

# SHOWCASE @laurahird.com

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About Me ▾



Annie Forbes Cooper is an Aberdonian bairn, who lives in Manhattan and took to fiction writing, somewhat later in life than is generally recommended. Over the years she has earned her crust from a wide variety of pursuits including, go-go dancing, chambermaiding, silver service waitressing, barmaiding, cleaning trains, quality control person in a fish processing plant, and selling double glazing. These days however, she tends to make the most money from being a journalist for everyone from the Sunday Times, The Scotsman, the Aberdeen Press & Journal, Scottish Field, Forbes, Ad Age, Adweek, the New York Post, Campaign, New Woman, HouseBuyer, the Wine & Spirit International Year Book, Lithoprinter and Carpetbaggers Weekly (OK, she made up the last one), among others. For the past several years she has ensconced herself in the novel. All three of them. The first, she tossed. The second, languishes lonely as a shroud in a drawer somewhere, and her third is currently being turned down by some of the UK's best publishers. She has had chapters published in a UK magazine called The Source; short stories published in Peninsula, in the zines : Word Riot and Literary Potpourri, in the print magazine



## TERMINAL ONE by Annie Forbes Cooper

"We apologize for the delay, but all flights are temporarily grounded due to bad weather...." announces the Dutch-accented voice, in impeccable English.

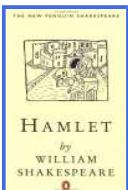
Bloody hell. Amsterdam's among the top ten of my "Places to See before I Die," list. But forget touring tulip fields, cycling alongside canals or sampling some of the city's finest skunkweed--and God knows I'd have killed for some of that. No, I'm stuck in Schiphol Airport, which despite umpteen casinos, saunas, masseurs and shops selling anything anyone could wish for at all times of the day and night, still feels like every other gray, anonymous terminal anywhere in the world.

I'm en route from New York, where I live, to the North-East of Scotland, where my family lives and where I grew up. With the next day's appointment with the specialist, supposedly one of the best in his field, now looking doubtful, I hit the bar with the aim of getting drunk—one of the few outcomes in my life over which I can still exercise some control. As my mitt grasps an industrial-sized vodka and tonic, I exhume my last meeting with

Inkpot, and Not Everything in Life Has To Be Explained. Forthcoming publications include NFG magazine.

In 2002 she won an Honorable Mention award in the Writer's Digest Essay Competition, and an Honorable Mention in the ByLine Creative Nonfiction Contest, 2003. She is also hopelessly disorganized and sadly, has no hi-tech impressive Web site on which to display her paltry wares, nor is she very efficient at posting her work, nor in fact sending it out of late. Despite all this, she is however, an editor at NFG magazine, which she urges everyone to rush out and subscribe to.

## ANNIE'S INFLUENCES



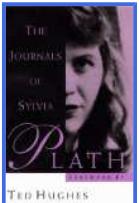
### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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### CHARLES DICKENS

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### SYLVIA PLATH

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Paul, the on-again, off-again lover of ten years, and ponder yet again the wisdom of a relationship from which I've walked away a million times, only to walk right back, unable to give him up, thinking, surely it'll work out in the end, right?

Wrong, comes this Delphic pronouncement inside my head, which I ignore anyway. Following the brain, rather than the heart, has never been my forte. I'm about to call him, just to hear his voice, unable to stop obsessing, and addicted to the Sturm und Drang, when--.

"Lucy? Is that Lucy Wilson?" comes this voice over my shoulder.

I whirl round. A tall, vaguely familiar-looking, middle-aged man with finely chiseled features stares back at me.

"OhmiGod. OhmiGod. Johnny?"

He nods. "Aye, it's me."

"I don't believe it."

"I'm the real thing."

"Small world," I blabber, as a series of musty, long-forgotten images resurrect themselves in my mind. We'd gone out for about a year when I was 15, or 16, and he was 17, or 18. He was the first guy I went all the way with. Not that it was exactly memorable. Back then, Johnny lived with his parents in a council house and worked as a fish filletter in a fish house down by the harbour. We'd been going to run away to London together, an ill thought-out scheme abandoned when he landed in prison after stealing his boss's fish lorry. We'd split up shortly after that. No idea why.

"We were on the same plane from New York. Thought it was you, all the way in the front," he says.

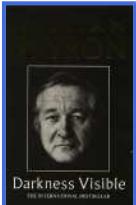
"Amazed you recognized me after all this time."

"You haven't changed much. You look great. Quite foxy in fact."

"Foxy." I gurgle. Then brighten, feeling pathetically grateful for the transforming power of make-up and perfume, making me feel, however temporarily, "quite foxy."

