



## Beginnings and Time



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***The Crooked Quill Online Magazine***

**First Issue**



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## Note from *The Crooked Quill*

Thank you for reading *The Crooked Quill's* first online magazine publication. Here at *The Crooked Quill*, we aspire to encourage writing in all ages and all genres. We set up this magazine with the hope that we would be able to find and promote new writers from all over the world at different stages of their career. Hopefully, we have achieved that.

We'd like to thank everyone who entered the competition, especially the children from Priory School, Birmingham who delighted us with their work. Congratulations to the winners and the shortlisted entrants, we hope that you continue to write and send your work into the world. Thank you also to the artwork contributors, you've made our magazine a brighter place.

Thanks to Billy for setting us on the path to publication with tips and ideas, providing guidance and giving us advice on how to manage our group.

Thanks to everyone who had a hand, no matter how small, in bringing these dreams together in *The Crooked Quill*.

## Manifesto

Here at *The Crooked Quill*, we aim:

- To encourage young adults to write and read more, and to become more confident in their writing
- To give positive and informative feedback to those that submit work
- To broaden the horizons of a literary magazine to include new writers and new ideas, as well as other genres of writing such as graphic art and comic books
- To provide a competitive but welcoming platform through which aspiring authors can let their work flourish



## *Beginnings and Time*

Katya Bozukova

Asher,

You asked me to tell you the story of why I left. I can't imagine how that might be any comfort to you, but I promised, and I've broken enough of those.

I took off as soon as it was light.

I was planning on a quick departure - just pick up my things and disappear into the wild, but as luck would have it, Sam had forgotten something important which made her double back. She needed exactly four seconds to figure out what had happened, and then she'd taken off after me.

It had rained the night before - a long, terrible storm - so tracking me down had been shamefully easy. I might have gotten away with it if I'd just had a little more time, just a bit more of a head start... or maybe I'm just trying to make myself feel better. Sam and I manage to find each other all the time without trying - you can imagine what she's like if she actually put in the effort.

Anyway, I digress. She caught up with me at the edge of the settlement, just out of the Guard's jurisdiction. And she was pissed.

'Never again,' she said. 'You promised, Olive. You fucking promised not to pull this shit on me again.'

'And you promised we'd make it work, whatever it takes,' I said, dropping my bags and facing her. 'Or are you backing off on me?'

You were too young to remember this, Asher, but we used to have this argument all the time. We'd had it less than a few hours ago, as a matter of fact. Even before the world went to Hell, we knew we'd have a hard time finding a place, and it wasn't because of who we were, but because of who I am, who I always have been... and the reality, after the Fall, matched my worst fears. Everyone was given a fresh start, but we - you, me, Sam, were stuck in the past.

'I told you, we will find a way. So many people got rehabilitated,' her voice caught, and I had to look away. 'Why can't you be?'

'Because the people who got rehabilitated don't have to share a living space with their victims. I do.'

She opened my mouth to challenge me, and then she closed it.

'We can barely afford to eat with what we're given,' I went on. 'You do what you can, Sam, but in a few years, Asher will have to make his own way in the world.'



'He'll go to school-'

'And he's better off as your son than mine. Don't tell me you didn't think that.'

She had. Of course, she had. Nothing keeps you quite as awake as hunger, and we'd put in many a white night mulling over our life choices.

I suppose I should say I'm ashamed of mine, but you know that already. The celestial ledger, if there is such a thing, has more red marks against me than commendations, and I wonder what the world would look like if it didn't.

'I have to leave.'

'No, you want to leave.'

'Sam...'

'You remember what happened the last time you took off,' Sam said. She was bitter, and I knew, then, that she'd let me go. 'You... can you really take that risk again?'

I looked around, at the wild. I wanted to say it was different, but really, I was off to live on my own, off my own wits, with the rest of the outcasts who wanted no part of the new order. Some people would have called it a suicide, Asher, but...

'Don't worry, you'll see me again,' I said. 'Bad people never die.'

'That's what I'm afraid of,' Sam said, then turned her back to me to walk back into the settlement. Then she stopped and threw her arms around me. 'I hate you,' she whispered.

I squeezed her, as hard as I could. 'Be safe, my love.'

