



NEWSLETTER

Edition 4: DECEMBER 2021

HAVE
A VERY
HAPPY NEW
YEAR!



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**Phil's Phunny
Cup - The
Winner 2020
Congratulations
(yet again!) to
Martin**



DEREK'S TURN AT WRITERS' CIRCLE

(Any resemblance to real people is mostly accidental and unintended)

Derek was looking forward to his work being praised at Writer's Circle. He'd deleted all the adverbs that had been tauntingly plaguing him recently.

As always, the group had received the work two weeks ago and had been studying it for minutes before the session. Derek was struggling to get through Agatha's second paragraph: one sentence with ten clauses and no more enjoyable than stomach flu.

'Anything particular you'd like feedback on?' He asked delayingly, to buy time. Fortunately her answer was as long-winded as her writing and he skim read the whole piece while she failed to concisely say 'no'.

'I wasn't sure your Quaker Minister hero would knife an old lady in the heart.' He added, while thinking 'unless he'd met you.' Conversation turned to which branch of Christianity would most likely produce an in-character granny-murdering minister hero, before Matthew returned to the murder saying it was the best bit.

Attention turned to Derek. Agatha smiled, Cheshire catishly.

'I made a few notes.' She said, handing over his work, reddened with corrections. 'I mean, I know it's only first draft...'

'Yes, first draft.' He said. The Cow! He'd been honing it for months.

She continued, 'You often use words in the wrong concept.'

He read it anew, red ink highlighting clear mistakes:

Chapter 2.

Flavio suddenly lost his tempter, shiting and testiculatng wildly...

Derek considered pretending that shiting and testiculatng were quirky character traits of Flavio but just couldn't imagine what testiculatng was. The circle had many suggestions.

MEMBERS' MUSINGS - 1

FROM JUNE

The present crisis which has worsened over Christmas and New year has reminded me of the poem by Louise Haskins - 'I said to the man at the gate of the year...' which as you know was read by King George VIth on Christmas day 1939. This also brought to my mind a framed print of Holman Hunt's 'The Light of the World' that hung on my bedroom wall as a child.

Also please encourage any 'non zoomers' that if I can do it anyone can!!!

I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year,
"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."
And he replied, "Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the
hand of God.
That shall be to you better than light, and safer than a known way."
May that Almighty hand guide and uphold us all.



FROM JAYNE

I'm not sure if you and other HWC members are aware of the amazing catalogue of free OU writing courses available to anyone.

Registration is simple and it's all online and modules downloadable. You can chose your level and course duration.

There are a host of creative writing elements to chose from the introductory levels such as 'Start Writing Fiction, Character and Stories; to an Intermediate level 'Approaching Prose Fiction' and the Advanced with 'Creative Writing and Critical Reading'.

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/free-courses/full-catalogue>

FROM SARAH

Resources for Writers - New Writing South

<https://newwritingsouth.com/support-for-writers/resources-for-writers>

The Creative Bridge - The Creative Campus

[https://www.thecreativity-campus.com/the-creative-bridge?
_ccCt=_tmRzRYDQqo2km9_0_atOwLdXucTvLEM
pqwWQLe2oGR_2yDf8kb9Kd%7egqpRqXqVn](https://www.thecreativity-campus.com/the-creative-bridge?_ccCt=_tmRzRYDQqo2km9_0_atOwLdXucTvLEMpqwWQLe2oGR_2yDf8kb9Kd%7egqpRqXqVn)

The Lucy Cavendish College Fiction Prize

<https://www.fictionprize.co.uk/>

MEMBERS' MUSINGS - 2

Also From Sarah - Info about a webinar and a competition organised by Writers On Line.



YOU ONLY HAVE A FEW DAYS LEFT TO REGISTER! DON'T MISS OUT!

**FUNDAMENTALS
OF NOVEL WRITING
WITH JAMES
MCCREET
LIVE WEBINAR**



16th & 23rd January at
10am (UK time)

The team at *Writing Magazine* have joined forces with author James McCrete to bring you a two-part webinar on the fundamentals of novel writing to give your writing a boost for 2021.