## THOMAS HARDY

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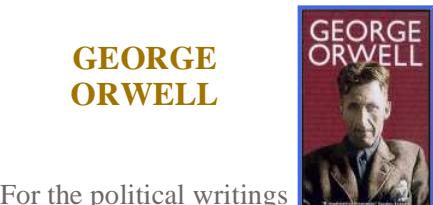


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### GEORGE ORWELL



Foxy! Fancy.

"I smoked my first joint with you, then fell down a flight of stairs," I say.

He laughs. Says he doesn't remember it. But it hardly matters, because he resurrects a host of other long-forgotten images and sounds in my brain. I'd always wondered what had happened to him. Even fantasized about meeting him again and what he'd look like; whether he'd still have those brooding and mysterious eyes that made him exotic in a way no other boy was. The reality is: some male pattern baldness, a few laughter lines--and a scar, running from his cheek to his jaw. We have something in common. And yes, he still has those brooding eyes. Apart from that, well preserved for what, forty-five?

Over more drinks we swap life histories; minus a few pertinent details. He's stayed in Aberdeen all his life. I've lived in the States for almost twenty years, and married and divorced two Americans--a bad habit I've been trying to break. He's separated with two teenage kids. I have a career as a creative director in an ad agency. He teaches philosophy at Aberdeen and was over in New York for a conference. We indulge in nostalgia. Remember him? Remember her? This one's dead. That one's married for the fourth time. Whatever happened to....?

"No kids?" he asks.

"I forgot."

He laughs and raises an eyebrow, revealing a glimpse of that adorable 17-year-old I once fell in love with. It gives me goose bumps.

"What happened?" I nod at the scar.

"Got beaten up by a gang of yobbos two years ago down by the Gallowgate. They knicked ma wallet."

"Oh, my God!" I can't seem to stop invoking the name of the Father. For about two seconds I contemplate telling him about my own scar, but dismiss this idea in favour of clinging on to the illusion of foxiness.

"Erm, how did we actually finish with each other?" I ask. "You told me to fuck off outside Woolies, remember?"

## EVELYN WAUGH

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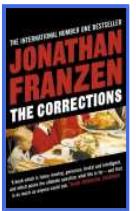
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## DAVE EGGERS

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## JONATHAN FRANZEN

Click image to visit Jonathan Franzen's official website; for Dave Weich's



"Sure it was me?"

He laughs again. We move closer, and I indulge in pointless "what ifs." I'd always thought we'd get back together again, but next thing I knew he was with someone else, then he married her. When he casually touches my hand, I almost fall off my bar stool. Now I'm 15 and he's 17 again, and I want to kiss him so badly. I can only imagine the response of the rest of my body. Another announcement comes over the tannoy: "Ladies and gentleman, your airline will issue you with a voucher for a hotel room...."

We stare at each other and smile. Something instinctive and unspoken passes between us as, vouchers in hand, we head towards the exit. We leave the terminal and turn the corner, lurching by mutual agreement towards each other: two tipsy, middle-aged, former lovers snogging round the side of an airport. It feels wild and romantic. Or maybe just wild. I'm beyond caring.

"Take your hair down," he orders. I unclip my clasp and my thick, dark locks cascade around my shoulders. He could have told me to take all my clothes off and I'd have done that too.

"You look beautiful," he says.

I believe him. To me, he looks pretty beautiful himself. In fact, I've never wanted anyone so badly in all my life as I do this man now, on a long, snowy night between planes in Amsterdam. We stumble towards the modern, glaring hotel at the end of the terminal and stall outside our hotel rooms.

"Nightcap?" he says, steering me towards his room.

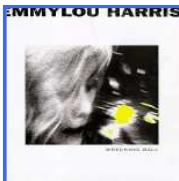
I nod, and once inside, sit awkwardly on his bed, while he removes tiny bottles from the fridge and pours me a drink.

"Just going for a slash," he says, and disappears into the bathroom. I contemplate making a dash for it, terrified of his reaction and the inevitability of being forced to face yet again, the reality that he has, for a few brief hours, made me forget.

"Eighty per cent of women with your pathology, blah, blah, blah..." said the breast cancer surgeon two weeks earlier, reducing my life to a pile of statistics and risk-versus-benefit ratios.

Powells.com interview with Franzen, click [here](#) or for related items on Amazon, click [here](#)

## ANNIE'S TOP 10 MUSIC SHE LIKES TO LISTEN TO WHILE WRITING



### EMMYLOU HARRIS

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### LUCINDA WILLIAMS



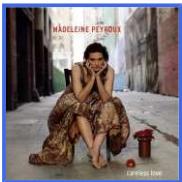
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### JOSS STONE

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### MADELEINE PEYROUX



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"Statistics," she added as a kicker, "have nothing to do with each patient's individual prognosis."

