

UEA Creative Writing Anthology 2011

Tamsin Flower

Compound Education

Scenes from a play in progress

ACT 1, SCENE 4

Bahrain (1996), St Christopher's British School playground. Nora (14), a slight and frightened Brit stands facing Jen (14), a flame-haired, big-boned Australian. The air is heavy with dust and moisture as it nears mid-day. Picnic tables, alcoves and distant Portakabins interrupt the expanse. Curiously, an archaeological dig clutters one corner. Jen has been ordered by the formidable Ms Cray to show Nora around her new school.

Jen

So you may as well tell me about yourself. How old are you?

Nora

Fourteen.

Jen

You look younger. Is that an Alice band you're wearing?

Nora

Yeah.

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Jen

Thought so. Are you wearing sun-block on your face?

Nora

No.

Jen

Didn't think so. You'll look like Red Rock Canyon tonight.

Nora

Do you have some?

Jen

No, and if I did, I wouldn't borrow it out. Everyone'd want some.

Jen lazily points to the picnic tables.

This is where some people eat their lunch.

Some people, the chicken-shits eat in the cloisters over there – some Greek girls ... and the geeky Arab guys. The Asians eat in the library.

Nora

Why?

Jen

I dunno. The Asians eat in the library, that's how it is. It's like an old women's meeting in there.

*UEA Creative Writing Anthology 2011***Nora**

Are there a lot of Asian people?

Jen

Why, d'you like 'em?

Nora

I was just interested.

Jen

You don't have to be. (*Smirks.*)
There's mainly Americans and
Australians and whingeing poms
out here in the playground.

Studies Nora.

You know what whingeing poms is?

Nora shakes her head.

You. British. Where in merry
England do you come from
anyways?

Nora

Nottingham.

Jen

Oh yeah, what's there?

Nora

A castle. And there's a ... an old
market with lace weavers and –

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Jen

Yeah OK.

Jen sees Melissa (a gang member) in the distance.

Hey Melissa! Babe! Wait there.
(To Nora.) Don't move a muscle.

Jen goes to talk to Melissa conspiratorially. Nora is drawn to the 'dig' and looks more closely. The Dilmun period God sculpture mentioned in assembly, sits on a plinth. She circles it. As she does so a boy of roughly the same age emerges from hiding among the artefacts. There is an ethereal quality about his mixed Arabic-European features. He has been crying and holds an old, woven fishing-trap in his hands.

Isa

Do you like him?

Nora

Oh! Sorry, I didn't know you were there. Is it a him?

Isa

He's a Ram, so yes.

Nora

How do you know?

Isa

My father dug him up.

Nora

Does he work here?

Isa

Yep, this is all his.

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Nora

Really?

Isa

No, not really. It's all government property. They don't care though. We could substitute everything with Lego and they wouldn't know the difference.

Nora

(Laughs.)

Isa

It's funny, but wouldn't you want to know what you own?

Nora

I don't own anything.

Isa

Yes you do.

Nora

I have some porcelain dolls, they're expensive.

Isa

Then own them. I'm Isa.

Nora

Nora.

Isa

Nice to meet you. You look new.

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Nora

Brand new today.

Isa

Who's showing you around?

Nora

Jenny Masterson.

Isa

Where is she now?

Nora

Over there with a girl.

Jen notices Isa staring at her.

Jen

Don't stare at me worm, I know
you're fucking in love but deal with
it.

Isa

Don't call me that.

Jen

(Approaching)
What's that worm-boy?

Isa

My name's Isa, don't call me that.

Jen

OK worm. Look, if you two wanna
hang out together, don't let me get

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in the way.
(Sees Isa's basket.)
Er! What's that piece of shit?

Isa

A 1000-year-old fish-trap.

Jen

Looks like a basket to catch heads
in. You better watch out. OK, I'll tell
Miss Cray you're with Isa all right?

Nora

Yep, OK.

Jen and Melissa amble offstage.

Isa

She thinks she owns the school. She
does.

Nora

Why?

Isa

Look at her, she could crack a skull
with her tongue.

Nora

She's not that scary.

Isa

Not yet.
(Grins)
Her mother's chairman to the
Governors. They own the place.

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Nora

(Indicates the godhead.)

Why do they let it just sit like that?
Anyone could vandalise it.

Isa

Vandalise? Hmmm. One, they don't
care cause it's government property
and two, have you met Miss Cray?
No one wants to be in her office.
She could stick a stiletto through
your heart and roast it if she wants.

Nora

(Chuckles.)

She seemed fair enough.

Isa

She seems a lot of things.

(Gestures to God statue.)

If you stare at the God-face long
enough you can see it smile.

Nora

Oh!

Isa

Or grimace, whichever.

Nora

Looks like a mask.

Isa

Yeah it's all like that, they didn't
think in 3-D, the Dilmuns.

*UEA Creative Writing Anthology 2011***Nora**

I'm not sure I think in 3-D. Isn't it a
10-D thing?