January 16th: Webinar 1 – Building your Idea (two hours)

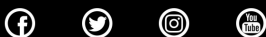
How to grow the seed of an idea into a solid foundation for your novel. James teaches a technique for roughly structuring any kind of novel so that it will work for a reader and be easier to write. Using a mix of on-screen presentation and interactive exercises, he will leave you with a plan you can start to use straight away.

January 23rd: Webinar 2 – Writing that works (two hours)

Once you have a workable structure, you need to hone your storytelling skills. That means mastering narrative (how a story flows and connects) and writing scenes that keep the readers' attention from page to page. James will explain through presentation, examples and interactive exercises how to hone these skills.

FIND OUT MORE

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**WRITERS
ONLINE**
Helping you become a better writer

WRITING MAGAZINE GRAND PRIZE 2021

Back by popular demand!

Following the success of the first Grand Prize, the team at Writers Online and *Writing Magazine* bring you the 2021 *Writing Magazine* Grand Prize competition with a **top prize of £1,000** and runner up prizes totalling over £400.

**WIN!
£1,000**

We are looking for a short story of no more than 2000 words and it can be on a topic of your choice.

Simply click on the button below for more information and details of how you can upload your entry. Good luck!

ENTER NOW

READ ABOUT OUR 2020 WINNER



Meet 2020 Grand Prize winner Iris Goldstajn, who explains the origin and writing of her story and what winning the prize has done for her.

READ MORE

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BOOK REVIEWS - 1

From Maggie:

'Lanny' by Max Porter

Max Porter is an extraordinary writer, he takes everything you learnt in Creative Writing courses and throws it out the window. His first book was 'Grief is the Thing with Feathers' in which the main character was Crow from the poem by Ted Hughes. I have to say that although it won awards and accolades, I found it rather difficult and odd.

His second book, 'Lanny', felt more accessible and has more of a story. It is set in a rural village within commuting distance of London, but beset with superstition and gossip. When a young boy, Lanny, goes missing all hell breaks loose in the village. Not least amongst the characters is a mythic, somewhat dishevelled sort of green man, called Dead Papa Toothwort, who has haunted the village and caused mischief for generations. The writing, even the physical layout, is unusual, but the story is compelling. It seems very current and yet with deep roots in the past. I would certainly recommend it as the story is good with a nice twist, and the style is interesting although challenging at times.

From Lesley:

'Everything I know about parties, dates, friends, jobs, life, love.'

Dolly Alderton



This was a fantastic read, at times heartbreaking and funny in equal measure, but never self-indulgent. Because it was autobiographical, I really felt I got to know Dolly: warts and all. Honest and self-deprecating this is a journey of self-discovery that I really empathised with, through its stories of friendship, love and loss and the necessity of this, at times, fraught journey in order to find yourself. I would recommend this

book for adult readers and young adult readers, particularly those who struggle with mental health issues. Dolly talks frankly about her time in therapy and it's clear that the tools she learned really supported her current level of self-awareness and

From Lesley again:

'The Ice Daughters' by D.E. White



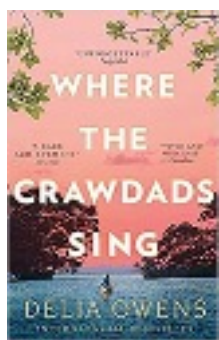
A naked frozen man, hair spiked with ice crystals and with the number two written on his chest, is found arranged in a macabre tableau on a doorstep opposite a smouldering factory. The owner of the house is missing, her two young children have slept through the abduction and their mother's frantic calls for help to the emergency services. An absolute corker of a first chapter in this pacy and gripping tale of crime with chilling references to the Nazi Hypothermia experiments conducted at Dachau in 1943.

Filled with intrigue and stark detail, Daisy's descriptions fill the reader with a creeping dread at the visual imagery portrayed: "The chess pieces ... glittered menacingly, faceless and angular against the backdrop of the red front door."

Daisy's characters were crafted well and no element was missed out, so each stood independent and believable, 100% recommended.