The rest, you know, or you can guess. I know you want me to tell you I'm sorry, Asher, and I am, for all the time I missed with you. But if you're looking for me to apologize for leaving, well...

I can't.

It was, literally, the best beginning I could have given you.

Love,

Your mother.



## *A New Beginning?*

Lynda Nash

*Shad shows Maris round Elodea<sup>1</sup>.*

'...if you swim to the right you'll see the school. It's built from salvaged materials and has a nursery with a tyre gym, and Maris, you'll never guess, but the main hall is the hull of the Lucy Tanya. So? What do you reckon?'

'Oh, I don't know, Shad. Do you think the girls will like it here?'

'They'll love it – I'm sure they will. Who wouldn't love a tyre gym?'

'Do the children wear uniform?'

'Of course. Why wouldn't they?'

'And how do they write?'

'Oh, come on, Maris, you must have heard of indelible ink? Let's move on. The headmaster said we shouldn't go in too close. He said, scuba gear disturbs the kids and the nippers take hours to settle again. Take a left, here. Look, they've got a Greggs. Girls'll be happy.'

'What about McDonalds?'

'Not at the moment. But it won't be long. This is a new town so we'll be moving in at the right time, you know, before it becomes fashionable and house prices go up.'

'How new is new?'

'It was founded in 2014 after the wettest winter on record. It took a hundred and fifty deaths before the first inhabitants changed their breathing habits.'

'You made that up.'

'I read it on the net.'

'That's the same thing.'

'Don't be cynical, Maris. We need to move and this seems like a decent enough place.'

'They call Caerphilly decent...'

'It might well be but do you really want to live near your mother?'

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<sup>1</sup> Elodea is a genus of aquatic plants often called waterweeds.



'I'd rather live by mine than yours...'

'Please, let's don't fight... See, that's where I'll be working – the Centre for Finance, Industry and Transport – in that concrete block over there. Plenty of scope for climbing the ladder. Without C.F.I.T. the town would grind to a halt. I'll be doing the paperwork for the inter-continental rail network. Hey, they have solar powered broadband, you know. Rumours suggest wealthy sediment holders are also investing in natural gasses and are in competition with the Atlantis CO2 Society for first pipeline rights, but I can't verify this.'

'You sound like a tour guide. Are they paying you to sell this to me?'

'Maris, love, I just want you and the girls to be happy. If you don't want to live here I'll have to rent a flat and come home on weekends. If there's no overtime. Why don't you try it? For me. You'll make friends easily, you always do. Hey, paddle over here and look past the scrap merchants. Do you know what that silver building is?'

'A jail.'

'No – that's about a mile north.'

'A chicken farm.'

'Now you're being facetious. You're looking at The Museum of Experimental Art. It's constructed *entirely* of shopping trolleys. After lunch we'll go inside and have a swim round. It's got a great section on contemporary painting and ceramics.'

'Nazi gold?'

'Don't be daft – this is the wrong lake. But there is a stylised portrait of Michael Phelps holding his gold medals.'

'Thrilling. Let's go shopping. What's the shopping centre like?'

'Actually, it hasn't been built. Now, before you say anything, there are plans, and they do have a second-hand shop, *Grown Out, Thrown In*, that should keep you going.'

'Great, I'm sure the girls will love wearing old boots...'

'What I was saying before about making friends... there's the Women's Institute. Ironically it's made from Calor gas bottles... Get it? Women. Gassing. Oh, Maris, please smile.'

'My mask is hurting and this oxygen tank is giving me a bad back. Can we go now?'

'But there's so much more I want to show you.'

'Gee, Shad, I'm bursting with excitement, can't you see that?'

'Shall we go and eat, then? You'll feel better after a sit down and something to drink. I was told *The Fin and Flipper* do a nice roast duck with locally grown veg. Their keg ale is a bit on the briny side, and the lager's watered down, so best stick to shorts. Ray in accounts says the locals call the pub *The Grime and Slime* because it's covered in green weed. When we go in be careful not to touch the walls. But if you do, don't put your fingers near your mouth.'



## *Counting Sins*

Elle Wrightson

'Today's the day?' Quinn asked, as Sydney walked into the living room, a bowl of cereal in hand. The spoon clinked against the bowl as she slumped into the armchair.

