

CAROLE RICHARDSON

While the Creative Writing degree course has a finite end, creative writing is a lifetime process.

Website: <https://www.cjrichardsonwriter.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/cjrichardsonwriter>

My books: [North Sea Shells](#) and [Home Truths](#)

BA Hons Creative
Writing

About

I live in a small village in North Yorkshire and completed my degree in Creative Writing with the OCA in May 2020. In 2016, I self-published a historical fiction novel based in Hartlepool during WW1 and in 2018, an anthology of short stories based around a fictitious town in the north-west of England. The stories are mainly from pieces written during the 'Writing Short Fiction' module. I am currently working on a second historical fiction novel set in 16th century England which I started while studying the third-year modules 'Retrospect and Prospect' and 'Independent Project'. The novel is based around the Northern Rebellion of 1569 and I hope to publish later this year.

I find the research part of my craft exciting and motivational and spend a great deal of time visiting places of historical interest. I read as much as possible, including non-fiction work, on the subject I am writing about. I also read lots of novels in the genre and periods I write about. They are invaluable sources when deciding on style, voice, point of view and period details.

I find I have still much to learn, but by continuing to write about a subject with infinite sources of interest and fascination, I hope to become a successful historical fiction author.

Taking Time Out

Why had she thought coming back to her parents' house was a good idea? Louise wasn't the same person, no longer the girl who had left all those years ago, a stranger, an unknown guest they would have to endure for the weekend. She couldn't expect a warm welcome, not after what she had done.

Louise had got off the bus ten minutes ago but was still sitting on the cold wooden bench. She pulled her thick wool coat tighter. They ought to change the name. The last thing you could call this was a bus *shelter*. The wind rattled the glass panes behind her; fine rain blew in the open front and stung her face. Checking her watch for the umpteenth time, she felt her pulse quicken as she remembered the sound of the ambulance leaving the photoshoot this morning. David, groaning and holding onto his side, shouting for her to follow on.

The rain stopped as suddenly as it had started and the setting sun cast an insipid yellow sheen on the late afternoon sky. She couldn't sit there all night.

Standing up and holding the collar of her coat close around her neck, she grabbed the handle of her suitcase and set off, wheeling it along the cracked paving stones. The tiny wheels rumbled and echoed, thumping down the kerbs as she crossed each junction along the deserted, Sunday afternoon roads of Battletown, passing street after street of terraced homes until she reached the simple, two up-two down house on Blake Street.

When her father opened the door, the sight of him in his home-knitted, sleeveless jersey and rolled shirt sleeves made her want to hug him close, but the hard look in his eyes as he stared at her in disbelief stopped her in her tracks.

'You'd better come in,' he said, eyeing her suitcase before leaving her standing there and retreating to the front room. Louise, shaking, lifted her case over the threshold before putting it down in the hall and following him into the warmth. The lingering smell of roast beef and cabbage filled her nostrils, making her swallow the saliva that bubbled up on her tongue.

'Hello Mum,' she said. Her mother looked up from the comfortable fireside seat.

'Louise. Oh, Louise.' Alice jumped up and flung her arms around her daughter.
'You're back.'

Louise clung on to her mother, breathing her in, the familiar scent of 4711 telling her she was home.

'Come and sit by the fire. You must be frozen stiff,' her mother said as if Louise had just got back from popping to the shop.

Louise took off her coat and sat in the armchair her mother was offering. She stretched her hands out to the fire to warm them. 'It hasn't changed a bit,' she murmured.

'I'll put the kettle on, and then you can tell me all your news,' her mum said. Her face was beaming as she bustled out of the room.

Louise checked the time. Yes. Tea would be good.

Her father cleared his throat. 'You look well,' he said. She knew he was referring to the tailored suit she'd been wearing for the photoshoot this morning, rather than her. There hadn't been time to change. His voice didn't sound as loud and sharp as she remembered. There was a slight hoarseness when he spoke.

'Thanks,' she said. 'And you?'

'You're interested, are you?'

Louise swallowed hard. 'Of course.' She didn't know what else to say. The silence spread; both of them feeling awkward; their gaze firmly fixed on the flames that were licking up the black back of the chimney; their attention on the coal as it cracked, split, and shifted in the open hearth.

'Here we are.' Louise's mother spoke cheerily, briskly, as she came back into the room carrying a tray.

Louise's father sneered at his wife. 'Since when did we use cups and saucers and a teapot?' She watched her mother's face redden.

'I... I thought it would be - you know? What she's used to...'

Louise felt embarrassed for her. 'It's lovely, Mum. Thank you.' She stood up and automatically retrieved the light, water-marked coffee table from its home under the netted window and put it in front of the fire. Taking the tray, she signalled for her mum to sit back down in her armchair. 'I'll be mother,' she said, smiling broadly.

