

TLC Showcase

JESSICA ZARINS

Introduction to the manuscript 2

Extract from *Breaking Shore* 3

About the Writer 7

Introduction to *Breaking Shore*

In *Breaking Shore*, a straight, millennial couple from London are on holiday in a small town by Lake Ontario in the days leading up to the Brexit referendum. Confronted by past mistakes, desires and responsibilities, their relationship as they know it ends and begins again, as they re-evaluate their feelings and their sense of what's right. It's a modern love story where the characters get to know each other and themselves through honest conversations, and discover that sometimes it's only in the freedom of the end that things can really begin.

As an urban millennial myself, I often find myself in conversations about relationships, mental health and popular culture. Inspired by real-life conversations, internal dialogues, and Richard Linklater's *Before* trilogy and the fiction of Sally Rooney, I wanted *Breaking Shore* to explore contemporary feelings and relationships through realistic and unique dialogue. And with the help of Rose Gaete, the TLC reader who did my manuscript assessment, I believe I've been able to do just that.

Rose saw exactly what I was trying to achieve with the manuscript, and gave invaluable advice on how to achieve it; what to change, what to remove, and what to keep. I was surprised by how much she said I should keep, and how some of the smaller changes she suggested had an enormous impact. I also really appreciated that Rose read the manuscript again after I made the initial edits based on her report, and recommended it as a 'quality manuscript' to TLC. They have then gone above and beyond the agreement of that initial assessment with further readings, edits and subsequent agent submissions, sharing their expertise, contacts and advice in order for the novel to reach a wider readership. Whatever happens with it from here on, it's a project I'm proud of and grateful to have worked with TLC on.

Extract from *Breaking Shore* by Jessica Zarins

She knows immediately after Nothing to Declare that he isn't there. The air in the Arrivals hall isn't any different from the plane or from Gatwick this morning. Thousands of miles without stepping outside; has she really travelled anywhere at all? They've only been together six months, and Sam has spent the last eight weeks on a research trip for his book in British Columbia. Now she's in Toronto for a two-week holiday with him, and he isn't here. Making herself okay with having to wait, Jennifer goes to the toilets – washrooms, they call them here – and opens her suitcase on the floor. She puts her German passport away, in the pocket with the sketchbook and journal she doesn't think she'll use. She changes her trainers and support socks for sandals and considers washing her armpits in the sink, but instead she just stares into the polished steel mirror. The 28-year-old self that looks back has short hair styled like he taught her, green eyes and tiny wrinkles that don't go away anymore. Her teeth are wonky and her cheeks are rosy. Is she nice and skinny or has she gone gaunt? Maybe she's fat. Her apricot top and cut off denims feel and should look cool in the June heat she expects outside, but maybe he won't like it. She sits on the toilet and tries to poo but it stays.

Having flushed the empty toilet, she takes a deep breath and leaves the cubicle. There are no messages on her phone and she doesn't try to call. The Arrivals hall is kind of like the end of *Love Actually*. Jennifer walks around the walls and looks at the brochures for Toronto, Niagara Falls and New York. They promise adventure, like what she'd sought when she moved to London, which she'd felt when she met Sam, and that she still seeks in her illustrations. But they're also a reminder that they haven't made any plans for their holiday, which to her is meant to solidify their relationship as grown-up and serious, then hopefully lifelong. She avoids looking towards the door and the clock, pretending that it's fine until it becomes true. Five minutes, then ten. On a TV screen there's a news channel discussing Brexit, and she's surprised they're discussing it as far away as Canada. On her phone, nothing. By the door, nothing. She wants him to see her, discover her. She doesn't want to have to shout his name across the terminal. Travellers and their families queue, wait, leave.

She was awake for most of the night looking at his photos on Facebook from three years ago, when people still regularly posted. He'd texted her at 3am, which she knew would be 10pm Toronto time, to say that he'd be at the airport to pick her up. It was the first she'd heard from him in two days, during which he'd had that meeting with Sofie. He hadn't mentioned anything about that. At 10am, when she was on the tarmac at Gatwick, he sent another text saying that he'll meet her at Arrivals, but if he's late she should just wait because his phone won't be on roaming. 5am Toronto time. She'd replied 'Thanks!!! Xxx' before setting her phone to airplane mode.

20 minutes. Which isn't that long, she tells herself, it just feels long because you're waiting. She tries to walk slower. Then, from the far side of the room, she sees him enter. Immediately she turns to examine the arrivals board. Landed, landed, baggage reclaim, can he see me, delayed, landed. Without turning her head she glances. He's also looking at the screens, on the other side of the hall, running his hands through his hair that hasn't been cut in over eight weeks. She waits, looks at him. Tall and slim, like a hipster Clint Eastwood, his brown beard and his blond hair growing darker rather than greyer with age. The west coast sun has brought back its goldenness though, and the effect together with his milk chocolate eyes is of marble cake. She ponders this edible description, because when looking at him she wants to taste him, consume him even, have him inside her. His eyes are shaded by his hand, with his other hand still on his lean waist. He looks almost feminine, with his weight on one foot. His Rolling Stones t-shirt, blue shorts and red high top Converse would look good on anyone. He still doesn't see her but she's self-conscious now.