'Sure is,' she said. Her drooping eyes and bruised knuckles told the story of the night before. Quinn didn't need to ask, feeling the nightmares filled with needles and dissections pressing back into her mind. Four months and three days ago and she still remembers every detail. The doctors tell her it will pass, eventually.

'How long have you got left?' she asked, watching Sydney scratch her temples with gnawed nails. Yesterday they were painted crimson, not a chip in sight.

'About half an hour,' Sydney said, gazing into the sky that seemed somewhat unfamiliar. The clouds provided an idyllic backdrop for the sparrows, battling in flight.

'I always forget that you were born in the morning,' Quinn said, 'You'll be all right, you know.'

'Nine minutes past eight, precisely. My mum said that labour was awful. Eighteen years later and I think that today will be the same,' she said, remembering the way her mum would throw her onto the sofa, screaming at her to beg for forgiveness. She flinched under the memory.

'It gets better though, look at me I'm getting there.'

'It's been months, Quinn. I can't be a wreck for months, I'd go insane,' Sydney said, sighing. 'This is supposed to be a new part of your life, why does it have to be so rough? You only ever hear horror stories about it.'

'It's not an easy thing to learn, Syd. Nobody likes to think of themselves doing something awful. Nobody. It sends everyone insane, at least for a while, but you do learn to accept it,' Quinn said.

'You're saying that you've accepted butchering and freezing innocent children?' Sydney said, holding her friends flinching gaze.

'No, I haven't accepted that I did that because in my eyes it wasn't me. It was an alternate version of my body. Someone who looked like me butchered children. Someone who looked like me, long before I was born, shot their mother through the eye. Someone who looked like me was a serial killer. None of them are *me*,' Quinn said.

'How do you know that it wasn't you?' Sydney asked, pushing the cereal around the bowl.

'I don't remember any of it. I don't think about murder or torture. I think the same way that I did the day before my eighteenth birthday. I know that they changed me - I remember the dream, probably to the same extent that you do now, but I'm still in control. That's how it's got to stay.'





‘How do you believe that when every sin is inked across your skin?’ Sydney asked, following her prominent veins up her arms. Soon to be unseen.

‘You stop reading them, you stop acknowledging them. It gets to the stage where you have a newspaper on your skin. You've got to detach yourself from it, otherwise you'll end up like them,’ she said, recalling the stories of rabid citizens bludgeoning their own children. She saw her sister, Lacey, pressing her fingers into her father's eyes. Blood drooling to the floor, dripping onto her bare feet.

‘You can't get rid of them though. Don't you want all of your skin to be covered?’ Sydney said, noticing Quinn's now pasty skin. She pressed herself into the gap on the sofa beside her. ‘I'm sorry. I'm just scared.’

‘I know you are, everyone is. The thing is, it's the beginning of your second life, your real life. You get thrown into reality and you learn to cope because that's all you can do,’ she said, leaning onto Sydney's shoulder.

‘What if I don't want a new beginning?’

‘You don't have a choice, Sydney. The alternative is unthinkable. It's part of life.’

Both girls sat listening to the freezer hum and the birds fight, aware that Sydney is about to lose everything that she has ever believed about herself.

‘Society shouldn't be this way,’ Sydney said, before she ran to the bathroom. The lock crunched into place. Her screams silenced the sparrow's fight.



## *Dartmeet Doesn't Change*

Bethany Gimbert

The rust coloured river hadn't changed. The rocks were the same, the water was the same, and even the café was the same. It may have been years since he was last here but it might as well have been days. Sitting on the same rock he had fallen off of years ago, nearly drowning, he opened up his sketch book and pulled the pencil from behind his ear.

Gradually, the sounds of people talking up at the café faded away so that he could only hear river as it rushed down and over the small rapids around his rock. It was as peaceful as ever and he lost himself in drawing it. It was only when his ears picked up that the sounds of people had not just become white noise but actually disappeared altogether that he stopped. He carefully clambered back over the mossy rocks to the bank. There was no one to save him if he slipped this time.

He started the short walk back to the cottage he was staying in. He had chosen to rent this one both for its isolated location and its closeness to the river that filled so many of his memories. This time though, he had come here to be alone and just work. It was better this way. He sighed as he unlocked the door and made his way through to the kitchen. It seemed it would be a long time before his thoughts stopped wandering back to the place he had left – along with the one he left there. He shook his head to clear that thought; he hadn't left anyone. He began to make dinner, just wanting to his thoughts to stop.