Next week, back in the States, I'm scheduled to face aggressive chemo, resulting in hair loss, nausea, mouth sores, infertility, premature menopause and umpteen other side effects too numerous to mention, after which nothing, especially my body--not to mention my mind--will ever feel the same again.

I've already chosen my new Meg Ryan look-alike wig, or "cranial prosthesis"--as it's termed in Cancer Speak. It perches on my bedroom dresser on a complementary plastic stand kindly provided by the New York wig store. After all, being a Gerber baby was not the role I've envisioned for my forties.

Still, at least I'd moved on from the self-pitying phase, replacing it with a form of subversive gallows humour. "God, just in case you do exist, if I promise to be the kind, generous spiritual person I was obviously meant to be, can you please get rid of this cancer? Please?" No answer.

Thanks a lot, God. Never believed in you, anyway. God's always been this murky presence in other people's lives—never intruding much upon my own. Until, that is, life-threatening illness forces me to contemplate my own existence, theoretically arriving at some profound epiphany about the meaning of life, the cosmos and God, etc., right? Wrong.

Turns out, my only epiphany occurs in the Schiphol Airport Ladies room, where I plaster on make-up, realizing that I need a cosmetic, rather than religious, transformation--anything to make me look less like the 80-year-old I feel. Just because I'm stuck in a foreign airport feeling lost and downtrodden, no need to look the part as well.

In duty-free I douse myself in Jean Paul Gaultier's latest perfume, largely because it comes in a glass bottle pneumatically-shaped like a woman's body. It serves as an ironic reminder that mine will never look like this again, if it ever did in the first place.

As I sit staring at the beigeness of Johnny's hotel room, I indulge in an over-the-top fantasy involving me as a Greta Garbo-esque heroine on her deathbed. When my cell phone rings, Paul's name flashes on the screen. My heart leaps in Pavlovian response. I wish it wouldn't do that. I

## DAVID GRAY

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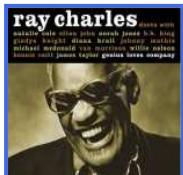


## MILES DAVIS

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## SOLOMON BURKE

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## BUDDHA BAR



hesitate.

"Hey," Johnny says, emerging from the bathroom.

"Hey." I kill the phone.

"You have a scar too," he whispers later, as I lie naked under the sheets. A tear trickles down my damn cheek.

"You OK?" he says.

"I am now." Which is why we kiss and make love for hours, as if my life depends on it. As if this might be both the first and last time ever; aware of the preciousness of existing in the moment, and of how much I love life, and want to flee death and illness. In the moment of orgasm, it's as if something religious has taken place. For a few hours he helps me forget my official, paid-up membership of Cancer World. I toy with the trumped up notion of destiny, wondering if this is the moment I've been waiting for my whole life, as if it's been all mapped out at some earlier juncture and that perhaps there is order in the universe after all.

"Do you believe in destiny?" he asks, as if on cue.

"What kind of question is that," I say. I've had quite enough epiphanies for one day.

When the alarm sounds at 5 a.m., we're not asleep. Outside, it has stopped snowing, and the skies are clearing. Flustered by the embarrassment that sudden intimacy brings, we both rush back to the airport, an exercise that sucks up all the available time and energy, for which I'm grateful.

I sit on the plane in my previously allotted seat in a trance, clinging to the concept of "foxiness" and reliving each intimate detail of the previous night, amazed at my actions; that something so far removed from what my life will soon become—could have occurred; amazed at the resilience of life; and at how, walking off that plane in Aberdeen, I feel strangely transformed and alive. My faith in the serendipity of life renewed. Christ, I'll be going all religious soon.

I turn and look for him in the crowd. We haven't even said goodbye. He appears from nowhere by my side.

"Give us your number, then," he says.

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## CAPERCAILLIE

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## CAPERCAILLIE

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"I don't think..." I struggle with the notion of being noble.

"Och, shut up you, and gimme it."

"Oh, alright." I hand it over, grinning.

"Lucy!" Mum's voice is bearing down on me. I turn and walk away.

"Now fa was that man talking to ma lassie?" says mum, who seems more wizened each time I see her. I can see the questions in her eyes, and her face is clouded with concern. And I know it's me that has to do the comforting.

"That was God, ma," I giggle, taking her arm, "telling me he works in mysterious ways. Dinna worry. Everything's going to be OK."

And this epiphany, I even start to believe.

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