

# Rathbones

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# Folio Prize

MENTORSHIPS

2019 - 2020

**FIRST STORY**  
Changing lives through writing



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

COCKAYNE

The Rathbones Folio Mentorships pairs 3 – 4 outstanding young graduates (16 – 18 years of age) from First Story’s in-school creative writing workshops with members of the Folio Academy, for a school year of creative writing mentoring, culminating with a public reading event, held at the British Library.

Across the mentorship, the mentees produce a portfolio of creative writing: here, you can read extracts from their portfolios, a mixture of short fiction, poetry, and poetry designed for spoken word.

**Aisha Borja** was mentored by **Francesca Beard**, and presents two poems.

**Henna Ravjibhai** was mentored by **Joe Dunthorne**, and presents short fiction and two poems.

**Adnaan Ali** was mentored by **Louise Doughty**, and presents three poems from a longer sequence.

Listen to the mentees reading from their work at their showcase event, which took place on 19 May 2019, on the Rathbones Folio Sessions podcast, which you can find on iTunes or at [www.rathbonesfolioprize.com](http://www.rathbonesfolioprize.com).

The Rathbones Folio Mentorships is a collaboration between the Folio Academy Foundation and First Story, and is supported by Cockayne and Arts Council England.

# *Aisha Borja*

# Say My Name

Walking into my Thursday politics class is always the same  
Seven girls split between year 12s and retakes I fit in the middle  
Awkwardly

I sit between the nicest girls of each half  
and face the ones that look like they're in physical pain  
or who aren't looking anywhere faces locked to phones  
as we all sit and wait  
cos Miss is always late  
all that can be heard is what happened to Shontay's boys last week  
and gum being chewed between teen's teeth

And then Miss walks in  
I don't really know how to describe her well  
she's short figured one broken nail on clawed hands and  
a constant look of distaste on her face  
as if election results had been read out in 2016  
or I might describe her like that  
and I think I'd like her if she wasn't my teacher  
because she loves Michelle Obama I mean  
to the point where one lesson she tried to get tickets to her book tour  
for like two hours

Anyway class starts  
register's read homework's checked and  
then she struggles to turn on the projector  
but always gets there in the end  
then we go through what we did last lesson  
five Conservatives stand in front of number 10  
looking pasted and disinfected  
and she'll ask some questions  
and at some point  
she has to choose me but has already forgotten my name from last week  
Briha's on her phone again

Marina still doesn't know what democracy is  
and I'm pretty sure Uswa's eyes are for rolling not for seeing.  
When the lunch bell rings Miss you're still calling me Emily.

# *London's Like This*

Free from anyone I know,  
This city forms intimacy that  
Knows no privacy.  
I'm watching two bodyguards  
Dancing ballroom in each other's arms,  
Half listening to unenthusiastic  
street magicians applause.  
London's weather is like that,  
Too warm to put on my jumper,  
Just cold enough to make me want to.  
London's benches are like that,  
Uncomfortable, like art,  
Like concrete blocks.  
Coming here never feels unwelcoming  
But no one ever stays or sits  
Still, movement is international  
And restrictive.  
Waiting, I become invisible,  
Fading like graffiti at a skate park,  
Not like a Banksy,  
Never that prestigious,  
But always that political,  
A demo voice in this city,  
Like everyone else,  
Trying to make it.  
London's like that, loud  
8 million people telling a different story  
Under the same roof  
Though not on the same floor.  
We all try and touch the stage,  
For a second, then when it's done,  
We all stare, but then move on,  
Stand back for a minute,  
Watch the tube fly past,

Forgetting that artist's name,  
But remembering their struggle,  
One of the many  
Lionesses of London, not sorry  
For being there or  
Being smart or  
Knowing our shit, unlike the dicks up there,  
Parliament standing there,  
Building embodiment of a hangover.

# *Henna Ravjibhai*

# Hide and Seek

Leila and I stand in the middle of the woods. Grand oaks and birches separate us from the smog of the city. I hold Leila's small hand as we climb the hill. It's been years since I came and played the role of Auntie Megsy. Brown leaves crunch under our wellies; Leila wears rainbow ones. She beams as bright as her yellow jacket.

We pass a neat row of trees. They're the ones we planted at school, nearly thirty years ago. I remember when I was Leila's age, and my sister and I came into these woods, the same meandering muddy pathways opened a kingdom of fun.

"What game do you want to play?" I ask.

"Hide and seek!" she squeals back, glad of the attention.

"Okay, but promise me, don't go too far."

She responds by crossing her heart, "I promise."

Before I even start counting, her little legs sprint off to find the best hiding place. Luckily for me, she keeps her yellow jacket on. I close my eyes and count slowly: "One... two... three... four..."

The sound of her footsteps becomes more and more distant.

"Five... six... seven... eight..."

I hear her giggle from afar. I can't help but smile and take a peek. I catch a glimpse of a yellow hood behind a log. Easy.

I close my eyes again.

"Nine... ten... eleven... twelve..."

I hear more footsteps – then silence. The only sound is the rustling of the leaves. Perhaps she has found somewhere else to hide.

"Thirteen... fourteen...fifteen... sixteen..." I hope she doesn't go too far. My sister will kill me if I don't look after her. She'll send me packing back down to London and never speak to me again.

I count quicker now.

"Seventeen-eighteen-nineteen-twenty! Here I come, ready or not!"

I open my eyes and run to the log where she was hiding.  
She's not there.  
I look for her bright yellow jacket.

\*

Aunty Megsy holds my hand when we go up the hill. I'm so happy that she's here. I was only a toddler when she last came to visit. I asked Mummy why she never comes, Mummy said she asks herself the same thing. I don't want her to leave, we have so much fun together.

At the top of the hill, we play hide and seek.

