



*'A heady
cocktail of
humanity,
humour and
heart.'*
Tamsin Greig

MARTINI HENRY

SARA CROWE

About the Book

In 1988, seventeen-year-old Sue Bowl has a diary, big dreams and £4.73. What she wants most of all is to make it as a writer, as well as stop her decadent aunt Coral spending money she doesn't have.

Living in their crumbling ancestral home should provide plenty of inspiration, but between falling in love, hunting for missing heirlooms and internship applications, things keep getting in the way.

So when a young literary professor moves in and catches Sue's eye, life begins to take an unexpected turn . . .

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Sara Crowe's Imaginary Bookshop

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HENRY

S A R A C R O W E

To Sean and to Lizzie

PART ONE

*Pushing the Smallest Boundary
with an Afternoon Drink*

Aunt Coral's To Do

Make will

Library (Gardener's Chronicle)

Compost

Cheddar

Green Place
Clockhouse Lane
Egham
Sat Jan 30 1988
2.35pm

Dear Sue,

I'm sorry I haven't written each day as I promised - I have been rushed off my feet.

This evening my Texan guest Mr Hart will be hosting a talk in the drawing room on the Victorian love affair with gardens. Mrs Bunion has made a paella. (I am sorry to say she was given the wrong brief.)

This is because Mr Hart *was* going to give a talk on Calypso dance but today he spontaneously decided to change it due to our remarkable discoveries.

I should start by explaining that every time I put the radio on lately, they say a new record has been broken, the coldest day, the wettest month, the angriest sky. And the last time it wasn't raining was last Tuesday week. And so in a rare respite from the elements, the Admirals, Mr Hart and Hugh from Chertsey took the opportunity to catch up with some garden To Do. With our new tenants, the male to female ratio in the house is now 5 to 3. This has many things to recommend it! It is the sole reason that Delia has taken to wafting about in the evenings in a silk devoré diva (glamorous name for a housecoat).

Anyway, all five gents were getting stuck in and cutting back the empires of thorns down at the bottom of the meadows, when they inadvertently began to excavate what looked like solid red brick. So they spread out in a line and hacked their way through the undergrowth and found they made contact with

bricks and mortar for at least forty feet! Realizing we might be on the brink of discovering a *building*, I swung into action with the Parish Magazine.

Mr Bellamy, from Dew Garden Mechanicals, has been here every day since then in his digger and the site is now cleared right back, to reveal the decrepit remains of two cottages and a large walled garden! If you look down from the right-hand side of Green Place (as you face the drive), the ruins stand about 2 acres away, at the bottom of the sloping meadows.

The old garden walls are ramshackle, crumbly and only part standing, but still clearly form the shape of an extensive oblong stockade. At one entrance, which I believe could have been the main one, a ragged wooden door still survives under an archway. It is tattered, devoid of its key and ironically it is still locked.

My first port of call in terms of research was to put out a feeler for a historian. So I rang the *Egham Echo* to see if they offered a list of experts in the locale and a very nice woman called Jackie County got in touch. She is archivist for the Percival Library in Egham and also tends the record vaults at the *Echo*.

We have already trawled the garden section at the Percival for any information on old local gardens which, alas, did not bear fruit.

But Jackie is undeterred and has been down at the ruins all day with her camera, paving the way for an article she intends to write. She's a doughty lady with a boot full of spaniels and a cookery qualification. Her hunch is, judging by the state of the brickwork at the site, that at some point there has been a fire.

This is really just a quickie as I desperately wanted to find a moment to sit down and tell you the extraordinary news. But having unburdened myself of the telling, I must rush, as this evening's Victorian Flower talk has transformed into a full-scale event and we expect 15 guests, including our old and new tenants. I did ask your father and Ivana, but they have cancelled on account of Ivana's condition.

So, due to the numbers attending, I do understand Mrs Bunion's being upset over what she has described as 'the paella of shame'.

In answer to your concerns about feeling out of your depth with some of your coursework, my advice is that you should persist and hold tight to your values. Fill your mind with knowledge and *never* be embarrassed to ask questions.

