Because I was speaking to this writer the other day and he was saying that he didn't believe in the creative process, he was saying that's just some hippy dippy thing and you just have to keep grafting on and making character profiles and plot arcs and stuff. And I found that really interesting because that's just not how I work...

There's nothing I hate more than one writer saying 'this is the way to write' full stop. And I have actually found that more with male writers than with other gendered

writers. Yeah I've often found that male writers are like 'YEAH! I JUST SIT DOWN AND BASH IT OUT MAN , JOB DONE!' I think the creative process its unique to each person but what you do need to be is I think, is I think you need to be flexible. If you develop a creative process that means you can only write at your desk in sunlight with a specific candle burning with a specific piece of parchment paper after having read a specific line from your favourite book then that's completely incompatible with modern day life.

I just wonder if you can write with specific rules in place? Like 'oh I shouldn't touch that' or 'I shouldn't go there' - I just mean I wonder if once you start getting too in your head then it takes away from creativity...

No, I think those sorts of rules and regulations when you're editing. You should just get everything out. Like if you're going to write some sort of horrific sex scene then put it in but then come back to it when you're editing. And then be like 'that was weird, maybe I was just horny?' Or maybe I just watched something horrible on television.

I guess one aspect we haven't touched on is yes, sure people should write their own stories but you personally, as a person of colour or as a gay person- have you ever felt like you were *expected* to just write about this particular aspect of your identity?

Yeah I think you do feel pressured. Maybe from yourself as well. To write from the perspective that you think people think you represent. But then that becomes really problematic because the novel I'm writing now I've just stopped because I don't think I like the main character and I feel so far removed from him and I think it was maybe just a psychological process of...I remember when we started the writing course they were like this is just cutting your teeth, and that everyone has a first novel that sort of dies with them. And I was sort of like that's trash! But now I realize no, actually even though I had everything plotted out a lot if it was like I was doubting myself because I felt everyone was expecting me to write a gay character and a character of colour and I was like well maybe I actually don't want to write either of those things at this time- maybe there's something else that I'd rather write. The other thing that's really interesting on that topic is when people were reading my work who had physically seen me they were making all these intertextual , like literary criticques like oh yes the dad is obviously gay. Like there was this one woman who said that she was really impressed with my work, because the dad is obviously gay as well. And it was like no the dad is not gay- where did you get that from? And it was just from this one scene where the main character is looking at old pictures of his dad as a child, naked with a sailors hat on. And I was like you've completely read into this the wrong way - you're expecting me to make every male character gay because she knows me, but actually that wasn't ever what I was trying to do and she had made an inference based on me as a person.

Do you think the problem is that we live in such an unequal society? So surely if we lived in a utopia where everyone was equal whatever gender or race you were then surely people could write about what they wanted? Because it seems also unfair that you should expect people to write about their own identity in order to fill that gap in the market.

Yeah, and maybe they don't want to.

Yeah maybe they don't want to, and actually, going back to that Vietnamese example, maybe sometimes its actually really fucking traumatizing to write about their experiences. Because you know, with the holocaust, I've said I don't feel anyone's going to attack me for writing about it because I am Jewish but actually of course I have no idea what it was actually like to live through that. And it's a seriously heavy subject so really why do I have a right to write about that as

essentially a middle class white person in some ways? But there's no way my granddad, or any of his contemporaries...they couldn't even talk about it, they couldn't even mention that it had happened. So its almost like a duty for those of us who can write about it, to do that...?

So that's really interesting because I think you've tapped into hidden histories now or hidden narratives. And I think the holocaust is a really good example because there are so many different instances of people who obviously have died or have survived and were either too poor or too traumatised to talk about it, but you live with that legacy and you're giving a voice that I've never heard about in the holocaust narrative. Which I think is really important.

Yeah, yeah...I guess I just mean it can be an act of charity or whatever to write about things that need to be remembered but cant be written about for whatever reason by that person who's story it is. It's not in any way the same thing of course, but I remember as a child Jacqueline Wilson- there's absolutely no way she could have experienced every single one of the things that happens to those kids in her books but I'm sure it helped a lot of children. Like she wrote about a kid with divorced parents and that was so nice to have that represented in a story for me, and I didn't care less if her parents were divorced too because I believed the story.

Children's fiction is really interesting to me because I think its different; I feel personally, having had a similar experience to you as a child in terms of wanting things that represented me, that we should just flood the children's market with different voices. Yes of course with diverse writers but it just needs to be *done!* Whereas I think it gets more complicated with adult fiction. I'm not sure why its different but...I think for children's literature you just need characters with strong voices but you can do with it almost exactly what I've said you shouldn't do with adults literature...in children's fiction you can have a character that represents that identity ...they can almost be more 2D in children's fiction. But you cant do that with adults because we expect more from our characters.

Have you ever had an experience of reading something about your demographic and felt icky like ugh, this is a stereotype or something?

