

TLC Showcase

EMMA NORRY

Introduction to the novel 2

Extract: There Will Always Be Others 3

About the Writer 10

Introduction to *There Will Always Be Others*

After an Arvon course in August 2014, I was fortunate enough to qualify for the ACE TLC Free Read scheme. In January, I received a comprehensive five page report based on the first 50 pages of my novel in progress. The report I received from Ben Paynter was everything a writer could hope for. For over twenty years I felt I had been writing 'into a void'. Embarking on the perilous journey of 'The First Novel', having previously written only short stories, was a daunting process (especially since six months in I had one of those 'eureka!' moments which involved ditching 50,000 words), but having an experienced writer validate my work gave me the encouragement to persevere. It was life affirming to read Ben's comments regarding the aspects he thought were strong, and a challenge to tackle the areas he felt I could improve upon.

There Will Always Be Others is a character-led psychological YA novel with dual protagonists in a contemporary setting.

Frankie Johnson, seventeen, is the newest resident of the children's home, Langston House, and she is keen to assert herself. Joe is a seventeen year old boy. From the moment Frankie walks into their Group Therapy session, Joe is infatuated.

Over three intense weeks Frankie and Joe strike up an unlikely friendship. Frankie, outwardly confident but insecure, decides to 'recruit' Joe for The Project, a scheme which involves intimidating her ex-foster mother Caroline, by sending her a series of letters and 'gifts'.

This is a novel about obsession, damaged youth, and the human need for connection.

There Will Always Be Others, by Emma Norry

"Sorry! Sorry – am I late?"

The clock on the wall wobbles because the door's flung open so hard. A girl stands in the doorway and I'm a cartoon figure, eyes on stalks. The veins in my neck bulge, ready to explode. *And breathe* hisses a tinny voice inside me. I'm going to fall off my chair, I'm going to fall off my chair, I'm going to... oh my god. OH MY GOD. Stabs of ancient agony hurtle up and down my chest.

Even though it's the end of July and we're having a record breaking scorching summer – winter sweeps across the entirety of me. And... *breathe*, again.

Does everybody see her in the doorway? I glance round – all of us, Gareth, Leon, Michelle and me – gawp at her. She leans against the cream paint-chipped doorframe and her short red cardigan flaps open. There's writing on her baby blue t-shirt. It reads: *I am my own hero*.

That message across her t-shirt: Becca's lips grazing my cheek, the stickiness of the tangerine she'd just eaten: 'You're *my* hero, Joey....'

And breathe! As my stare tails off, I see that this girl is not her. It was only in that first instance, the moment when she burst in. The angle she held her head at, the swinging of arms by her sides, that's all. I push my glasses up; I'm sweating now, and they're slipping down.

The girl is quiet in the doorway. What must we look like? Gareth perched in his burgundy high-backed leather chair like a throne, and the three of us like segments of an orange in our primary-school plastic chairs, facing the door in a semi-circle. There's a long low window behind me and because I overheat easily, I like to sit near it. At the exact moment this girl steps forward, a breeze ruffles across my neck. I gulp the fresh air it offers.

Gareth stands, takes off his glasses and waves them at her. "Ah, yes. Hello. You must be Francesca."

She looks at ease, one hand in the pocket of her lime-green skirt which has tiny daisies with yellow embroidered centres on it.

So, her name is Francesca. A swerving line of sweat wriggles its way from my armpit into the waistband of my tracksuit bottoms.

"I prefer Frankie, to be honest."

Gareth blinks rapidly, and puts his glasses back on.

"You know, that silver lady outside the door looks a bit waterlogged, the leaves don't really like being wet for long."

"You're a fan of plants? Well. That's fantastic. I'll let Janet know, she'll appreciate it, I'm sure." Gareth peeks at his watch. "But yes – in answer to your question – you are late. So you're aware, we do try to begin promptly at 11am."

"Sorry. I got here really late last night, so Janet let me have a lie in. I don't think I've even met *you*, have I?" She waves at Michelle. "You're my roomy."

Michelle's cheeks flush and she squirms in her seat. Her eyes flick to Gareth and then to Frankie, not sure who – if anybody – she should speak to. She sips her Fanta and swallows a burp. Her cheeks flare pinker.

Gareth indicates the stack of chairs next to the door. "Please, take a seat."

Frankie's tone is teasing. "Okey-dokey."

"Great. Great." But Gareth's tone implies it's not great in the slightest. "I'm Gareth, but I expect you know that. Janet mentioned you'd be joining us. Well, welcome! We don't bite, do we folks?" He beams round and settles back into his armchair. It looks comfy, that chair. I should sit in it, I'm the biggest here. Gareth's feet don't reach the ground, even when he sits right back, which possibly explains why he perches on the edge.

"That's a relief 'cos I don't taste great."

Leon and Michelle catch each others' eye and grin. Leon blushes and adjusts the green baseball cap he wears. The rim of it is damp with sweat and his afro frizzes out at the sides. Gareth doesn't smile, though what Frankie's said is funny.