In closing I'll just draw your attention to a clipping I have popped in. It was drawn to my attention by Jackie County herself. As I explained, she tends the archives at the *Echo* and so she has her finger on the pulse. Maybe as far as becoming a writer goes this might be a good way to cut your teeth?

All love,

Aunt Coral Xx

Cutting from the *Egham Echo*

Mid-summer Internship Offered (June 15 to September 30 1988)
--

To assist in our busy Features Office

.....
.....

Candidates please send completed questionnaire by
February 28 1988

To: Mr Gordoney George
Egham Echo
The Tillings
Quakers Acre
Egham

We will endeavour to process and respond to all
applications by April 15 1988.

FEATURES INTERNSHIP APPLICATION

ABOUT YOU

Name: Sue Bowl

Age: 18

Home: Green Place, Clockhouse Lane,
Egham

Nationality: British

Languages: None (except British)

Education: Titford High School

I am currently studying under Benjamin O'Carroll for a Diploma in Creative Writing at Taverna O'Carroll in Crete. I am a half scholarship student. I will graduate in April and I will be available immediately after.

Experience

The Egham Hirsute Group (EHG) Weekly Writers Group (FM. Founder Member.)

Also, Individual Winner of the Ramblers Association Gala Short Story Competition in December 1987, whence I met Mr O'Carroll MBA.

Skills None (except writing)

ABOUT WRITING

What is your approach to writing?

The devil is in the detail.

What do you think recommends you for a career in journalism?

A love of language, a love of people, 24-hour curiosity.

Why would you make a good intern?

I could offer an alien's perspective, edginess, and an easy way with a beverage! I am open, frank, eager and willing.

What would you hope to gain from an Internship in the Features Office?

My dream is to live by my pen. My hope would be that an internship with The Echo would give me a major grounding. I would seek to broaden my classical approach, into tough truncated pith.

What kind of writer are you? Can you offer half a page on your style and any aims?

As a writer I think I'm with Emily Bronte, out there shivering on the moors, tapping at the window, a ghostly spectre running away from all the darkness that lies in the misty other world.

My aim is to retain a leaning towards the classical, and to be scrupulously honest. For when I'm faced with a field of blazing flowers, I feel I could burn with joy till I am feverish and then die of the bliss. But I do see that this sort of bent, or at least the expression of it, is not necessarily a restrained

enough technique, and my goal is to endeavour to become more spartan about things, to be muted . . . and to *simmer*. To write as it were, almost as if I am constantly on the edge of having an orgasm, but never actually having one.

A LITTLE MORE ABOUT YOU

Best moment: Getting my creative writing scholarship to Taverna O'Carroll.

Worst moment: The sudden loss of my mother.

Favourite things: Nice stationery, tea party clothes, spontaneity.

If you had a lazy old dog what would you call it? Dave.

And a new kitten? Leoncia.

Favourite poem:
*'A sight to dream of and not to tell
Shield, shield oh Cristobel'*
(Matthew Arnold)

Why?
Because she seems to be hiding her secret dream.

Favourite book:
Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte.

Why?
Because she was never really what we might call 'a teenager' and I feel I never was either. Both Jane

Eyre and I have had to grow up fast due to life's blows.

Any mottos?

'Listen with the ears of your heart.'

(Biblical)

THANKS! Gordoney George and the Team

Sue

Taverna O'Carroll, Creative Writing Course
Shabany Bay, Crete

Mon Feb 8 1988 9am

On a pontoon

This seat of learning stands on the beach at Shabany Bay - the brain child of Mr O'Carroll MBA. It boasts three classrooms and four dorms set over Café English.

One of a handful of villas at the peaceful end of Shabany, with crisp white-washed walls enjoying the nautical chique of seaside shutters in blue.

A sweep of terraces and a first-floor veranda regularly buzz with students, and beyond them the mountain road snakes away like a ball of tossed-away string.

Yet surely, it is the shoreline that commands the finest position from which to view the Taverna life. For, what it is to be young! Our elders say we don't know it. But for my friends, from down on the waterfront, I can see what a great blessing that it is.

Note: I think I sound a bit too much like a travel agent.