Yes completely 100%. I think recently I've experienced it a lot with people writing about gay men that aren't gay men. But writing like..i don't know if I can use an example from like, Hollywood, but you know often someone will recommend a film to you that has gay characters and then they'll be gay characters played by straight actors written by straight men. Like a whole production crew, everyone involved in that script has been straight but they've decided to write about a gay centered film. So I'll give you an example, the best example I can think of is 'kill your darlings' which is a film about Allen Ginsburg where Daniel Radcliffe who is straight, at this time of talking, who is playing Allen Ginsburg, a notoriously queer poet. And there's a bit where there's a sex scene where it's the first time Allen Ginsburg has had penetrative gay sex and I remember watching it just thinking like (head in hands) , like there was a bit where there was a) no need for it, like it just felt like minority safari, like 'well they're gay so we're going to show them having penetrative gay sex so everyone believes they're gay and oh its played by Daniel Radcliffe' and it just made me really angry because I know Allen Ginsburg quite well and sex was a really important thing to him and quite a lot of his work is about sex and spiruality and things like that and to have his sexuality boiled down to one sexual act where Daniel Radcliffe was pretending to have penetrative sex

and looking like he was in pain , like I don't think Allen Ginsburg would be very happy with this portrayal of his sexuality.

And I guess its like that with the disability thing as well - like actors who play disabled people get extra accolade like oh wow that must have been so hard to act disabled- but its like yeah but you could have just given that work to a disabled actor whou wouldn't have had t o act and who wont get offered other roles because we're so ablelist

Yes, yes I know it makes me SO angry with trans characters you know when...like I'm not forgiving it but if you're having a story where someone transitions during the story I can see why maybe having a trans might be difficult, but a lot of tv shows or films will have a trans character who isn't in the process of transitioning and they will just have him played by a cis actor for no reason and then you've taken that away from a trans actor or actress. There's a really good tv show called Pose, where everyone is actually trans and its amazing. I've never seen that many trans performers.

I know and whats crazy is that everyone loved it- there's this whole idea that people don't want to watch a diverse cast or something but they absolutely do , people don't just want to see white men on tv, even if you're not from a particular background yourself, people find it interesting to watch a diverse cast...but but! I guess the thing with the writing- if you think of the show years and years or something, obviously he had black characters and a refugee and a disabled character and it was really good casting because it was actually a wheelchair user who played her but obviously the writer, he obviously isn't all of those different characters. So as a writer you do have a slightly different job than an actor because he needed to write all of those different characters in order for them to be played. But I wonder if that's different in writing scripts in that way than a novel...

Yeah I suppose it would be because theres that physicality in TV. We should probably get back to the world of writing shouldn't we ...But yeah I do get annoyed when people are writing a character and its very clear that its all assumptions and they've actually done no research. I think I see it a lot when people are writing old characters...

Yeah I think I'm guilty of that ...

Yeah because I think its quite easy to be 'ooh they bent down and their knees hurt' and its like well yes that might be true but also they're a person and also - I cant speak on behalf of old people!- but maybe if they've been living with that pain for decades they don't think 'oh my knees hurt' its just something they live with day to day but they've got other things going on, there's more of their life that's interesting. Whatever character you're writing its got to be multi-dimensional.

Yeah that's why I think it does come down, in the end, to good writing. Because , I mean even though I say I don't do technical processes, I always write a character profile so you do think about the whole of your character, if you're good. And again thinking about the mark haddon thing, I think its about bringing in that humanity ...its obviously arguable whether he did that or not because obviously its subjective and people are going to be more sensitive to it depending on their background but I think what is interesting about what he's said is that we shouldn't be arguing about whether or not I'm allowed to do this, we should be arguing about whether or not this is an authentic voice, whether you believe this character or not. And if you don't believe this character then I'll accept that, but if you do then sort of let it go..

But that's what's interesting to me about the Middlesex book because it's an amazing depiction, to me, still, of a Greek American family, of a Greek immigrant family, of a family dealing with trauma and loss and those bits I find really, really exciting and interesting (oh god I hope they are actually Greek!) and when I first read the intersex bit that was really interesting to me because I'd never read about that or heard about that but now that is the bit I have the issue with.

But I guess that's because we are so much more aware of this stuff than when he was writing. Probably if he was writing now, or maybe looking back on it he might be like oh my god that's so cringe...

But that was the first time I'd read, I mean definitely not the first that had been published, but the first that I'd read, and the first that had 'reached the masses'.

I guess the thing I'm wondering is do you think things sometimes just need to be done for the first time, almost knowing there is going to be mistakes but then it opens the door for improvements? Like obviously everyone looks back on Friends now and thinks it's so problematic but it's like well at least they had a lesbian couple getting married-

And raising a kid-

Yeah and obviously Chandler's dad character was so problematic but at least they had a trans character even if it was awful. Also because now we can look back and see how quickly actually things have improved in a lot of ways. I guess the question really is - do you think it will have tangible, negative effects on certain demographics to have their identity represented in ways that aren't well done?

I think that's a really interesting question because I think it does, if you, because you run the risk of reinforcing stereotypes or even creating a new way of people being taunted or being like harassed for that specific character. Like I'm thinking specifically of like Apu from the Simpsons, who like, yeah actually when he first came around it might have been the first Indian American character on television but everything that's problematic about him has still continued on the Simpsons thus is being used to discriminate against people from that background. I think if you're character...the problem with Apu is he's very one dimensional.

But then so is Homer, I guess they are all stereotypes in that programme?

Lisa is not! At the start they were all very one dimensional but I would argue that they've had more character progression than some of the other secondary characters have which obviously is the way television works to some extent...yes representation is good but it has to be solid, well researched and accurate representation of people, for the time that you're writing. So if you're writing now, you have to try your best to have as accurate representation as you can of that character.