She's *not* Becca. For a start, Frankie's skin is a different colour. Becca was so pale as to be transparent, and this girl is the colour of milky coffee, but still... my insides twist like laundry being wrung out. Her hair is chestnut brown, curly and skims her

shoulders, whilst Becca's was straight, golden-syrup-coloured and halfway down her back. But Frankie has the same heart-shaped face, the same regal nose slightly upturned, and similar almond-shaped eyes with lashes so long that they curl back on themselves. I can't see the colour of her eyes. Where Becca had freckles like paint splatters, Frankie has a beauty spot to the left of her top lip. The branding iron of Becca's image zooms across my consciousness with the immediacy and intensity of a firework.

"So, Francesca. What do you hope to gain from your time spent with us?"

Frankie removes a plastic chair from the stack, carries it across the room and sets it down next to Michelle. She straddles it the wrong way round. The chairs are in a semi-circle and I'm next to Leon, but the way the chairs are arranged means I'm nearly opposite Frankie.

"Seeing as I'm eighteen in two months and you're kicking me out of the system, or should I say – 'letting your baby bird fly the nest' – there's not much I can *gain*, is there? But, I'm always up for some therapy. You never know when you might strike gold."

Gareth rests his glasses on the round table next to him. He links his fingers, thumbs sticking together and coming apart, like there's Velcro attached to them.

"And is that how you see the situation? The 'system' abandoning you?"

"I didn't say *abandon*."

"Ah, but what we *don't* say is often as revealing as what we do, and that's why we're all here, isn't it? It's my job to help you learn to read between the lines."

I shuffle in my seat, sneak a quick look at her.

"If you ask me the – what's the word, analogy? – is a positive one. A baby bird flying the nest, or didn't you hear that bit?"

Whoa. She has Becca's bite, as well as similar features. She's a solid force and has Gareth in a headlock. If he had super powers, they'd be draining out. Michelle stares at the beige carpet, and nibbles at the skin around her thumbnail. Leon drags his heel back and forth. I can't hear the lawnmower anymore, though the window is open next to me.

"This is a *safe* space for you. I hope you know that. I don't know what your previous residential placements have been like, but here at Langston House..." Gareth's pause is long as he collects himself. "Francesca, you opted into attending this group and I sincerely hope I haven't offended you. That was *not* my intention. How about we start again?"

She's not going to let him off that easily. Part of her is spoiling for a fight, you can see by the tension in her jaw, and the creased lines on her forehead.

"Let's."

"So. What do you think you might achieve in the short time you *will* be with us?"

Frankie leans forward, elbows on knees; hands cupped either side of her face. Her skirt skims her knees, there's a silver ankle chain around her left ankle, and a square plaster on her right. Flip-flops with scarlet-coloured beads, and toenails painted electric blue with silver tips. Her gaze settles over me, comforting as a blanket. Heat cruises in my cheeks. Her teeth-revealing smile is a broad stroke of white gloss paint.

My breath is pin-sharp as a memory digs in my ribs: Becca twirling in her full length mirror, wearing a chiffon turquoise dress. She tosses tousled hair, and prickly burrs and heads of daisies fly across the room. Chunky plastic bangles crash together on her wrist. Her reflection pokes its tongue out at me, as she turns and grabs a cushion from the bed. I duck before it hits me. 'Oi, dreamer!'

I'm back in the room. What have I missed? These time-travelling portals suck me in sometimes; whisking me into the past without warning.

Frankie's expression is serious. "Obviously I just want what everyone wants."

Gareth looks at her expectantly, but I recognise a pause for dramatic effect when I hear one. Leon looks up from underneath his baseball cap. Michelle stops mid thumb-pick, and we all wait for what's coming next. Frankie's entrance is an exciting event. Group's been running for a month and two people have already left. I considered leaving too, but I wouldn't want to let Janet down. She was the one who suggested I attend.

"I want... peace, love and understanding."

Michelle snorts unexpectedly, and Fanta sprays across the room in a fizzy orange arc. Leon moves his knees quickly to one side.

"Sorry! Sorry!" Michelle's hushed apology is like a whisper in the night.

"It's alright," Leon lifts his cap off, rubs his head, and then puts his cap back on again. "Don't worry about it."

"This is a serious therapeutic group, Francesca." Gareth clears his throat. "These sessions aren't mandatory, but rather an addition to the services Langston House provides. I'm sure Janet – Mrs. Regan – explained this group is a resource the government is trialling, for those who may need some..." His pause is Hubba Bubba being stretched. "...extra help, and all I'd ask is that you respect the process, please." It's not so much a smile that follows this lecture, as an animal's bared teeth.

"No problem..." she trails off, the fierce light in her eyes extinguished. It isn't Becca staring out at me, but my emotional dam bulges at the resemblance all the same, and if it bursts and the water rushes out, everybody will drown.

Frankie strolls around to the window behind me. There aren't rules about not moving around during a group session; but... no-one does it.

She opens the second window; flashes of sunlight bounce off the silver buttons of her cardigan as she walks back to her seat.

