



Helen Ivory was born in Luton and has a Degree from Norwich Art School. She spent most of her 20s and early 30s working as a free range egg farmer, and a laborer and brick layer. She now edits the webzine [Ink Sweat and Tears](#), and is an editor for The Poetry Archive.

She lives in Norwich with her husband, poet Martin Figura, where they run the live lit organization Cafe Writers. She regularly posts poems and new artwork on her [blog](#).

Publications

The Breakfast Machine Bloodaxe Books, 2010

The Dog in the Sky Bloodaxe Books, 2006

The Double Life of Clocks Bloodaxe Books, 2002

Awards

Writers Award, Arts Council of England, 2010

Author's Foundation Award, 2008

Writers Award, Arts Council of England, 2005

Eric Gregory Award, 1999

“A direct approach, via deep folklore and dream imagery, to the conundrum of being a woman...in keeping with what I think we mean when we say ‘women’s writing.’ This book is mischievously dark, rick with anti-logic and harnessed to the power of something we used to call magic.”

Katy Evans-Bush

“A visually precise poet, with the gift of creating stunning images with an economy of means...Ivory has established an eerily engaging style. Her poems are like mobiles suspended on invisible threads, charming to watch as they seem to spin by themselves in the air, but capable of

administering more than a paper cut on the sensibility of the reader.”
James Sutherland-Smith

How to make a pot of tea

Take a bowl of weed from the sea,
plunge in your hands, wrists,
then up to the elbows.

Soon you are wading, you are waist-deep
and before you know it
you are living under water.

Time passes. You have a new job,
have taken up different hobbies,
have learned to burn sea-coal to warm yourself.

More time passes, and your life has become
a series of complicated pretends, and you imagine
you were born here; were brought up in a family of part-fish.

Then you find the syringe
in the pocket of your old coat. It's filled with air
that wants to bubble into your veins.

When you climb from the bowl
you leave a puddle of water on the kitchen floor.
You fill up the kettle and forget to turn off the tap.

The Orange Seller

A woman on the bus
is selling oranges;
mouldy little oranges
with no juice inside.

Yet people are buying them
and peeling them
with a grim-faced
determination.

She is shoeless,
and chirrup
like a ragged little bird.
And still we buy her oranges.

Her hands are outstretched,
as if expecting rain.

Her Uncle's New House

Her parents had gone there for serious talks
but the dumb waiter spent all night
conveying food though the storeys.

The head of a pig, cooked till its eyes
were cataract milky, jaw fallen open
to a wise-cracking grin.

A rabbit blancmange wobbling
through each jolt of the hoist,
fiercely trying to keep a straight face.

Visit

In the very quiet of an early morning
a bird tries every window of the house,
feathers bristling with effort.
Only the eldest girl hears
and creeps downstairs in her nightdress.

She knows nothing of the persistence of birds
has only seen them distant in trees
or making patterns in the sky,
so the dark bead of its eye unnerves her.

Still she opens a window.

It perches on the back of a chair,
claws grazing at lacquer.
When it speaks, it is raw crow,
earthy, guttural, with scant punctuation
no openings for niceties or how-do-you-dos.

Her ears hurt with the noise of it,
she tries dreadfully to understand
but she is only a girl. As it departs,
the bird filches a snag of her hair
to weave into its nest.

Another 3am Call

Every night, my grandmother
rehearses her journey
into the otherworld
as her womenfolk stand by,
rooted to this world by strong cups of tea.

The air is electricity
and it's easy to imagine
my grandmother's travels
and how superfluous

slippers might be.

We dress her in her wedding gown,
her auburn hair with violets.
On the walk home
night fits around us
like a freshly torn coat.

APY

Hospital Visit

The waiting room is full
of all sorts, pretending
to be awake.

The bad mother,
deaf ear cocked
to the incubator;

the bogey man,
painted eyeballs on his hands,
wedged upright in the corner.

Even the alchemist
has discovered a way
to shoe horses in his sleep.

SPIN CYCLE

I have been suspicious for some time
about the washing-machine.

At first it was the odd sock or handkerchief
that went missing.

Everyday occurrences
nothing to be concerned about.

But then there was the Aran sweater
put in on gentle spin, never to be seen again.

It was washed on its own
so at the end of the cycle
the drum was entirely empty.

This was a concern.

And this evening I came home to discover
that the curtains had vanished
from the kitchen window.

There was a trail
of soapy suds across the floor
stained with burgundy dye.

I tried to open the washing-machine door
but it was locked tight.

There was a weird gooey gurgle
from deep inside its belly,
causing me to jump,
and back away.

I ran upstairs to find that the duvet
and pillows were also gone
and the floor was awash.

There was a pervasive smell
of Spring Fresh

hanging cloyingly in the air.

MEOW

I have always suspected but now
I know for a fact that I am not a human being.
As children, my sister and I were cats.
We would slink about the house,
pause, scratch at fleas and demand our mother
feed us saucers of milk on the kitchen floor.

Now, my sister was only playing.
Her movements were not fluid,
and her meows were unconvincing.
Dolly, the family cat and I would laugh
at her as we washed our faces together.
My Mother was unaware of our rapport.

I was ten years old when my Mother took Dolly
away in a cardboard box. I never saw her again.
Every night, I scratched at the back door
to be let out so I could be with Dolly.
From then on, I only spoke in cat language.
My Mother was at first angry and then upset.

When I was fifteen my Mother took me
away in a cardboard box. I never saw her again.
Every day I am bought food on a plastic plate.
They no longer leave a knife a fork.
At night I call to Dolly in our language and sometimes
she comes to me. We wash our faces together



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