



**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

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## **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.

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### **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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