**NFFD Workshop: Layers in Flash Fiction with Farhana Khalique and Anita Goveas**

**Part 1: Imagery with Farhana**

‘Stories that provide a physical hit will be much more memorable... Make use of the senses, with a few carefully chosen details that provoke an emotional response... make it work on different levels. The more layers you hide, the more rewarding it will be with each re-read...’ -Emily Devane

(Link: <https://theshortstory.co.uk/what-makes-a-winning-flash-fiction-by-emily-devane/>)

(1) Story example 1: ‘Something Like Happy’, by Emily Devane (2/12/2020)

I came here with a body full of poison and hair loose in its sockets. The thrill of standing by the harbour is something else. *Better than Disneyland*, you say. *Of course*, I reply, *of course*.

Gulls screech like newborn babes and the air has a taste to it like sweat, like tears, like life at its gritty best. And we say yes: to ice cream with sprinkles and sky-blue candyfloss; to hours of digging holes in the sand and skipping over the waves, our skin staying just the right side of pink, our lungs stinging, singing with the salt; to crabbing beside the harbour wall; to feeding our two penny pieces into the metal-guzzling machines at the arcade, watching the forwards and backwards until they’re all gone.

By the caravan with the genuine Romany inside, I wonder if, with one look, she’ll avert her eyes, knowing my fate.

We climb the steps and I’m breathless but I don’t make a fuss because today is an illusion and it matters, more than anything, to be normal.

A stranger takes a photograph of us in the picture-postcard cemetery, its tombstones rakish as ageing teeth. Our faces beam with the relief of the fearful. For now, we are saying, this is okay, this can be done. And though the wind whips my hair into tangled knots and my scalp tingles with the losses to come and my life is too short to count, we are something like happy, and that is enough.

(Link: <https://lost-balloon.com/2020/12/02/something-like-happy-emily-devane/>)

🡪What do you think? Note the use of metaphors, similes and repetition and more…

(2) Writing exercise 1:

Imagine a landscape that you have visited and remember quite well. Eg a beach, garden, park, forest, hill/ mountain. Make a list of words and their surface level, and then deeper meanings. Eg:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Word** | **Surface level meanings** | **Deeper/ associated meanings** |
| harbour | blue, wet, windy, seagulls, donuts | (un)safe place, boats, spray, grit, childish treats, the smell of sugar/cinnamon, heat, (dis)comfort… |
| candyfloss | Bright pink, sweet, soft, sticky | cloud, web, melts on your tongue, looks silly, doesn’t last, an illusion, spun sugar, spinning… |

(3) Story example 2: ‘Next of Kin’, by Jo Gatford (5/3/2021)

If one day you find that I died alone, in my own home, my body lying in state for several days, possibly weeks before the neighbours noticed or someone thought to call, became concerned, and asked you to check—the only one with a spare key, unlucky you—and you have to shove the door because of the mountain of mail behind it, the soft muttering of the envelopes judging you for not coming sooner, and even as you realise something must be very wrong, if the smell of my decomposing hasn’t hit you yet, I know that you will still call out a halloo in the exact tone that requires two Os, as though you hadn’t lived here and slept here and eaten breakfast here, with me, at this kitchen table, watermarked with years of silent coffees, and perhaps that’s where you find me, slumped over a triangle of calcified toast, or perhaps in the garden, still clutching the fork handle, soil burrowed beneath my fingernails, slug trails across my collar bones, or perhaps I died in bed, as we all wish to, an unfinished book steepled upon my chest, and as you lift it you will slide your middle finger between the pages to keep my place, carry it uncertainly through the house as you try to remember what happens next, what to do when you find a person—no longer an actual person, just a congealing body, purple at the edges—when this is not something anyone ever teaches us, and you will, for something practical to do, find some other marker for the book—you never could abide dogearing, something else we disagreed upon—and take it home with you, perhaps feel obliged to read it right to the end, to see what I had missed, even though you hated the books I liked when I was alive, and when you pass the point at which I left off you will pause, hook your thumb into the paper valley and have to remind yourself how to breathe, how to blink, how to swallow, as if all automation has failed, and realise that an absence can manifest as something immovable—the kind that sits on your chest while you sleep, waking as though you are surfacing through water—and if that is what you find, one day, after you leave me and we become old and separate, mere pilot lights of our former selves, remember what we promised when we used to talk of ashes and planting trees and pyjamas instead of dress up clothes, for comfort, in that last little rounded sleep, and if there is anyone left to funeralise with be sure to laugh most inappropriately at the joke only you and I know—the one about the shell—except now it’s only you who knows it and isn’t that a thing, the only person in the world with a joke you can no longer share, with a book you cannot bring yourself to finish, and know that I am sorry for it, for giving you the key in the first place, but that there really was no one else I could trust to do these things, not a single human else, and if you do them, just as I ask, know that I promise to haunt you dearly, the way we have always haunted one another, a slow, inevitable mourning of something we never quite got right.

