



## TLC SHOWCASE

Serena Salvi

Introduction to the Manuscript	2
Extract from <i>The Nature of Dusk</i>	3
About the Writer	5

## Introduction to *The Nature of Dusk*

When I began *The Nature of Dusk*, I never believed I would ever finish it, let alone that I would eventually send it out and find an agent interested in representing me. I approached it, at first, as a distraction from work. But with the weeks and then months passing, I discovered that the manuscript was taking an increasingly large space in my mind, and that, perhaps, professional feedback would help me understand if the direction I was taking made any sense.

I requested a partial manuscript appraisal from TLC last summer and was assigned to Jonathan McAloon. From the beginning of his report, it was clear to me that no matter my lack of experience, he took my writing seriously, even more than I allowed myself to.

The feedback at this stage mainly focused on sharpening the balance between the older narrator's voice and its childhood counterpart, and overall, on trusting the reader more without underscoring the emotional significance of certain events. I have to admit that what truly motivated me at this stage was not the positive and encouraging tone of the letter (though it meant a lot), but the realisation that someone else could understand what I was trying to say, especially when I resisted the need to say too much.

At the beginning of last December, I then sent the full manuscript to Jonathan through TLC for a final assessment. The piece was flagged by him as complete and very promising, and after some minor tweaks on my part, in February, I had a 1-1 with Joe Sedgwick to help me refine my submission package. I signed with my agent in May.

It is difficult to tell for sure whether I would have reached this stage on my own, but I don't care to know. I will not write a novel for the first time ever again, and I will perhaps never experience the same kind of surprise and joy in finding a professional reader like Jonathan, who never once dismissed me or my ambitions as too unreasonable, given my starting point.

## Extract from *The Nature of Dusk*

Even when we crossed the tree line, I did not release his hand, nor did I slow my steps. I kept going, sometimes glimpsing the face of a villager or a brother walking among the trees, until we reached a spot I had visited when I was younger, with Alice.

The light hardly reached us through the canopy of twigs, and the whole world had become blue and green. I left Gregory's hand, sitting, trying to catch my breath. I brushed away the sweat from my brows and eyes. He sat next to me; his heavy breaths aligned with mine.

Some time passed when neither of us spoke. The sun lowered, and what was green turned grey, what had seemed blue became mauve. We had not heard any noise. No great army coming for us, and nothing other than animals rustling through the undergrowth.

'I think we will have to sleep here,' I told him. 'But there are worse things than lying on grass.'

'I never slept outside,' he replied.

We both lay on a stretch of moss, near a severed trunk. Above us, the light of dusk made the branches of the trees look like fingers extended to the stars. He had removed the hat. His hair curled loosely around his forehead.

He was looking at me, but did not say a word. Neither of us moved our eyes, for I suspected we shared the same fear. We were worried that by looking away, even just for an instant, the light of the evening would have passed, letting the face of the other disappear.

I stared at him, and he stared at me until night came. When the darkness erased his features, I felt his hand searching for mine. I grasped it, holding it until we both fell asleep, on our bed under the leaves.

By morning, our lips were cracked with thirst, but we did not dare to drink from the few cloudy puddles we had found. And because we had heard no noises during the night, we decided to walk towards the Priory to see if we could find someone who knew more than we did.

I walked in front of him. I desired to turn back and say something. Perhaps how much

it had meant that he had come with me to my mother, or that when I woke up in the middle of the night, his hand was still in mine. But I never did.

When we reached a clearing leading to the fields, we saw a few of the brothers walking in the light of the morning. Brother Abbo was among them, and upon reaching him, I asked, 'What happened? Are they gone?'

'They never came,' he said. 'But we think they burned our granges and the fields by the sea.'

He left, moving with the others like a deserted soul to the church. Gregory and I went with them, without urgency.

As the Priory's walls drew near, I was separated from him. The Prior took him away, without giving me the chance to exchange another word.

Alone, I walked. I saw dark smoke on the horizon and the people, men, women, tonsured or with their heads covered, emerging from the forest. The soldiers had passed. Our food, another time, had been destroyed. And yet, I was intact. I was whole.

I thought about the time in front of me. I thought about the lessons and my vows. I thought about the smell of the green fern, of the life thriving inside a tree, of my secrets and my mysteries. I thought of the hours between day and night. For some, these were such a short time, but for me, they were my entire being.

## About the Writer

Serena is a researcher at Lancaster University within the International Observatory on End-of-Life Care. She is originally from Brescia, Italy. She holds an MSc in Developmental Psychology from the University of Milano Bicocca (Italy) and a PhD in Behavioural Economics from Northumbria University (UK).

She is currently working on her debut book, a historical literary novel set in 14th-century North-West England.