Also from Lesley:

'Where the Crawdads Sing' by Delia Owens



A phenomenal and beautifully written story of a young girl whose mother reluctantly walks away from her young family, after enduring years of abuse, broken promises and hardship from the family's cheating, alcoholic father.

Kya Clark, just out of infancy, has to learn how to survive and to raise herself against the beautiful and wild background of North Carolina's marsh country; with no sympathy or help from its town's deeply prejudiced residents.

When Barkley Cove's favourite star quarterback and the town's most popular boy, Chase Andrews, is found dead at the base of the fire tower, Kya is immediately the key suspect. The town have been aware for years of the rumours surrounding Chase and Kya, but with no obvious clues they will struggle to prove the guilt of the 'Marsh Girl'.

This novel follows Kya's almost feral quest for survival through her desperate quest for love and acceptance by the resistant townsfolk. Eventually, realisation that she can only rely on herself and the beautiful backdrop of the marsh and the gulls she befriends, Kya learns independence.

While I was buying this book, from my local Waterstones, someone called in to thank the manager for recommending this book. She said, it was one of her favourite books of 2020, I agree with her.



SHOWCASE - 1

Mathew Bridle's 'Masterplayer'

By Lesley Hart



Greed, arrogance and determination drive Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, in his quest for Elizabeth I's throne. He is The Queen's favourite and has fought wars in her name - or has he?

As William Shakespeare builds his Globe Theatre and forges his place in the palace court, it appears he too will unwittingly be drawn into the combined schemes of Devereux and the unstoppable forces of Spain and Ireland. Can a playwright without wealth, inheritance, or title, foil Essex's treasonous plans and save The Queen and his reputation.

Masterplayer uncovers the guile which runs rampant in court and bleeds onto London's streets, culminating in a final showdown at Westminster. One that will result in death - but whose?

Mathew's blurb for Masterplayer represents the final stages towards publishing Author's Pen's second book. This novel is a historical fiction story that Mathew has worked on for more than four years.

It's a completely different genre from Mathew's preferred genres: Fantasy and Sci-Fi, and came about as the result of a chance meeting with a lady called Ginny Monroe. She had written a screen play called Masterplayer and asked if Mathew thought he could write the novel.

Mathew rose to the challenge and found that historical story writing had similarities with fantasy writing, both Fantasy and History, in this instance, included: dragons, castles, kings, wars etc. It was really just the source material that changed.

One of the questions that Author's Pen had to consider, and which may resonate with other authors, was to do with pen names. Mathew was already established as a fantasy author and this book may well be his only foray into historical fiction writing, so should he consider a different pen-name? Particularly, bearing in mind the subject matter and genre?

After much heart-felt discussion, we felt that Mathew had worked so hard on Masterplayer that he deserved the personal recognition for his labours.

Prior to writing Masterplayer, Mathew would simply get an idea and begin to write, his plotting style was essentially that of a 'pantser'. Fictionalising known facts meant that a different writing style was necessary. Historical fiction requires that certain events must happen. It was necessary to put them on a timeline and use them as beats to the story. The rest was then structured around them.

His research began at the end of the story. With no knowledge of Shakespeare, Queen Elizabeth, and in particular of Richard Devereux: 2nd Earl of Essex. Mathew wrote the last scene first, then set about the start, the rest then began to fall in order. It was difficult to keep the story in chronological order as some old documents had different dates in them. Additionally, 'quieter' years were condensed down to maintain pace. He had to create a couple of characters for convenience of plot mechanics too.

It was through this that Mathew was able to include some details of Horsham's illustrious connections to Elizabethan England, with the creation of his character: Marie, Lady-in-Waiting to Queen Elizabeth and a central character in his plot

Having completed Masterplayer, Mathew has gone back to his creative writing MA studies and his current WIP towards his MA qualification is a fast-paced Sci-fi.