I'm just back from the letter box having posted off my application to the *Echo*. Although it is such a cool! to be here, I have still been worrying about how I am going to earn after I finish on the course. And so Aunt Coral's clipping winging its way here is as if it is *meant*. But I must try not to get my hopes up too much, as I'm sure there will be lots of candidates. I must stay calm and do as the infamous doctor advised me after mum died, 'try to avoid stress and getting over emotional.' Doctors!

As to the news in Aunt C's letter, much as I am deeply surprised to hear that they have unearthed these ruins, I am

also not surprised at all. Because the grounds of Green Place are so vast and there are *empires* of thorns and *swathes* of meadows that sprawl to the side of the house. This is because Aunt Coral believes that some grass should be left to grow long as a treat for the insects. She studied Evolutionary Biology at university, and had a long romance with a botanist. She carved her career out of spiders and venoms; she's a very big fan of wild things.

5pm

On a rock down by the sea

Our first tutorial this morning was something called an Encapsulation exercise. Point A of the task was to learn how to encapsulate *events*.

Mr O'Carroll set us what he calls an exercise of diminishment, which asked the question 'Can you sum up your life in less than 4 paragraphs?'

He read us out an example of his own life's encapsulization, which is used as a bench mark for coursework. Mr O'Carroll has managed to get his whole adulthood into a single sentence. It goes like this:

I can recount the entirety of the last three decades under the headings the peccadilloes of all the wives and the misdemeanours of all the sons.

I think that is absolutely inspirational!

My dorm mate Helen Spring's was also brilliant, pithy and no nonsense, she wrote:

Grew up, went to London, stayed three years, came back with a novel.

It was a bit like a shopping list.
Here below is mine:

My Life in Less than Four Paragraphs.

by Sue Bowl.

I was born to complicated parents in a terraced house, in Titford. My mother and I were close, my father somewhat distant. They'd grown apart by the time I was ten, our horizons shrunk, we ate piecemeal. They treated home like it was just somewhere to get changed and look in the fridge. And in the midst of it all I had my childhood, in a bedroom that was 8 by 8.

But events took a desperate turn when my life was split into before and after, in the same way that Jesus divided the calendar. This was when my mother split my life in two, on the day she ended her own.

This tragic event was little more than a year ago, but my Father has already re-married and furthermore his new wife is expecting a baby.

And I don't really know how I managed to get from those dark days into these brighter ones, but for the fact that I was somewhat rescued by my wonderful, eccentric, extravagant, bohemian, omnipotent Great Aunt Coral.

I expect the others will be asking me a lot of questions about what happened to mum this evening and suicide is a hard thing to explain.

When I say that my mum died, people assume that it must have been cancer, and I admit that I feel somehow ashamed that it wasn't. But mum was very sensitive and she found living too painful, and I have to argue this point in my head almost constantly so I don't feel that I wasn't enough.

The appearance of dad's current wife Ivana in his life, has made things that much harder. For here is a woman who has spent her youth philandering around Denmark and then, I'm guessing, hacked her way through an ice flow in order to get to England and philander my dad. Now, she has hijacked him, my childhood home, and my mum's position in it. It's a deeply painful situation and an on-going battle to accept.

But, I think as a result of all this, I conjured Aunt Coral into my life. Because I still needed an adult. Someone who could take care of me when I wasn't quite up to the job.

Tues Feb 9 6am

In the dorm

This time of day is a good time for journaling and catching up thoughts, as I'm keen not to neglect that side of things. When I get back home, I want to have an account of life here to treasure. Because I know that over time, the little details will slip away, until I get to the point where I can't remember the names and faces and the places.

I also wanted to complete my notes on point 2 of the Encapsulation exercise from yesterday. In the afternoon, Mr O'Carroll moved on to instructing us on the pruning and condensing of *characters*.

We had to come up with a character, i.e. Sabrina Weston-Fair, and offer a three-word description for them, i.e. She eats salad.

Mr O'Carroll teaches a technique he calls 'Active' Description, for which he uses a three-word format to focus detail. He is most keen on observations that convey the way people *move* or how they *sound*, and not only the way they *look*. He uses the Active Description method to kick start fleshier work. If three words won't express a certain character, then they can be pushed to a maximum of eleven.

