

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

## What's my Name?

by Stuart Carruthers

“Overnight, our neighbours began to look at us differently.”

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“What time are we heading next door?”

“Anytime after seven, we don't want to be the first to arrive.”

“Lets not stay to long, remember what happened the last time we went to one of these.”

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I often wonder why.

Why did I go with Paul's that afternoon?.

We never played in the old coal yards after school. What would I be doing now if I hadn't have gone that cold autumn afternoon?

Why was Clara there? She lived on the other side of town. I can see her face, innocent, freckles and her golden shoulder length hair. She would have married that boy from Year 5. For a long time I blamed him. Night after night in that cold damp room they called my home, she called on me. I tried to explain why. I lost the ability to talk once the tears and anger emerged. Yet she returned time and again. Often sat at the end of my bed, sometimes she just stood in the corner and started at the floor.

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“Look, you’ve compromised your situation again.” I heard every word he said, but for whatever reason I wasn’t listening. All I cared about was Niamh. The last time I’d seen her, she was escaping out the back door into the dead of night.

“Do I have a choice here or are you telling me again that I need to reenter the programme?”

“Yes.”

“Why? they didn’t actually say the name, they were drunk and anyway around here most news is gossip.”

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The first time I really struggled with the thought that I’d never see them again. No letters or phone calls for the first few years. They said someone inside could sell my story or tell the others who I was. I self-harmed for the first time. At first they were more like scratches but it quickly escalated to deep parallel lines running up my left arm. I hid them from everyone. I knew other people that did it. They wore t-shirts as if they were a badge of honour. But not me. It took a long time before I admitted it to anyone.

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“So keep to the small talk, be polite and let the others do the talking.”

“Are you drinking?”

“No.”

“Me neither.”

“If anyone asks say we are out tomorrow.”

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“So when did you notice a change in atmosphere, was it something someone said to you?”

“I can’t put my finger on it, but our neighbours friend kept looking at me as if he knew me from somewhere, you know that look? Every now and then he’d ask a probing question, but in a way as not to make the conversation uncomfortable. Like a solicitor does.

“And then what?”

“I tried to grab Niamh’s attention. She was in the other room, I could see her through the dividing doors between the kitchen and the living room.”

“And?”

“I sensed it was coming.”

“He excused himself saying he was going to the toilet and as he walked past, he leaned forward and whispered into my ear.”

“I know.”

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“We need to leave now.”

“What’s happened?”

“I’m going to the bathroom, carry on your conversation and then politely say we’ve got to go, say we have early start tomorrow.”

“Emma, what’s happened?”

“I’ll see you back in the house.”

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“Emma what happened in the bathroom, did you attack Mr Jefferson?”

“No.”

“So why did he claim you did?”

“I don’t know, he was drunk, look he tried it on as he came of out the door, I told him no, he would listen so I may have slapped him.”

“He asked us if i knew who you were.”

“All I know is that overnight, our neighbours began to look at us differently.”