'I noticed your suitcase in the hall. Are you stopping long?'

'Only until something better comes along,' her father said, glaring at her.

It felt like a slap, and Louise's face was now the one turning pink. She didn't blame him for being angry. 'I... I was hoping to spend a couple of days. If that's okay?'

'Of course, love.' Her mother looked up at her. The china-blue eyes that had always been her best feature, now looked a dull grey to Louise, as if they had changed with age to match her hair colour. Louise turned away, tears pricking her own eyes as she poured the tea and passed it over.

'Had enough of you, has he?'

'Don't, George. She'll tell us when she's ready.'

'You're a right glutton for punishment, Alice.'

Louise passed a cup to her mum and then to her father. The cups rattled in their saucers. He took it from her without a word.

'Would you prefer it if I went?' she asked, her head cast down, unable to look directly at him.

'Do what you like. You always have.'

Louise poured herself some tea and sat on one of the spindle-back chairs by the dining table. She looked at her watch. It had been one o'clock when she'd rung the hospital from a phone box at Kings Cross. They'd removed his appendix, and he was sitting up and talking. He'd be counting the minutes. 'I've left, David. I couldn't—He was-.'

'What? Too dull? Wouldn't let you walk all over him?'

'Stop it, George. Give her a chance.' Her mother got up and pulled up another dining chair. Facing her daughter and taking hold of Louise's hands, she said, 'You can stay as long as you want.'

The warm, soft, white skin touching hers was all it took for Louise to burst into tears.

Alice sat quietly beside her daughter, giving her time to calm down and drink her tea before speaking. 'C'mon. Let's take your bag upstairs.' She tugged at Louise's hand, pulling her up from the seat. Louise went out into the hall without protest.

George reached for the poker and began stirring the coal in the grate, creating an explosion of sparks as the coal hissed and spat.

Louise followed her mother and stepped onto the faded, patterned runner on the stairs. The same runner that her feet had raced over every day of her life until she'd left home ten years ago.

'I s'pose I'd better bank it up. She'll be wanting a bath next,' he shouted after them.

The words sounded gruff, but a shadow of a smile crept across Louise's face as she remembered him using those same words every Friday night when she would shovel her tea down and race upstairs to get ready for a night out with her friends. She pictured herself running back down to him, kissing his cheek, and whispering in his ear. "Thanks, Dad. You're the best." He'd turn and waft her away with his hands. "Get on with you," he'd mumble, and she'd dash back upstairs as happy as it was possible to be.

She wasn't so sure of herself or him this time, but it made her feel safe, and that feeling was what she needed most right now.

Alice held the bedroom door open as Louise lugged her suitcase in and dropped it down onto the purple shag-pile carpet. Looking around, she felt as if she had never left. The room was exactly as it was the last time she had seen it. 'Oh, Mum.'

'I haven't changed anything. Wanted it to stay as it was until you got home.'

Louise looked at the David Cassidy posters on the wall, the little trolls with bright coloured hair in a range of colours, standing to attention along the windowsill. Sitting on the edge of the bed, gripping the mattress, she could hardly see anything through the puddles swimming around her eyes. 'I thought you would have thrown it all away. Redecorated. I didn't expect—deserve-.'

'You're my daughter,' said Alice. 'This is your home.' Turning to leave, she added, 'You take as long as you want. Come down when you're ready.'

Louise lay down on the bed and stared up at the ceiling. She looked at her watch. Visiting was at seven.

She opened her eyes; it was pitch black. Louise flinched and sat up. What time was it? He'd be back soon. She reached out for her watch, but it wasn't there. She snatched at her wrist and, feeling the metal strap, relaxed and let her breath out slowly. She hadn't taken it off. While she fumbled for the bedside light, the bedroom door opened, and light flooded in from the landing.

'I was just coming,' she said, almost diving from the bed, feeling dizzy as the blood rushed from her head.

'It's alright. No rush. I've brought you a cup of tea.'

'Mum?' Louise remembered where she was. She took the mug and put it down on the pine bedside cabinet. 'What time is it?'

'Six o'clock. I've run a bath for you. We'll eat at seven. Cold beef and salad, okay?'

Louise checked her watch. 'I think that will be alright. Thank you,' she said, reaching out her hand. Her mum squeezed it gently and went back downstairs.