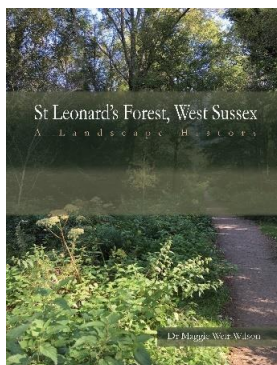
You can read more of Mathew's work and order his previously self-published novels by pasting his website's address into your browser:

<https://theonesagacouk.wordpress.com>

To speak to Author's Pen about visits and talks by Mathew, please contact: authorspen@outlook.com

Masterplayer will be published by Author's Pen at the end of January 2021. To pre-order your copy, please email: authorspen@outlook.com

SHOWCASE - 2



Details

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E-book: £9.99

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St Leonard's Forest, West Sussex: A Landscape History by Dr. Maggie Weir-Wilson

'The first in-depth study of St Leonard's Forest'

Have you ever wondered about St. Leonard's Forest as you pass it by in your car, bicycle, or in the bus; maybe you have walked its footpaths, with or without a dog? Was it a royal forest? Who owned it? And what about the dragon? Wasn't there something about a saint and the white and pink spring flowers, lily of the valley? Wonder no more. This book tells it all. The iron and the rabbits, the estates with their parks and gardens, the villages, churches and people, not forgetting of course, the dragon.

'It is odd that very little has been written about this fascinating forest, which was never a royal forest, but since Norman times it was a chase under the control of William de Braose of Bramber. Forest game was hunted for food and sport but other forest resources such as iron working and charcoal making continued for many centuries. Later the forest land, which was unsuitable for agriculture, housed warrens to breed rabbits, a lucrative trade with London ... The five private estates were much prized for their accessibility to London and attractive Wealden landscape. An interest in horticulture and design was exemplified by the Lodges at Leonardslee, still a beautiful garden and open to the public.'

About the Author

In her work as a Probation Officer, Maggie moved to Horsham, West Sussex in 2000. She began evening classes studying for a BA Landscape Studies at University of Sussex. Maggie was aware that retirement was approaching fast, and so was keen to continue her studies with a six-year part time DPhil Landscape Studies. For her subject she took St Leonard's Forest on the edge of Horsham and researched how social and economic history effected this forest landscape. She was awarded her doctorate in 2014. Since then she has focussed on writing; fiction, non-fiction and poetry. Her first publication was *Secret Horsham* (2019) Amberley Publications. This will be her second book, *St Leonard's Forest, West Sussex: A Landscape History*, published by local company Author's Pen.



"Maggie's scholarly work has now paid off in a handsome way, as readers of this book will quickly recognise. Covering a long time scale we are taken through the Forest's landscape development in a thematic treatment, each illuminated by her own knowledge and her own artistic flair."

**Brian Short, Emeritus Professor of Historical Geography
University of Sussex**

For more information, editorial opportunities, interview requests or review copies please get in touch with Author's Pen by email: authorspen@outlook.com

Why I Started Writing - Jackie

It was in the late 1970s. I was a full time mother, my choice, but I still missed the companionship of colleagues and the mental stimulus that going to work brings. Our children were still little but I began to teach in Sunday school at the church we attended. Whilst doing my preparation one day I read that the organisation, which published the teaching guides we used, was advertising for writers. I applied.

My test assignment arrived just before we were due to set off on our family holiday. 'Take it with you,' my husband said. 'I'll look after the kids, while you take time to write'. I sent my writing to the publishers, Scripture Union, and received a reply that I had the feel for this kind of writing and they wanted to take me on. I felt affirmed and valued, in a way which you will understand if you have spent several years at home as a full time parent. And I found that I enjoyed the writing process. I contributed happily for two years. I then went back to full time teaching and subsequently trained as a teacher of the deaf.

During my teaching career I had articles published in the local press, in professional magazines and journals and co-wrote a chapter in a book on Deaf Education.

The idea of writing for pleasure came when I left my last full time teacher of the deaf post. I determined to write about the previous five years which had been important and remarkable in many ways. The resulting manuscript was rejected by various publishers and then, as often happens, life intervened. For several years other things consumed my time and energy: caring for grandchildren, running baby signing classes and coping with my husband's health issues and repeated surgeries. Throughout though, I wrote a daily journal.