As the night went on, the wind picked up and drove the clouds down over the valley. The rain began falling hard and fast. When he was awakened by a loud banging, he first assumed that it was thunder. As the sound came again, he realised that someone was actually knocking at the cottage door. Carefully making his way to the front door, he wondered who it could be. Standing in front of the door, he hesitated before pulling it open. He wasn't sure whether to wish he hadn't.

'How did you find me?' he asked, voice suddenly hoarse.

'Will you let me in?'

'Answer the question!' A growl worked its way into his voice but his body moved automatically. The sight of a wet and shivering Victor, eyes pleading, triggered switches in him that he had no control over. He led the way into the kitchen, putting the kettle on as he indicated for his unexpected, and possibly unwelcome, guest to sit at the table.

'Now,' he said, after taking a deep breath, 'tell me how you found me.'

'I asked your Mum.'

'What?'

'When I came home and found you gone, it was the first place I went.' Victor sounded so sincere and desperate that he had to turn away and focus on making coffee.



‘Okay. That doesn’t explain why though.’

‘Why?’ Victor’s voice showed obvious confusion.

‘Yes,’ he said venomously. ‘Why are you here?!’

‘You left,’ Victor stated, as if that explained everything. ‘Of course I came to find you.’

‘OF COURSE? I left because of you. You called me unlovable; you said you couldn’t take it anymore.’

‘I didn’t mean it! I was just mad; feeling like you didn’t want to be with me anymore.’ Victor looked completely shattered, as if the world had ended.

‘I warned you,’ he said slowly, ‘I warned you that sometimes I get lost in my art. You accepted that. You said you understood.’

‘I know. I know, and I do.’ Victor’s entire being was pleading, and he felt his carefully built walls falling apart before the onslaught.

‘Please darling,’ Victor said, and his heart melted at the familiar endearment, ‘let me make it up to you. Let me apologise every day until I earn your forgiveness. Just don’t leave me again.’ Tears were flowing freely down Victor’s face and he could feel answering ones pricking his own eyes.

‘It’ll take time.’

‘I’ve got time.’ Victor smiled lovely down at him and he gave up all resistance.

The coffee was left to get cold and the rain continued falling. Just down the road, the river rushed around a large stone which a young man had fallen off of years ago, only to be rescued from drowning by a kind man who happened to have been walking by.



## *The Chocolate Thief*

### Sebastian Kimblin

‘What is this?’ asked Jim, as he pulled back the leaves from the trunk. Jackie and Jim were up in their treehouse. It was the summer holidays ‘It’s a door!’ said Jackie.

They opened it and walked through it and found themselves in a foggy, misty cobbled street. They could just see tall, red brick houses, which were extremely close to each other.

A tall, elegant man with a beard, a top hat and coat tails, was walking past. Jackie and Jim spotted a small scruffy and skinny boy, creeping upon the man. They saw him slip his hand into the man’s pocket and pull out a piece of parchment.

The boy quickly ran down an alley. Jackie and Jim decided to follow him. He dodged in and out of people in the crowd then dodged the horses and chariots. They ran after him, in hot pursuit. In a dark alley, they saw him crawl through an open window. They watched him put the parchment on a table.

Jackie checked that the coast was clear, whilst Jim climbed in through the window and collected the paper. They made their way back through the slim narrow streets, to where the tall, smart man lived.

They knocked on his door, the man opened it looking quite in distress. They handed him the piece of parchment and his face beamed with happiness. He explained, that this was his secret recipe and formula, for making solid chocolate.

He invited them in to taste it and they loved the warming sweet chocolate taste. As they left, he gave them his card, on it was his name...his name was JOHN CADBURY.



## *Pain(t)*

Shakira Mason

I once knew a boy who loved to paint,  
his arms were steady but his head was faint.  
His art was a wonder and his hands were clever,  
colours from green to red to heather.  
His painting, however, is not what you think,  
the remains of which can drip down the sink.  
You might think his paintbrush would be of an aid -  
you wouldn't suspect that it is a blade.  
'Do you like my work, my rhythm, my art?'  
he asks, and the words break your heart.  
You know the art, the rhythm, the rhyme,  
because you used to paint on your skin all the time.