(Link: <http://www.smokelong.com/next-of-kin/>)

🡪What do you think? Note the (extended) metaphors, personification, colours/textures, and more…

(4) Writing exercise 2:

Write a paragraph using the words that you wrote earlier. Go for more unusual combinations and verbs. See where it takes you! Eg a walk along a beach, up a hill/mountain, through an estate…

**Part 2: Structures and Titles with Anita**

Hermit crab flash

-Using an existing structure like a shopping list to write fiction/creative non-fiction

A One-Word Yet Possibly Longer-Than-Necessary Personal Essay Dedicated to My Soon-to-Be Ex-Boyfriend Who Doesn't Believe Me When I Tell Him I Can Write Something This Short That Sums up Everything There Is to Say about Our Relationship, Our Future Together, and His Allegedly Legendary Sexual Organ  
by Ingrid Jendrzejewski

Ha.

The main thing I try and keep in mind when deciding to write a hermit crab flash is why I’m choosing that structure, and what does it bring to the understanding of that character. For me, they still have to be emotionally resonant

Writing exercise:

think of a character, their age, where they live, their immediate family structure, something they want and why, something they have lost, one reoccurring dream they have, and a secret.

Then write notes they’re making for a speech- at leaving do, hen do, wedding, proposal etc and see how the elements you know about your character might intrude. Do they want to write this speech? Do they want to attend this event? Will their secret be revealed?

Breathless paragraphs

-A type of story that’s often one sentence, but it’s written in a way that doesn’t pause.

Eg the above piece by Jo Gatford

Writing exercise:

Word cricket

Think of an emotion, how do you experience it in your body, how do other people react, what was the first time you experienced it, have you experienced it recently

Don’t take your pen off the page, don’t worry about you’re writing, just add in these rnadow words

Shoes

Request

Spring

Guard

Train

Kiss

Ears

Truth

Could you turn any of what you’ve written in that exercise or Farhana’s session into a breathless paragraph

Exercise 3 Titles

Think about titles as an extra advantage. The title can completely change what the reader takes away from your story (or be a big part of the story!)

Key thing: what do you want your reader to take away from your story? What is the truth of your story?

Here are some titling ideas (with gratitude to Kathy Fish’s Titling exercise from her Fast Flash workshops):

1. A sentence fragment/line of dialogue that speaks to the piece as a whole.

2. A fragment or sentence that you had edited out of the story e.g. a discarded first or last line

3. Place or character names

4. A one word title, something that has more than one meaning

5. Something your main character might say

6. What might happen next

7. Something that answers a question asked by the story.

8. An idea you want to linger

9. A key image

Author bios:

Farhana Khalique is a writer, voiceover artist and teacher from London. Her stories have appeared in

the *National Flash Fiction Day Anthology 2021*, *Leicester Writes Short Story Prize Anthology 2020*,

*Reflex Fiction* and more. Recently, Farhana was one of the teachers on Dahlia Publishing’s ‘A Brief

Pause’ and ‘Short Fiction Festival Weekend’ programmes, and she taught a workshop at the ‘Stay at

Home Lit Fest’. She is also the editor of *Desi Reads* and a submissions editor at *SmokeLong Quarterly*.

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‘National Flash Fiction Day Anthology 2021’ (Ad Hoc Fiction, 2021, forthcoming). Link:

<https://www.nationalflashfictionday.co.uk/index.php/bookshop/>

Anita Goveas is British-Asian and based in London. She’s on the editorial team at *Flashback Fiction*,

an editor at *Mythic Picnic*’s twitter zine, and she’s an editor for the *Flash Flood*. She is one of the

teachers on Dahlia Publishing’s ‘A Brief Pause’ writer development programme and she taught a

workshop at the ‘Stay at Home Lit Fest’. Her debut flash collection *Families and Other Natural*

*Disasters* was published by Reflex Press in Sept 2020. Find her at @coffeeandpaneer and

<https://coffeeandpaneer.wordpress.com/>

Families and Other Natural Disasters by Anita Goveas (Reflex Press, 2020). Link:

<https://www.reflex.press/product/families-and-other-natural-disasters/>