

**Bourne**  
**toWrite...**  
creative writing  
workshops

## Selkie

by Saffron Swansborough

Inspired by Sea Singing by Shirley Hughes

Winter arrived in minutes.  
Blubberless I staggered naked  
Through a sandy land squall  
Searching for the seal skin  
I'd cast onto rocks while exploring,  
In human form, the shore.

The fisherman placed fur  
Around my shoulders, then  
The shell within my ears fell silent  
Like a spell. He  
Took my hand...hand!  
Fore-flippers sliced into finger widths,  
He walked me back

To his timber sea shack  
Where he  
Dealt out instructions  
With killer whale precision:  
Love me, lay me,  
Cherish me, bear my children.  
I did.

    But at night  
I ran into the water  
Knotting seaweed into my hair  
Pushing sand into my eyes  
Funnelling brine into my mouth  
Calling for my brothers and sisters, but  
Muted by browns and greens  
Forlorn seal cries echoed  
My old name trapped on the grey horizon.

I returned to the house  
Hushed bare, like my feet  
Salty drips my only comfort  
A stranger's nest.

Mending netting as the children played,  
I hummed to them,  
The shore my worry quarry  
Sometimes I asked them to look after the baby  
While I foraged for mesh parts  
To knit a new skin

I stared, my tiny eyes pulling to the distance like lead  
And sang, a siren's wail,  
From an upright thin-skinned voicebox

Until one day, my seal skin found me  
Sobbing in a heap behind the wardrobe  
Its thick rugness rolled me into itself  
We wept into each other  
Two pillars of saltiness,  
As it covered my shoulders,  
I could hear them calling my old name.

Collapsing, my toes bent in on themselves  
Dress shredded, flippers forming,  
Barrell bellied, I tipped forward  
Heavy breaths through feather whiskers  
Galumphing to the beach.

I have not forgotten my babies.  
Bobbing, I greet them as they play,  
They wave and squeal at me  
The little one stares, she knows.  
When the seasons change, I leave treasure  
Under their pillows  
Damp kisses on their heads  
And I whisper, that they will always be my pearls.