## *Time Slip*

Lynda Nash

The fall didn't hurt  
but I did wonder how I would land.

Like a burnished leaf  
that settles without sound?

Like a punctured balloon  
the wind upon its back?

Like a new-born deer  
legs splayed beneath me?

Or in some contorted pose  
that yogis have yet to master?

Perhaps I wouldn't land.  
Just continue to tumble,

planning shopping lists  
and mentally redesigning the house

should the threat of hitting  
the ground become concrete.



## *Elevator Floors*

Maddie Solomon

1. he is alone. he thinks of Jonah. sitting in the belly of the whale.
2. a man and a woman shower him with gifts. meaningless in the absolute scheme of things.
3. it is eleven pm when the man comes home each night.
4. time is a bare kitchen table. they are eating oatmeal, they are eating grits--they are folding remnants of pain into their newspaper [espresso cannot save the insomnia]
5. sunday school teachers. and doctors. he cannot confess.

ii. it is not a sin to be loved.

6. he runs with the crowd. school boys and trains. butterflies in pursuit of reckless flight. dirty their wings, they are moths.
7. this life is not in vain. he dreams in black and white, she dreams in technicolour.
8. the wedding is on the eighth. they are married to an idea. they are married to the sea.
9. she leaves for a cottage in Maine. the neighbours start to whisper. they were always mired in gossip.
10. a suitor makes for bitter company. our hearts are the Gilded age.

iii. it is impossible to truly love enough.

11. wedding. of a son he barely knew. they throw roses. they are married to the sea.
12. all run into the night. their coats heavy with everything.
13. he is sick
14. he has never prayed before. today he prays. today he is Jonah.

*does life take me in death as death in life? do we carry dreams? do we love the sea?*

*am I Jonah, I in the elevator as he in the whale? what is the mouth that swallows me?*

Heaven is a machine.



## *Sometime After 1am*

Lynda Nash

The paramedics came  
with adrenalin and defibrillators,  
why, when and hows,  
paperwork and apologies.

The police with crackling  
radios, stiff upper lips,  
notebooks and procedures,  
phone calls to their superiors.

The undertakers with stretcher  
and sheet, sympathy  
and efficiency, judging  
exit routes in hushed voices.

And sometime  
before dawn, with the house hollowed,  
us on the back step,  
arms linked, staring at the heavens  
naming a star after you.





## *A Fresh Start*

Mustafa Khan

What I need for a fresh start is...

A pencil case;

A lunch box;

A smart uniform;

A gigantic bag for all my belongings;

But the most important thing is to be...fearless, kind, helpful and generous.

Have hope and wish for a happy day to come.

To achieve high and pass exams.

To make new friends and be happy at my new school.



## Rosanne Rivers

Rosanne Rivers is a Birmingham based writer, who published her debut novel *After the Fear* with Immortal Ink Publishing in 2013. She has also written the script to a downloadable app Highrise Heroes.

*After the Fear* is dystopian thriller/ romance novel for Young Adults. It stayed in two US Amazon Best Sellers' lists since the week it was released, and has also won the Best Dystopian Book in the Reader's Choice Awards February 2013.

## Blurb

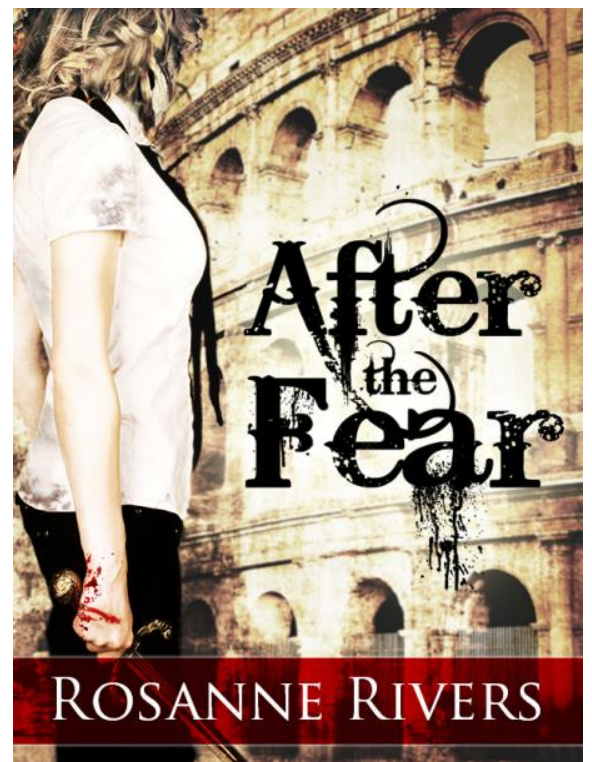
*You have not attended a Demonstration this month.*