And so he set us a task where we had to try and capture the essence of some of the people in our current day-to-day

lives, as opposed to any fiction or to our past, and do so using both his Active Description technique and his Encapsulation method.

Thus I read out the following:

CAST LIST

AT HOME:

Aunt Coral is my Great Aunt, she is very, very dear to me. Without wishing to sound melodramatic, I'd say she was the light of my life. She has all but adopted me and salvaged me, given me sanctuary, hope, and a new life.

Three-word description: Shopaholic Bon Viveur.

Delia is Aunt Coral's lady companion. She is great fun, yet with a dark side.

3-word description: Joyous, frank, o'reverand.

The Admiral is Aunt Coral's main tenant. We know him as *the* Admiral because it distinguishes him from the other two Admirals living in our house. The Admiral's civilian name is Avery Little, his personal motto is 'Avery Little Helps'. I'd say he looks very striking for his years, but he must be over 70 because all his maps are out of date.

Six words in his case: All his maps are out of date.

Admiral Gordon is a full blooded Scotsman and makes an eligible suitor for Delia.

TWD: *Likes his tucker.*

Admiral Ted is a gentleman, a man of caution and crosswords. Polite, thoughtful, hard of hearing and so old-

fashioned he is practically pre-electricity.

TWD: *He never runs.*

Mrs Bunion is Aunt Coral's housekeeper. She is a diamond. This is easier to get into a TWD: She never stops.

And last but not least:

IN THE WIDER WORLD:

Joe Falling in love with Joe happened slowly, it wasn't drastic. Or rather, it wasn't drastic for me. He is a mass of inconsistencies, he is awkward, intelligent, nurturing, unfashionable, cheerful, simple and complicated. It is bittersweet to reduce his description to less than an essay, but if forced I would say that Joe is:

Masculine enough to reveal that gingham makes him feel happy.

As I read out my list, I believe some of my fellow students might have been finding me peculiar, coming as most of them do from stable academic family homes. I do hope that, though I haven't been to university, I'm still going to fit in.

Tues Feb 9 1988 11pm

Back in the dorm

During the middling hours of this morning a bank of cloud wrapped itself round the Taverna like a blanket. I thought it was fog when I looked out of the window, but the villas on the opposite side of the bay stood in blazing sun that bleached their canopies white. This is a phenomenon of Shabany caused by the clouds meeting the air and the sea. And as the cloud disappeared, the warming air smelled of

perm lotion and later it was revealed why when Cinnamon came down with fresh curls.

Cinnamon Sunday lives upstairs and runs Café English. (NB I have translated all Greek names into English so I can understand them.) Cinnamon mostly wears a washaday housecoat, but her sandals are golden, as are her eyes.

My nights here on the course are spent in a dormitory, so getting up and out in the morning can be hectic. And due to the lack of space in the dorm, I have only the basics with me in my packing. These items were masterminded by Aunt Coral and this is my infantry: Lotions, bikini, sarong, long-legged trousers for bites. A statement cardi for sharp evenings, swish dress for cocktails and talks. Sleeve top, vests and t-shirts, all wash and wear. Formal shorts, knockabout shorts, hill walking boots, socks and plasters. High-heeled shoes, sandals, jelly shoes, one pair flip-flops, and one pair jeans. Aunt Coral said somewhat wistfully that if you can wear jeans you can travel.

She told me once that she'd be too self-conscious to wear jeans herself. Though far from prim, she is remarkably ladylike in her dress sense. I must write and tell her that I have seen plenty of sixtygenarians in jeans here and Mr O'Carroll wears dungies. It sounds like she could do with a pair of them in her wardrobe so that she can muck in with her tenants and get stuck into the extraordinary archaeological discoveries!

But other than my jeans and the tools of my trade - jotters etc. - the only other things I have with me are a couple of precious mementos of my mum, a letter she wrote me, and her picture that I keep tucked away in my case, because I'm still too raw to have it out.

And I brought a picture of Joe that was taken outside Green Place on January 3rd a couple of days before I came here. It sits on the shelf beside my bunk. I think that the pictures that get placed on the shelf beside the bunk in the dorm are a good indication of some sort of love story back

home. (One of my room mates, Helen, has a picture of a fat old cat on hers.)