When we moved to Horsham, almost two years ago, my ambition was to do a creative writing course. I did that, starting in September 2019 with the lovely Lesley. As part of putting into practice lessons learned on the course, I began to rewrite the book, in 1000 word chunks! And received favourable feedback. Now I'm here with some of my fellow students in the Horsham Writers Circle, very happy to be with others who enjoy the writing process and will spur me on to finish the memoir I started in 2002.

WRITERS' TIPS - 1

Writing from Pictures - Tracey



Some years ago I went on a creative writing course which lasted just for a morning, but was hugely helpful. It was run by Ruth Brandt, a published author, who runs many courses and has a website (www.ruthbrandt.co.uk) and a facebook page (Creativity, inspiration and muses).

The point of the course I attended was to use photographs as a starting point for some short pieces of writing. Ruth had brought along a random selection of photos cut from magazines - they were totally unrelated and I think we all felt that we would struggle to get started. However, having been given one photo each, and the deadline of 15 minutes hence, we had no choice but to get cracking!

Focussing completely on the photograph forced me to 'jump right in'. I subconsciously asked questions of the man in my photo (why was he there? What was he doing? What will happen after this moment?), and writing from first ideas rather than honing thoughts into a more considered piece gave me a sense of freedom. It made me realise how much I usually think about the eventual reader before I write - having that 15 minute work window was perfect - it gave me no time to do anything but go with my initial thoughts about the picture.

None of us wrote more than a paragraph, but the discussions we had about each piece were very telling - we discovered that sharing the photos before sharing the pieces of writing allowed the listeners to get into the zone, and some of us found that we had mutual visual references (from films for example) with the writer, whilst others would have taken a completely different path had that photograph been their inspiration.

I started a notebook after taking the course, where I picked up a picture at random every couple of days and wrote for 15 minutes - it was a great way of breaking the writing ice, and I can recommend it!

WRITERS' TIPS -2

People Watching: Creating Character - Lesley

Following on from last month's blog, I wanted to continue to discuss the value of people watching, and too the value of inner reflection.

While you're looking around the café and trying to work out who to look at, begin by focussing on your own behaviour, what are you doing?: blowing on your coffee, wiping your mouth with your napkin? Is there any noise that makes it difficult to hear, or to focus? Is the noise loud, or merely distracting? Why? Look at how you are holding your cup? What does this convey about your mood, character, or how you want to be perceived in this situation?

Now look at the individual(s) you're focussing on. What characteristics best sum up the person you're watching? Which are the ones you would focus on in a line-up? Character description should only focus in on the characteristics that make the individual distinctive and unique. Look again, are there any characteristics that give some indication of personality or mood? Additionally, what about social group? How are they trying to fit in. Or, stand out? It could be a brooch, deliberately laddered tights, a peaky blinders cap, the way they've tied their scarf, something in their hair, or the way they've styled it - have they done something that appears deliberately conscious, or artfully/artlessly unconscious? If there is something that deliberately ties them to something, or to some social group, what does that tell you about their character or personality?

See if you can discover their mood from their body language, are they relaxed? Or, bunched up with everything crossed? How much space are they taking up at their table - what might this tell you about them? Have they got any ticks? A constantly flicking leg, are they drumming their fingers on the table, playing with their hair, checking their appearance. Look at the person or group they're with, try and read the emotional interplay between them - is this likely to be their usual behaviour? Or, does it relate to the conversation they're having? Look at their facial expressions; what clues does this give you? How close are they sitting to each other? Are they leaning towards each other? Are they heavily engaged in their conversation? Or is one, or both, of them distracted? Is the conversation relaxed? Or, heated?

Continued on next page

See if another table is having a different type of conversation? Contrast the two types of behaviour - what marks the conversations out as being different?

What you're doing here is learning all about how to use show and tell effectively in your writing. For example, you can 'tell' your reader that your couple are having a heated discussion, maybe you might use some dialogue, and possibly some punctuation to add weight to your dialogue. But think about how much this tells your reader about character and how much more effective it would be to show your characters having this heated discussion; using what you've learned about body language and action. For example:

Simon leaned forwards, his body rigid and shoulders hunched towards his ears. He jabbed a finger towards Maggie, his coffee slopped over the rim of his cup as the table jarred. He didn't notice, but Maggie clearly had, she leaned back, her eyes went to the coffee pooling on the table before returning anxiously to his face.