Louise got out of bed and opened her suitcase, taking out her cosmetics bag. She unzipped it and took out some cleanser and cotton wool balls. Sitting down at her dressing table, she took a hairbrush from her old vanity case, unclipped her long dark hair and brushed it thoroughly. Her perfect makeup was smudged around her eyes and made her face look clownish and ugly. Looking in the mirror, she cleaned up her face and saw only a faint shadow of the girl who ran off with the handsome fashion scout so long ago. She could see him now, still feel his hand tight around her wrist as he lay on the trolley, ready to go down to the theatre. "*Make sure you're back here in time for visiting.*"

Louise stripped and reached for her old, pink fluffy dressing gown from behind the door and put it on. It made her feel like a teenager again, flooding her mind with memories. It was soft on her skin, but it was enormous, hanging on her narrow shoulders like a man's coat that had been put on a child's hanger by mistake. Lifting the collar around her face, she breathed in deeply. Pure Flakes. Mum always washed with Pure

Soap Flakes. It was her favourite brand, even in the twin tub. She always said that powder didn't dissolve properly on delicate fabrics. She looked on the bookshelves above the dresser to see if there was anything worth reading in the bath. There were the books for her A-level studies, some childhood favourites, and some classics that her father had bought her when she'd said that she was taking English Lit. He had been so proud of her. "My little girl is going to University," he'd brag to anyone who'd listen. "She'll be the first in our family." She stroked the spines of the unopened books, feeling the hurt he must have gone through when she had let him down so badly. There were a couple of copies of Jackie on the edge of the bottom shelf. Reaching for one, she noticed a scrapbook beneath the magazines.

She pulled it down and opened it to see a photo of herself staring out from a newspaper article, David watching her from the front row. The headline read *Fashion Scout, David Loach hits the jackpot as his new model, Louise causes a stir on the London catwalk*. The photo had been taken during her first time at the London Fashion Week show. Mum must have cut it out and saved it. Turning the pages, clipping after clipping from Vogue, Elle and every national newspaper filled the leaves. She remembered a journalist coming to interview them in their luxury apartment. The photo showed them sitting on the white leather sofa that was always so cold, David's arm tight around her waist. Snapping the scrapbook closed, Louise pinned her hair up again and went to get in the bath.

As she crossed the landing, she heard her mum and dad talking downstairs

'You're a fool, Alice. Not a word for nigh-on ten years and she waltzes in here, turns on the waterworks, and expects everything to be just the same.'

'I'm so worried, George. Something's not right. She's like a skeleton.'

'Have you heard yourself? She's turned her back on him, just like she did with us. Why did she always send him to answer the phone? Eh? Couldn't have been clearer the last time she actually deigned to speak to us. *"I'm so sorry. Time seems to go by so quickly. I'll try harder."*

The anger and hurt in his voice as he mocked hers was unbearable. Louise had never wanted to hurt them; she had missed them both so much. She retreated to the steam-filled bathroom, where their voices became an indecipherable murmur. Taking the watch off her wrist, she checked the time. Six-Twenty. How long was she allowed?

Sinking through the soft bubbles and into the warm water, she closed her eyes and bit down on her lip until the initial sting subsided, finally wallowing in the sheer bliss of soaking in a hot bath. It had been such a long time. Closing her eyes, she drifted off.

There was a light tap on the door.

Louise was startled from her thoughts. It had never occurred to her to lock it. Not after so long.

'Can I come in?' Alice peered around the door. 'I've warmed a towel by the fire,' she said, smiling and placing it on the closed toilet lid. Her smile dwindled, and when she spoke again, it was almost a whisper as she tried to control the sudden tremble in her voice. 'Come home so I can feed you up, I bet.'

Louise sat up, covering her breasts with her hands, almost crying out as the kindness in her mother's voice wrapped itself around her.

'Would you like me to wash your back?'

Louise shook her head, lying down again, covering herself with bubbles.

Alice sat on the edge of the bath. 'I could wash your hair if you like?'

Louise wanted to cry, wanted her mum to hold her, rock her, make everything the way it used to be. She looked at the watch lying on the shelf below the bathroom cabinet. 'Alright,' said Alice, standing up. 'See you shortly.'

Alice stroked her daughter's arm as she turned away.

Louise waited until she heard her mother's footsteps on the stairs before standing up and reaching for the towel. Wrapping it around her body, she made her way back into the bedroom. Remembering her watch, Louise dashed back to the bathroom and retrieved it. How long had she been out of the bath? Ten minutes she'd asked for. Was there time to dress and do her hair? She let the towel drop around her ankles and fastened the watch on to her wrist. Bending over the suitcase, she pulled out some underwear, a pale-green cashmere sweater and a pair of Calvin Klein jeans and laid them on the bed. Would these be alright? She'd better hurry. Slipping her arms through the narrow straps of her bra, she heard a loud gasp and spun around to see her mother standing in the doorway with her hand over her mouth, her eyes brimming and shiny with tears.

'What has he done to you?'

Louise tried to cover her buttocks with her hands. The telephone in the hallway rang. Louise looked at her watch. Five past seven. She shrank back and dropped to the floor, curling into a ball.