Isa

Ha! Don't let Jen know you're
bright.

Nora

But if you're just nice and chatty,
surely –

Isa

Just keep quiet, it's easier.

Nora is subdued. A Mullah sings prayers from a nearby mosque.

Nora

This is a weird adventure.

Isa

A big one though, here –

Isa gives Nora a piece of pottery from the dig's findings.

– have it, polish it. It's been buried
long enough.

Nora

That's amazing! Thank –

Enter Ms Cray. As she approaches, they fall silent.

Ms Cray

Isa, I know this is your father's dig,
but it doesn't mean you can riffle
through it during morning break.

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Isa

I wasn't riffing.

Ms Cray

OK Isa, that's enough.

Isa

We were just talking.

Ms Cray

Erm, what did I say?
Have you been sobbing Isa?

Isa

Yes.

Ms Cray puts a hand on Isa's shoulder.

Now, I know your mother's leaving
the island soon. Is that right?

Isa nods.

Ms Cray

But sharing your upset with Nora on
her first day isn't appropriate, is it?

Isa does not respond.

What impression does that give?

Isa

(Mumbles.)
I don't know.

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Ms Cray

Sorry, what was that?

Isa

I. Don't. Know.

Ms Cray

Well, not a *kind* one Isa.

Nora

I like being shown the artefacts.

Ms Cray

Hmmm, but we can't do what we like all the time can we?

Ms Cray takes a tissue from her pocket and hands it to Isa.

Here. She hasn't left yet has she?

Isa

She's not going to.

Ms Cray

Al Jazeera TV's banned, she'll have to. Now, the sooner you get used to that, the easier it'll be. Norah what's ..? Isa, go and wash your face, there's a good man.

They watch him lope offstage.

Ms Cray

Give me that please.

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Ms Cray indicates the ceramic piece Isa has given Nora. It has left a dirt-mark on her skirt. Nora hands it over and Ms Cray pockets it.

Your next class is Home Economics.
Cheer up! Do you like cooking?

Nora

I'm not very good at it.

Ms Cray

Good, you can learn. I'll show you the way. You know, Isa's a very friendly young man, very, what you'd call 'sensitive'. But it's important you have an overall view of the school. Especially as your father's teaching here. Now, see that?

Ms Cray points to a utilitarian building.

Nora

Yes.

Ms Cray

That's going to be the new art block. The governors put a lot of money into ensuring you have the very best of everything. Don't you feel lucky?

Nora

Yes.

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Ms Cray

So scabbling about in the dirt isn't what well-educated people do. That's what they do in the villages, they aren't so lucky. Now, you will find everyone here very helpful and friendly. There's just one thing you need to give back, in this mutual contract of ours Nora.

Pause.

Do you know what it is?

Nora

Hard work.

Ms Cray

Hard work, yes, but I was thinking more of – abiding by the rules. That way everyone's happy. Follow the rules and we'll give you everything you need. It's an exciting place, isn't it?

Nora

Yes, thank you.

End of Scene

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ACT ONE, SCENE 6

8pm in Al-Zamil compound. The temperature is dropping. Viki (a 15-year-old Brit) leads the way to the compound garden, showing Jen and Mel (a 15-year-old Aussie) where they can make themselves comfortable. Nora follows. The group carry towels to sit on, four bottles of cider and two bottles of vodka. They settle near the pool changing rooms.

Jen

Where shall we keep this booze, eh?

Mel

Shhhhhush!

Jen

What!? You think they fuckin' care?
The gardeners are probably
dribbling at us in our shorts.

Viki

Don't.

Jen

What?

Viki

It's my compound, I see them
every day.

Jen

Oh yeah? What's the name of
that one?

Viki

Where?

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Jen

That one, hiding behind the
hedge there.

Viki

Shut up!

Jen

Sorry babe, couldn't resist.

Viki

Urgh! Don't. They're all old men.

Jen

Even the maids?

Viki

Yeah, ours has sideburns!

Mel, Viki and Jen laugh.

Jen

You got a maid?
Nora? Loner? You got a maid?

Nora

No, we don't want one.

Jen

Yeah, that happens. People come
here and get all high and mighty
but the fact is if you don't pay 'em
peanuts, they'll have to eat dirt
from some other nasty bastard's
hand. Int that right Mel?

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Mel

(Nods)

This is boring.

Jen

Yeah, Nora, come over here. You got the bottles ready Mel? OK, so it's half however many we say, getting faster.

Mel

OK.

Jen, Mel & Viki:

One two	(they drink)	you look like poo
Three four	(they drink)	drink like a whore
Five six	(they drink)	show those dicks
Seven eight	(they drink)	pull your weight
Nine ten	(they drink)	start again

Jen

Ready!

They gollop from their bottles, swilling cider in their mouths while counting to ten on their fingers. As they spray each other with saliva-diluted cider, Nora climbs up a date-palm onto the changing-room roof.