In Sola's city, everyone obeys the rules. Stay away from the trigger cameras and regularly update your Debtbook, and you just might survive. But having to watch the way criminals are dealt with—murdered by Demonstrators in the Stadium—is a law Sola tries to avoid. When a charming Demonstrator kisses her at a party, however, she's thrust into the Stadium and forced into the very role she despises.

Armed with only natural resourcefulness and a caring nature, Sola narrowly survives her first bout. Her small success means she's whisked off to a training camp, where she discovers a world beyond the trigger cameras and monitoring—a world where falling in love with a killer doesn't seem so terrible.

Yet life as a Demonstrator has no peace. Sola must train her way through twenty-five more Demonstrations before she can return home to her father. At the end of each battle, only one survivor remains.

Sola could face anyone in the Stadium . . . even a loved one.





## Interview

### **Why did you start writing?**

I love relationships and their complexities. Most of my ideas come from two voices suddenly having a conversation in my mind and me wondering, *what's happening in this scene? Do these people know each other? Are they related?* Etc etc. When I was younger, this was in the form of fan fiction – I couldn't let a story finish after the book or film, so I'd create my own stories with the characters. Eventually, my own characters took over!

### **What other authors inspire you?**

So many! My favourite writers for adults are: Jodi Picoult, Margaret Atwood and Liane Moriarty (her characters are brilliant), and for children/YA: J.K. Rowling (oh Snape, I want you in my books/life), Robin LaFevers, Kiera Cass, Kristin Cashore and Maria V Snyder.

### **What inspired you to write *After the Fear*?**

Everything around me. England was in the middle of a recession, Facebook seemed to be invading its users' privacy more and more, and there were riots right outside my door in Birmingham. According to the news reports at the time, another city near me, Coventry, was considering installing CCTV cameras which activated upon trigger words. So I took these things and imagined a future where we are all born into debt, mandatory social media and CCTV cameras. The Shepherds aren't simply an evil government just out for themselves, but in the novel, they were voted in during a time of massive crisis, and took the measures they thought were needed to keep the country afloat. Usually, when that happens, those measures affect those with the least power, influence and money.

### **How did you go about getting published?**

Once I had completed my novel and edited it dozens of times, I had my manuscript professionally critiqued by a literary consultancy. After applying some changes, letting the manuscript rest for a few weeks, then editing a few more times, I felt as though it was ready to submit. I submitted the covering letter and first three chapters to a handful of smaller publishers, some overseas, and was contacted by Immortal Ink Publishing, asking for the full manuscript. Within a week they had sent a contract over for signing. It was one of the best moments of my life!



**When the book was published, how did it feel, knowing strangers were reading your work?**

Very surreal at first. I'm still not totally used to it! I read all my reviews and am so thankful when someone takes the time to post one, even if it's negative, because it shows the book affected them in some way. A good review from a stranger is honestly a wonderful feeling; I just want to give them a big hug!

**Are you working on anything at the moment?**

Yes. I've completed my second book, a YA fantasy, so hopefully there'll be news on that soon(ish), and I'm working on my third now.

**Do you have any advice or writing tips for new writers?**

It's obvious, but read. Read everything you can get your hands on in the genre you want to write in, but also other genres and age-ranges too. Join a writing group and make your work the best it can possibly be. Also write the book you would want to read with issues and conflict you're passionate about, otherwise you'll lose interest! Finally, be aware of the etiquette which accompanies submitting to agents or publishers. Always follow their guidelines and never submit your work before the whole manuscript is 100% ready.

And of course, believe in yourself and your work.

Thanks so much for having me!



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