You can tell from this that Simon is the aggressor, he's full of pent-up anger and is the one leaning forwards; determined to get his point across and ignorant of his spilled coffee because he is so incensed. Maggie, contrastingly, is leaning away from Simon; trying to put distance between them? Maybe, to give herself that fight or flight space? Either that, or she's surprised by the sudden outburst? Additionally, she's seen the spilled coffee but realises that she won't help the situation by mentioning it now.

You'll notice too - there's no dialogue here, but the dialogue you add will simply have weight added to it by the actions and body language of the individuals. There's no need to tag the dialogue. By weaving this action into the dialogue you've created a dynamic scene, which adds weight and depth to the conversation they're having. Both dialogue, action and body language will help to develop the reader's knowledge of character.

Essentially, developing character in this way means you don't have to work half as hard as you would if you were telling and tagging your way through your story.

Happy writing.

SHORT FORMERS - FOR OUR NEXT SESSION - ON 21st JANUARY

THE TASK

Was it the drink that stopped me remembering? Was it the excitement of the moment that made me forget? Was it because I just didn't want to talk about work when we were all having fun? But, for whatever reason, at our Christmas 'do', I failed to suggest what we might write for the next Short Form Session (21st January).

So, how about this?

As always - it could be a piece on any subject you like. But otherwise would you have a go at writing a 'setting' for a story? You might like to complete a short story that develops from it or just present the setting.

(For any 'newbies' to the group, our usual pattern is that we take it in turns to read out our pieces and discuss them in turn. We have about an hour to cover everyone, so, obviously, the pieces can't be too long)

What I'd also suggest will help our discussion is if you're willing to :

- say why you think the way you've described the setting may be useful for the rest of the piece;
- suggest what you're most pleased with (a detail, perhaps, or a general point);
- point to what you found most tricky to do.

(If you're doing your own piece instead, then you can still give your thoughts about b and c.)

HERE ARE some things we might discuss about the settings we've created:

Choice of place: both geographical location and immediate surroundings. A story in a run down part of a city is changed completely if moved to a coral island in the Pacific. A scene in a claustrophobic room shifts when it occurs in a vast forest.

What's the Time: Time of day, a season or time of year, or historical time period.

You can use your character's interpretation of the setting. It sometimes is worth seeing the scene through the eyes (nose and ears as well, if appropriate) of your character - what they observe in the setting, what they feel about it. It can help develop your character.

Use your readers' likely responses to the setting - it may well be a bit of a stereotype or clichéd setting - but this can create a 'stock response' in your reader (a gloomy old house at night, a romantic sunset etc. - they can still engage your reader - or you as a writer).

Sandra suggested that we might be interested to read the winner of *The Daily Telegraph* short story competition. So here it is - it's a cracker! The runners-up can also be found on *The Daily Telegraph* website:

Orbit heard a scratching from his bag and quickened his pace towards a narrow scar of rocks, uncovered by low tide. A breeze drifted in from the leaden sea and the sun glinted on the wet rocks. On the slipway, he passed an irritated fisherman who hitched a red cobble to a tractor which, despite being stripped of its bodywork, ran well.

An elderly couple walked dogs; a schnauzer and an Alsatian. They altered course to avoid intersecting Orbit's path. He looked back at the cinema, the rear of which was built on to the beach. The council, his dad once said, had painted *Achtung!* on the sea-facing wall to trick invading Germans into thinking that they were lost and had landed back in the Reich. Orbit walked briskly, carrying the red scuffed holdall, in which was a plastic box containing water of 3.5 per cent salinity. In this was Kingsley, a native British lobster.

Orbit had acquired Kingsley in late March at Vinteuil, a sullen French restaurant in Holborn. Barry, the sinewy head chef, called to him, 'Do you want this? You're the only one who'll know what to do with it.' At arm's length, he held a lobster that was waving its limbs angrily. Orbit accepted. The other Vinteuil chefs, a brigade of compliant but incompetent drifters, looted the booze and steaks while Barry and Orbit readied the kitchen for the Government-ordered closure.

