

## Dubrovnik by Vidyan Ravinthiran

I watch you swim far out from my deckchair,  
a black dot amid white glitter. Later,  
you insist I reverse down the ladder  
slowly – where you leapt in. But the odour,  
the giant freeze of the sea and its gross judder  
– which I describe, but could never prepare for,  
once you've climbed out, you don't remember –  
kept me paddling tamely by the shore  
grasping the rungs of my own ribs. In Sri Lanka,  
the tide licked icily up and over  
my bitten legs in the sun-smitten sand – my mother,  
hating it, snatched me away before  
I was pulled in and under and lost forever.  
Yours, when she swam out to sea, took you with her.

*From The Million-Petalled Flower of Being Here, published by Bloodaxe Books*

## Scenes from a Bright Town by Helen Tookey

... a bright, clean-looking town...

Ward Lock Guide to Wales, 1966

*Eight a.m.*

the long beach is almost empty  
and the sea is quiet, its attention elsewhere

like a small girl in Sunday school  
who sits on a hard chair, half-attending

pleating and unpleating  
the hem of her skirt

*Sycamore*

and at the upstairs window the sycamore tree  
rustling its bunches of yellow keys  
as though to say *there are doors not tried*  
as though to say *there are other ways*

*Garden*

not midnight exactly – three minutes past  
by the kitchen clock  
but the garden is sudden and strange in the moonlight:  
thorn trees, battlements, everything a knife-edge  
version of itself, sky a scumble  
of silver clouds, and the garden become  
a gleaming box, a Schauspielhaus

*Castle Sands*

but this beach is made from fragments of shell  
thinnest flakings of mother-of-pearl

as though a child had run with a stick  
through a city built of fine bone china

had run and run and kept on running  
till he ran himself clean out of story  
and we now in some far future  
sift the pieces through our fingers

try to reconstruct the city

*From City of Departures, published by Carcanet*

## Flowers by Jay Bernard

Will anybody speak of this  
the way the flowers do,  
the way the common speaks  
of the fearless dying leaves?

Will anybody speak of this the way  
the common does, the way  
the fearless dying leaves  
speak of the coming cold?

Will anybody speak of this  
the way the fearless dying leaves  
speak of the coming cold  
and the quiet it will bring?

Will anybody speak of this  
the coming of the cold,  
the quiet it will bring,  
the fire we beheld?

Will anybody speak of this  
the quiet it will bring  
the fire we beheld,  
the garlands at the gate?

Will anybody speak of this  
the fire we beheld  
the garlands at the gate,  
the way the flowers do?

*From Surge, published by Chatto & Windus*

### Our Notes to Help You

In the collection from which this poem is taken, Jay Bernard explains how it came out of reading archive material about the New Cross Fire in 1981, where thirteen young black people died and twenty-seven others were injured. The poet draws links to more recent events, in particular the Grenfell Tower Fire of June 2017.