



JUDY DARLEY

If you enjoy reading tales about the threads that connect different people, shot through with a hint of of fairytale, you're going to love Judy's latest collection...

Judy Darley has an eclectic CV. Not only has she worked as a journalist and a communications manager, but as a shepherdess – the latter conjuring up an irresistible (though undoubtedly inaccurate) Arcadian vision of Judy depicted in Meissen porcelain. Today, she divides her time between content-writing for clients, that include the NHS, and writing her own fiction.

"I love the challenge of finding the clearest way to express everything, from a nebulous emotion experienced by a fictional character to medical guidance for NHS patients," she says.

Her latest collection of short stories, *The Stairs are a Snowcapped Mountain*, is just about to be published by Reflex, with a launch event on 26 March.

I grew up in Thornbury, in a house full of books and ghosts, and loved listening to bedtime stories. I still need to read before I can fall asleep.

My early stories included lots of lengthy descriptions of sunrises and springtime, plus the occasional vampire. I began working as a staff writer for travel magazines in 2005, and my first short story was published soon after. Travel writing taught me to be concise and avoid clichés (my editor had a ban on 'sandy beaches' and 'stunning views') and to engage all the senses.

As a child, I fell in love with characters rather than authors. I loved Elisabeth Beresford's Wombles, adoring *The Wombles Go Round The World*. I also found CS Lewis's Narnia books gorgeously magical and dark. Other favourites included *Tom's Midnight Garden* by Philippa Pearce. This list makes me realise that I loved anything about journeys and adventure, plus twists of magic and the impossible.

As a flash-fiction editor, I have the privilege of reading a

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huge variety of stories under 1000 words, and choosing one to publish on the Reflex Press website each week. I also review a huge number of collections. Amanda Saint, Tracey Slaughter, Sarah Hills and Tom O'Brien are all powerful writers tackling emotions in their own inimitable way. *Fly Already* by Etgar Keret, published in *The New Yorker*, is another story that has stayed with me.

I'm curious about people and the underlying emotions that influence why they do the things they do, and I think that shines through in each of my books. I write to answer my own questions – why does that person look so sad while playing hopscotch with their child? What hidden worries are influencing that stranger's behaviour? Part of the reason I write is to put myself in other people's shoes and stroll around in them for a while.

The Stairs are a Snowcapped Mountain contains stories about the strangeness of the 2020 bubble, alongside tales about places I've visited in the past. The connecting threads are the things that bring us together or push us apart, and the way that things are often so much more than they seem at first glance. Hints of fairytales and myths ripple through everyday scenarios, but at the heart of the book is humanity and family, and all the ways we find to survive and thrive.

I'm so excited about the book launch and literary night for *The Stairs are a Snowcapped Mountain*, which takes place from 7-9.30pm on 26 March at Waterstones in Bristol Galleries. There will be live music from singer-songwriter Eve Appleton and readings from local writers

Helen Sheppard, Harriet Kline, Jo Mary Butler and me. It's going to be a great night out!

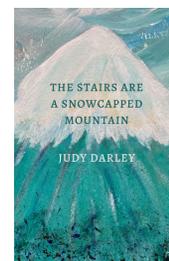
Meeting people who are as obsessed with stories as me has been amazing. I found them through writing courses at Bristol Folk House and at live literary events and open mic nights, including Novel Nights and Tonic.

My favourite time to write is early in the morning, preferably when I'm still half-asleep. On a perfect day, I get up, make a coffee, grab my laptop and go back to bed to write for a couple of hours. But really, ideas can arrive at any time. I always carry a notebook.

I live in the hilly part of south Bristol that isn't sure whether it's Totterdown or Knowle. It's a brilliant area full of lovely people, but the best thing for me are the green spaces. I'm a fan of Arnos Vale Cemetery's overgrown wilderness, as well as Victoria Park, Perrett Park, and the Northern Slopes. You're never far from a tree, or a squirrel...

My most regrettable habit is jumping around in rooms where other people are trying to relax. Also, demanding other people stop jumping around while I'm trying to write 'important' words.

Immediately after answering these questions I have an idea for a new story that I need to pin down before it has a chance to escape. I may be some time... ■



The Stairs are a Snowcapped Mountain is available for pre-order from reflex.press. Free tickets for the launch event on 26 March are available from waterstones.com/events