I find the perfect spot. It's a massive log, and it can easily hide me. I giggle with excitement. She won't find me here.

I look up and see a big knobby tree. I can climb it easily; we have loads of trees near school. Even though I'm not supposed to climb them, I still do.

So I jump out from my hiding place. I've got enough time to climb up. I reach the first branch. Easy. I keep climbing up. I don't look down.

Aunty Megsy will never find me.

\*

I gaze around the vast landscape and still no sign of Leila. The faint taste of bile rises in my throat. I told her not to go too far. She was still hiding behind that log after ten right? How far can a child go in ten seconds? Trying to convince myself just makes it worse.

"Leila?" I call.

My voice echoes, bouncing from tree to tree. I can hear the blood in my ears.

"Leila?!"

\*

Should I shout to tell Aunty Megsy where I am? I don't want to ruin the game. She sounds worried, but what if she's trying to trick me?

I try to climb higher though it's difficult in my wellies. They're all heavy with mud from hiding behind that log.

Surely it'll be easier if I take them off.

\*

Did I just see that? Something fell from the sky about fifty metres away. I'm going mad.

I tell myself to focus. Snap out of it, Meg.

But then something else falls from the sky with a thud.

It came from that tree. I look up.

In among the branches, I see a flash of yellow.

I don't think.

I run.

\*

Now I've got my wellies off, I can easily get to the top.

Aunty Megsy will be so impressed.

If she ever finds me.

Just as I reach for the tallest branch, my foot slips. I manage to cling on but my legs are shaking.

I want to come down now. I look down and see Megsy running towards me. This isn't how the game is supposed to work.

\*

I see a small person with a bright yellow jacket clinging to the topmost branch of the tree. Her boots lie in the mud at my feet. I don't know where she got her bravery from; her mother has always been cautious.

"Leila, what are you doing up there?" I say, trying to keep my voice calm.

Her lips are trembling, she doesn't reply. She's got her mother's stubbornness though.

"Okay, we're going to do this together. Put your foot on that big branch near your right – "

Before I finish, her foot slips and she falls for a moment before she clings on to another branch. Her little legs hang in the air above me.

At last she speaks, "You have to say you've found me."

\*

I'm trying my best to hold on but my fingers keep slipping. I don't want the game to end. Megsy tells me to just let go and she'll catch me.

"You have to say you've found me first," I tell her again.

\*

"Okay, I found you!"

I'm looking up. The sun's in my eyes.

She lets go.

# *The grey planet*

The blue man woke up and said  
'What planet is this?'  
I replied,  
'Sir, you are on Earth'

'Ah,' he said,  
with a knowing smile.  
His face transformed into  
azure oceans,  
eyebrows forming great arches and waves.  
Orange, pink and black diamonds  
scattered along his rough contours.  
Rays of light pierced the skin  
with a warm glow.  
Semi-translucent gold freckles of fish  
swam serenely through towers  
of seaweed along his torso.

'Earth', he said,  
waiting for my nod of approval.

I handed him an image taken only yesterday.  
As he looked,  
his warm skin turned icy cold.  
He bore a plastic necklace,  
feathers trapped between the gaps.  
His eyes blazed red.  
His green torso faded,  
replaced with a dried seabed.  
Translucent traps spread like a rash  
which buried the last  
colours in his body.

*Adnaan Ali*

# Suicide

"Doubt thou the stars are fire  
Doubt that the sun doth move  
Doubt truth to be a liar  
But never doubt I love" - Hamlet, A2S2

Hours of darkness and destruction ensue the afternoons of anger  
That cripple my addiction, my intoxication, my narcoticism.  
For what reason was I made to live a destitute, impoverished existence  
But for the sole reason of following the unconscious act of loving, loving one  
That didn't want to be loved?  
You may believe that the sun and moon interchange positions night after day  
Or that the black night will strike us at our most vulnerable every night  
But you could never believe that my roses and chocolates of affection  
Were never for your pleasure, but for me a sacrament of my love  
That I beheld to you?

My love, why was my love for you not deemed to be a reality for us, but  
a bore?  
Why was love for you just a game that had been played too many times, but  
I was the game, and you were the  
Controller, deciding my inescapable fate? I cannot escape my fate, I will not  
escape my fate.

I was never able to accept my fate in the first place.

Forgiveness is futile.  
Betrayal is brutal.

# Coffee

Fingers twitching, heart beating faster than that night you left me,  
Reconciliation meant nothing to me, yet with you, you have me in your  
presence be.

I know I wronged you, you said, with a countenance of sorrow on your face,  
But your deceit was apparent on your visage, my lord, my love was now  
disgraced.

My love knew no bounds, so I spent that hour listening in awe to you,  
Knowing that I could never fix our love anymore, to it I had to say adieu.  
What's done is done, you said, as you put your black jacket on to go,  
When I begged you not to leave, my tears began to flow.

# The Process

Stigma. Suffering. Solitude.

Three words that define my life being brought up in an Asian household.  
You can't see pain, they say, but it's like I'm forced to wear a blindfold  
They'd ask me what's wrong and I would have to say I've got a  
'common cold'

Because where's the pain and the shattering of bones if your heart's been  
lolloped?

And so I live my nights unable to breathe, trying to find a reason to survive  
Where living life is a pain in an environment where you're supposed to thrive  
You can't see my mental turmoil, but in reality I'm just trying to stay alive  
Sleeping, drowning, crying, could my soul ever find a way to revive?

From the darkest of nights to the brightest of days, my bedroom finds no  
guest

All it finds is the anxieties and thoughts that my cerebellum finds abscessed  
Get over your mood swings they say, as they try to make you feel less  
stressed

But in reality, it is the death of love that has continued to ruin my rest.