*

They'd met at the bookshop. It was a Tuesday, and Jennifer had been shelving books when he asked for advice for an early Christmas present. They'd started chatting, he was funny and easy to talk to. She told him she was from Munich but had moved to London to study Art History before working in the bookshop, and he told her he was a freelance writer who worked part time at the marketing department of Penguin Random House. Then he bought an expensive design book. The following Tuesday he came back and she had tingled when she recognised his blond hair and dark beard. His rugged handsomeness and his voice that was deep when he spoke but high when he laughed stood out against the white bookshelves and traffic on

Charing Cross Road. They chatted some more and he bought paperbacks on the 3 for 2 offer. Two weeks after that she saw him again, and he said he'd been in the Tuesday before but that she hadn't been there. She told him it had been her day off. He'd only bought a Christmas card that time, but before she put the receipt in the bag she wrote 'just in case', her name and her phone number on it. She'd folded it up so he wouldn't see it immediately, and when she didn't hear from him that day she thought maybe he'd thrown it away. She hadn't been waiting or anything, but she couldn't really sleep that night with embarrassment. What was she thinking? He'd never insinuated that he wanted her number. Their eyes had met, sure, but had it really been flirting? Probably not. He lived in Hackney, which felt far away from her Twickenham. She tried to do non-customer facing jobs at work the next day. But by the time she checked her phone on her afternoon break, there was a message. 'Hiya it's Sam here, the bookshop customer. It's been nice meeting you, maybe you'd like to go for a drink sometime? S.'

The next Friday she'd waited for him outside the Shard, and even though it was December he'd just worn a black denim jacket. It had been remarkably mild, and when their hands accidentally touched a bit later he was warm. They'd spoken about their dreams, him about his writing and her about her drawing. He said he'd always wanted to write, and only the year before had he left his office job of eight years in order to do a Creative Writing MA. After this he'd had some short stories published and the novel he'd finished was with an agent on submission to publishers. He'd sipped an IPA while he talked, and Jennifer had watched the golden droplets form in the beard on his upper lip and how he unconsciously licked them off. She was embarrassed to tell him how little there was to tell about her own practice, but he listened and encouraged her. He nodded with a wrinkle between his eyebrows and told her to keep going. He asked her which illustrators and artists she admired with such interest that her aspirations felt legitimised. That her dreams were possible.

They'd wandered along the Southbank past City Hall, where Boris was still mayor, then gone to the Garrison where the decor was a shabby chic of mismatched chairs and lamps and the beer cost £5.80. Jennifer decided to ignore that and just pay whatever the food bill came up to, but was relieved to have more in common with Sam when he said he refused to pay £17 for a poached egg. They left without giving

a tip and went across the road to Franco Manca, where the conversation had stalled over pizza. The waiter had forgotten their order so they'd been waiting, often in silence. They'd been given free panettone as an apology, but Jennifer was convinced she'd never see him again when they left. Then he'd suggested one more drink at the Shipwright Arms on their way back to London Bridge station, and there they'd come on to the topic of films, which they found they could discuss at length. The pub was busy so they stood at the circular wooden bar in their jackets, while drinks were served in glasses from the shelf above them. They'd stood close together amidst the suits and suitcases, and slowly got into the more intimate subjects of their emotions and mental health. Sam had looked into his glass and said, 'You might want to know that I've just come out of a pretty serious relationship.' Then he'd looked at her and waved his hands in a mock-scaring way and said in what she'd interpreted as a joking way: 'Just to warn you!' And despite having promised herself that she under no circumstances would talk about Fred, she'd told him about their breakup some eight months earlier, and finished with 'So don't worry, I'm damaged goods too.' He'd chuckled at that, and stroked her back in a non-sexual but still inviting kind of way, that seemed to say 'you're okay, and we'll be okay.' It had been the first time that he'd deliberately touched her. When they reached the Tooley Street tube entrance she'd said, 'You can kiss me now if you like.' That made him chuckle again, and he joked about not being able to perform on order. But he did, and the kiss he gave her was of such warmth and softness but unbearable sexiness that Jennifer wanted to melt into the cobbles and wash his feet with herself. It was as if the kiss also meant that she was okay, and would be okay with him.

And that had been it. Sam.

About the Writer

Jessica Zarins is a Swedish-Latvian writer based in the UK. Her paternal grandparents were refugees from Latvia to Sweden at the end of World War II, and she moved to London by herself when she was 19. These events have had enormous influence on her writing, which is in English, her second language.

She has a degree in English with Creative and Professional Writing from St Mary's University in Twickenham, and a Masters in Modern and Contemporary Literature from Birkbeck College, London. Since then she has attended additional creative writing courses and retreats, and is now part of TLC's Being A Writer community.



Her work often centres around identity, heritage and nature, and outsidership. She has had fiction published in *Under the Radar* magazine, and non-fiction in Litro Online and in the Epoch Press's upcoming 'Roots' issue. *Breaking Shore* is her first novel and she's currently working on her second, which is set on a sailing boat from Britain to Sweden.

Jessica tweets on @JessBranches, and blogs on jessbranches.wordpress.com. She lives in Cambridge, works full-time for the University's English language exam board, struggles to write biographies about herself, and occasionally employs an Oxford comma.