

Reflex Fiction

Quarterly international flash fiction competition.

**[etym. Ancient Greek parasitos,
meaning one who feeds at
another's table]**

BY KATHRYN ALDRIDGE-MORRIS - 16 NOVEMBER 2020

We bought the house as a quick sale from the school nit nurse. I sensed them the second we set foot inside; seething parasites, hunting for scalp.

Why did we have to move here?

I became convinced the pine wood panelling on the living room walls was riddled with ticking termites. And not just the walls. The wooden floors too. Tiles, slotted together; the entire room a mind-puzzle, seen from the inside out.

Sitting on the foam sofa, with its worn orange cover, I'd tuck my feet under to stop the nurse's leftover lice licking my toes, hopping up my thighs, moon-landing on my head, while the grain of the wood swirled with its invisible, predatory life force. Nothing seemed stable, least of all the walls holding up the latest roof over our heads.

I took to wearing sunglasses in the house. On account of the lines. Vertical lines down the panelling. Jigsaw lines on the floor. Horizontal lines from the blinds across the square bay window. Just that one chink in the metal slats, from the time someone threw a Rubik's cube. The only breach in the symmetry.

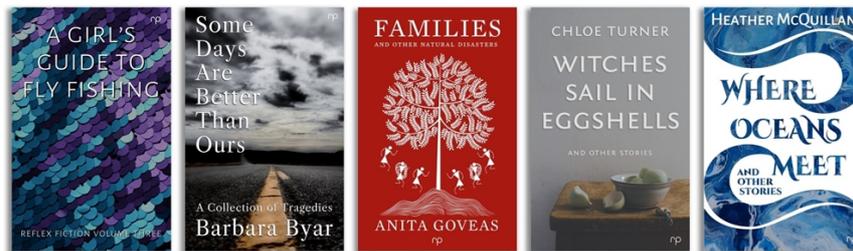
The evenings are getting darker, earlier. I peer out into the orange rush hour, scratching, restless, breathing in the dust, waiting. When you get home, you sit me down. Gently remove my ear defenders. It's important. What you need to tell me. He's coming back. We're all going to try again.

You tell me straight in one long line so there's nothing to read between. I twitch. Nod. What can I do? The room is silent long enough for me to mutter I think another wall panel's been eaten away.

This story just missed the long-list in the Autumn 2020 Reflex flash fiction competition.

Flash Fiction by Kathryn Aldridge-Morris

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Published in Autumn 2020

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Autumn 2020 story

Just Missed the Longlist