Jen

You don't seem to be drinking?
Don't fancy being spat on huh?

Nora

I'm fine, just watching.

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Jen

Fuckin' weirdo. Come here –

Mel

Jen.

Jen

Come here, I wanna talk to you. Or
you scared of me for real? Come –

Nora climbs down and sits near them.

Jen

These girls wanna get to know you,
right?

Mel and Viki nod.

So, to be straight with you, you're
never gonna feel part of the group
unless you share stuff with us. Let's
have a sharing!

Viki

Oooooh me first!

Jen

Go ahead Viksta!

Viki

OK, you don't know this but ... I
have a little crush on Mr Sutcliff.

Jen

We know!

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Mel

Yeah, tell us something interesting.

Viki

And ... and I kept his pen when he lent it to me.

Jen

You freak, does it smell of him?

Viki

Yes.

Jen

Ha ha! Mel ... you enjoying yourself Nora?

Nora

Yeah.

Mel

You don't know this but loverboy's getting a pack of needles from the kids over at the American school.

Jen

You don't say. He's gonna make a killing on the sixth formers. You're looking a little shocked Nora?

Nora

No.

Jen

But see we trust you. Now I've got one, right.

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I ... I listened in on a meeting at our house about Mr Sudbury. There is some serious shit going down and he's going with it! (*Looks at Nora.*)
See no secrets here.
What *you* got?

Nora

I don't know, I don't have any secrets.

Jen

You gotta have something otherwise you might not be human. Maybe you're not.

Nora

Well,

(*They smile attentively.*)

I used to fake migraines to get out of PE.

Jen

Jesus, is that all you've got? Never mind. Pass the girl some juice.

Mel reaches for a bottle of vodka and passes it to Nora, who resists.

Nora

I –

Jen

A little bit won't hurt, OK?

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Mel

Yeah, live a little.

Viki

It's good.

Jen

Do it straight mind, I mean we did
ten straight.

Nora drinks from the bottle of vodka.

Mel

Wah!

Others

Hooooooooo!

Nora

(Laughs, encouraged.)
There is something –

Jen

I knew it.

Nora

Me and Isa, we –

Mel

No!

Jen

Mel, don't stop her.

Nora

No, it's not like that. No.

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Jen

Course not.

Nora

No, it's ... I was talking about,
about the stuff in the dig.

Jen

Oh yeah?

Nora

Yes.

Jen

You realise, if you don't tell us now,
there's no way we're gonna make
life sweet for ye.

Nora

It's nothing. We just kept some
things for ourselves.

Jen

You're a thief!

Nora

No! It's just they're just going to be
shoved away in storage anyway.

Mel

Tell me about it, my life's in a
fuckin' freight container.

Jen

Aw, Mel!

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(To Nora)

Don't worry, we won't
tell anyone.

Nora

Thanks.

Jen

Let's move on. What next?

Mel

Dare or drink.

Jen

Ah! Classic. I dare you three to
run through the servants' quarters
topless!

Mel

Child's play.

Viki gets up belligerently and starts unbuttoning her shirt. Mel follows suit.

Nora

You'd rather do that than drink?

Viki

It's your compound next time
Jen, OK?

Jen

Right you are. *(To Nora.)* What you
shaking your head for? *(Beat)* Thief.

Nora is welling up.

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Oh what? You're gonna cry? Are you
a woman or a freakin' insect?

Mel

I'm actually getting cold now.

Viki

Hurry up, do you want Ms Cray to
know about your and Isa's habit?

Nora

What?

Jen

You heard the girl. *(Beat.)* Don't
think Mr Green'd like it either.

Nora takes the bottle and gulps from it.

Jen

Yeah, this isn't kindergarten; you
do at least half the bottle. It's not
that much!

*Nora gets up angrily and starts to walk off. Jen climbs onto the roof of the
changing room and begins to holler.*

Jen

Hey! Everyone! Nora Green and Is –

Nora

(Shouts)
OKaaaaaaay!

Nora downs the bottle of vodka and smashes it on the ground. She storms off.

*UEA Creative Writing Anthology 2011***Jen**

Wooooooooooooo. Some fuckin'
spirit at last.

Mel

(Calling after her.)
Yeah, congrats Nora!

Nora looks back confused and flushed before making for the Greens' bungalow. Mel and Viki stretch their arms out as if flying and swoop topless around the space, laughing. Nora stoops on her way. She falls to all fours retching.

End of Scene

Tamsin Flower studied Acting on Mountview Academy's postgraduate course and has a BA in Film Studies. She has worked in the fields of youth work and disability support, and currently leads movement groups for children with special needs. Prior to attending UEA, Tamsin worked as Assistant to the film department of Target Entertainment and as a runner for Objective Productions. She was shortlisted for the Young Writer Arvon Award and received an Arvon 42 Grant to further her poetry last summer. She wrote and directed *Conversation with the Symbolists*, which was performed at the Ralph Richardson studios in 2007.