At midnight, Barry stepped into a cab with three bin bags straining with food. 'Well, bye Orbit. Take care, won't you?' Barry stared at Orbit with puzzled concern, a look that seemed to express both doubt that they would meet again, or that he would give this any thought once the taxi had gone. Along with the lobster, Orbit took what the others left: foie gras, red mullet fillets, duck breasts and a cannon of lamb.

Back at his worn-down bedsit on the top floor of a Georgian house in Mornington Crescent, he packed the food into a tiny fridge. The lobster was still. Orbit leaned towards it, his nose near its long antennae and hard, angry face. The lobster swiped a claw, disabled by a pink rubber band, against Orbit's cheek. 'Little bugger!' The lobster tried a few more jabs, but quickly accepted its predicament and went to sleep. Orbit put it in a plastic box surrounded by damp newspapers and placed this in the fridge.

He scored the skin of one of the duck breasts and cooked it on the Baby Belling, letting the smoke from the slowly rendering fat drift into the night. He checked the lobster, who raised a claw in objection and dismissed Orbit. 'Goodnight.'

The next day, Orbit baked a dense pain d'épice. He ate foie gras - sliced and sautéed in butter - on warm bread. Later, he examined the lobster, looked over its glossy black-blue and fawn freckled shell, its rusty claws, its spindly legs and oily black eyes. The lobster threw up its limbs with impatience.

That evening, hollandaise made, Orbit held the lobster above roughly boiling water. About to launch it, he became transfixed by the cross-hatch of pink and white raised scars on his own wrists. They reddened in the heat. He sat the lobster on the table and traced the mottled ruts; how quickly the Vinteuil chefs had noticed them and then remained warily remote.

A light thud broke his thoughts and he saw the lobster disappear under the single bed, moving with impressive haste. Bending down, he watched it scamper over some paperbacks, the only things he'd kept from his marriage. The lobster sat on a 1980s copy of Kingsley Amis's *The Alteration*. Orbit looked down indulgently. Back in the fridge, Kingsley went to sleep, pleased with his reprieve.

Orbit did not kill Kingsley. He rarely went out during the next two weeks. The lobster took daily strolls around the room while Orbit re-read books he had not touched for 20 years. They ignored the world outside. Orbit occasionally quoted something aloud. Kingsley was always delighted to return to his newly salinated water. Orbit felt something returning.

As April grew warmer, the sun flooded and warmed the room each morning. The old fridge struggled. Orbit considered Kingsley's options. He recalled piles of orange stringed lobster pots in Fisherman's Square, near where he grew up. Getting into the trap was easy; getting out, his dad said, was the issue.

Next morning, he went north from King's Cross, a first-class carriage to himself. The conductor sniffed at the bag, unable to place the faint smell of the seaside. Just after Retford, Orbit checked on Kingsley, who looked up at the fast-moving world and settled back down, unimpressed. After changing to a local train, they arrived at the bright, shivering coast.

Orbit scrambled along the rocks; he occasionally slipped on seaweed, but kept upright. Soon, he stood on a spit of rock. The water gently expanded and contracted about him. Faded pink buoys marked the lobster pots nearby, but Orbit was confident Kingsley would not fall for them a second time. The risk seemed to be the price of freedom.

Looking landwards, he saw the old couple staring, the schnauzer barking. He lifted Kingsley out of the holdall and stared at the glistening carapace, and noticed again the scars on his own soft skin. He remembered the rubber bands. With a small penknife, he set one claw free; Kingsley began snapping with uncoordinated enthusiasm. Orbit removed the second band and lowered Kingsley towards rocks that were covered by two feet of water and fine seaweed.

As he was about to be liberated, Kingsley reached around and, with his larger, left claw, clipped the fleshy tip off Orbit's right forefinger. Orbit dropped Kingsley who dashed out of sight, pursued by a shower of blood. Orbit shook his head, held his finger, smiled, and turned his face to the town where he grew up.



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