"Serious Therapeutic Group. I get it." Her words are deliberate. "Nice beard."

"Let's carry on with what we were discussing earlier, before Francesca joined us, shall we?" It's never a question we answer when he says this.

Gareth smiles at Michelle who'd been speaking before Frankie made her entrance. "Please, carry on."

Michelle has a pitted moon-like face and brown hair parted down the middle which covers her face like a curtain. She speaks quietly but there's restrained feeling behind her words.

"It's not fair that The Littlies' get all the attention. They have all these activities, and the trips are all based around baby stuff!"

"Well. Yesterday when we discussed the Negativity of Complaining, we came to

the conclusion – together, didn't we? – that complaining was merely a temporary release, and in order to allow the positive to break through, we need to *actively* consider alternative solutions which may be available to us."

The lawnmower stutters, followed by Daver-ella's indistinguishable swearing. Gareth huffs across the room.

"Please don't close them, it's baking in here." Frankie's tone is polite but commanding.

"How about I pull them to?" He doesn't wait for a response. Sitting on the low windowsill, he wiggles a finger into the knot of his brown tie, loosening it.

I take my glasses off and rub at the grooves they've left. My head throbs; I'd like everything to be blurry for a while. I can't stop images and memories of Becca saturating my mind.

"Michelle. Have you considered *why* the different treatment you perceive the younger members receive disturbs you so much?"

Frankie mutters under her breath. Gareth spins round, his knees knocking together.

"Sorry Francesca, would you like to contribute?"

"I said, that's *funny*."

"What is?"

"You. Calling them that. *Members*. Like we're in some sort of *club*, but we're not, are we?"

He looks fleetingly at the ceiling. "Well. You're right, of course but..." his expression so tight it could crack, like the facemasks mum used to slather on. "... I was merely using the term in order to invoke a sense of... community, togetherness. No man is an island, Francesca." Gareth turns away: end of subject.

"But, we *are*, aren't we?"

I force my feet into the floor; put my glasses back on. Leon presses his knee deliberately into mine and leaves it there. He fiddles with the lip of his baseball cap so that it's directly over his eyes. I don't understand, why is she trying to have an argument? Michelle's shiny eyes flit over Frankie's face; she's mesmerized.

"And, just so you know, it's Frankie, *not* Francesca, but... I think I said that?" She grins round nonchalantly at nobody in particular. "Didn't I say that already?"

Gareth unbuttons his shirt cuffs, and pushes the sleeves up. Leon calls him 'Gareth the Gorilla' because his forearms are covered with dense black hairs. "Sorry. *Frankie*." He moves as if he's about to stand but decides against it. "Now, Michelle..."

Michelle rubs her eyes with the heels of her hands. She often cries in group but never makes a sound. It's as if the never-ending pain in her body simply needs to release itself. I reach for the box of tissues on the table, and pass them to Leon, who hands them to Michelle. She holds them in her lap and tugs one out without looking at anybody.

Gareth presses on. "Do you know *why* you're upset Michelle? Are you able to articulate what you're *feeling*?"

Michelle blows her nose and folds the tissue over and over until it's a tiny soggy square. "I think..."

"No, no. Not what you *think*, but what you *feel*."

"There's a difference?" Frankie sounds genuinely surprised.

Gareth's unused to interruptions and he's exasperated. "Yes, there's a difference!"

I tune into the roaring of the re-started industrial lawnmower. Daver-ella's whistling now, a tune I recognise but can't place. I shut my eyes and breathe in deeply. Scenes – fast as plates in a circus act – spin in my mind: Becca and I lying on our backs on the hilltop in the park, arms stretched right over our heads, hands linked and her yelling: 'Ready?' and off we go – my nostrils stinging with the aroma of just-that-second-cut-grass, my heart puffy with exhilaration, and us rolling down and down and over and over, me with my eyes squeezed tight and her hiccupping with laughter... grass clinging to every part of us, hair sticking to her face, skirt twisting up and revealing her knickers.

The lawnmower cuts off, again. Wind shuffles its way through the slight gaps in both windows. Gareth's back in his armchair throne. I didn't notice him move. Now his head rotates owl-like, and he picks his notepad up off the table. With one ankle on his opposite knee, he balances the pad and begins writing.

About the Writer

Emma Norry completed an MA in Screenwriting at Bournemouth University, graduating in 2007. Previous fiction has been published in *Spiked*, *Aesthetica*, *Ink* and FiveStopStory and the [Poetry Prose And Plays](#) website. A runner up in the *Rhys Davies Award 2005*.

In 2013 she was part of a collaborative US project between writers and photographers entitled [Fading Light: Open to Interpretation](#).



2014 highlights included: placed 3rd in West Sussex Writing Competition, included in the NFFD print anthology *Eat my Words*, longlisted for the S1 Leeds Literary Prize and shortlisted for HG Wells Prize.

2015 highlights so far include: commended in the Neil Gunn 2015 Writing Competition, and shortlisted for the Fish Flash Fiction 2015 competition.