Joe told me early on in our relationship, which only really began properly in December, that when he was younger he had an imaginary girlfriend called Janet Clarke. You'd have thought that coming from his imagination she'd have been called something like Flick Vanderbee or Cecily Summer, but Joe is terribly modest, it's one of the reasons why I like him. I was telling Helen about him last night and she said she thought he might have something that she called 'working class authenticity'. I think that sounds about right.

I just discovered a dried clipping of lesser celandine, which Aunt Coral had also popped in with her ruins newsletter. I nearly missed it because it was wrapped inside a small tatty scrap of paper, and I only just realized it was there when I came to reread. The scrap of paper said she had plucked it from the earth inside the derelict walled garden, as if it was a time capsule.

And what a dear yellow flower the lesser celandine is, with starry petals that worship the sun. It made me think of all the buds that would be freezing in the ditches of England and I feel as near and far as an echo in a land where the nature is so brash. The sun's garish light is so harsh on a lady's skin tone. It highlights imperfection. Plukes, spots and skin are illuminated so you can see straight through to the tapestry of gristles inside.

Strictly speaking it's not hot enough in February for bikinis, shorts or white linen, but we Brits are so deprived of the sun we just can't wait to peel off. I have been here since January 7th when I got straight into a sarong, which made me feel risque, liberated, and also a tad self-conscious.

Weds Feb 10 1988, 11pm

Students at the Taverna are divided into three groups, Tolstoy, Dickens, and Zola Tutorial Groups (I'm in Zola). The

groups are called after great writers Leo Tolstoy, Charles Dickens and Camille Zola. And Mr O'Carroll subdivided Zola today for some buddy work with a partner. (Mine was Helen Spring from my dorm.)

Mr O'C says I can learn a lot from Helen because she has suffered and emulates the Russians. In fact his main note to me on the course so far is that I must learn to be more Russian in my work, so ever since I've been making it my project to be as simmering as I possibly can. Curious that he thinks I have not suffered, I obviously don't look like I have. But then, I don't express myself like a Russian, because I'm too used to cheering myself up.

But Helen has suffered in her childhood and has never had very much money. Back home in the dire times she confessed that the only way she could afford make-up was to go and apply it from the testers at Boots.

If I were to try and summarize with an active description of her I'd say, Helen is the girl you see at the table in the corner of the nightclub smoking and having opinions.

The majority of the other students here are graduates with smart bars of chocolate in their luggage. There's only one other like me who hasn't been to university.

William McVie comes from the Highlands, and thought that an Oxbridge went over a river. He explained that a traffic jam in the Hebrides is two minis and a ford capri. He's a poet with ruddy cheeks and suffers from infatuation. He's even had a crush on germy Izzy (who chambermaids at Hotel Bunty on the other side of the Bay). William can't get his head round the fact that I live with elderly bohemians. But he appears to find anyone over the age of 20 embarrassing. I don't think he will age well himself because it will all come as a horrible shock to him. Helen says he is a Puer Eternis (eternal boy). This could be his TWD.

Other than Helen, William and myself, there are two other members in Zola and they are Diane Winterby and Quiz Wilson, a glittering couple from London.

Quiz (Crispin) is Diane's boyfriend, a devilishly good-looking Englishman. He is so at ease in the world he wears dinner dress as though it's his comfy joggers. He looks like Robert Donut. (If your references go back that far.)

And he's a Professor in his own right, of philosophy, from the University of London in Bloomsbury (which is amazing because he is only 28).

And Diane is probably the sharpest cookie in the Taverna - a prodigy in literature and writing, and when I am around her, I confess I feel something a kin to a crush. She's one of those extraordinary waif girls; as Aunt Coral might say, 'she'd have to stand in the same place twice to cast a shadow.' She's tall and blonde, and though academic has chosen a 'film-school haircut' (with angles and both long and short bits to style at the front).

Her vocabulary is enormous, with lots of Latin and French. I have kept a record of some of the words she uses: for example, Ingénue, Oeuvre and Bafouillage (which I believe means simply, gibberish). Plus she keeps a jotter entitled 'Apprentissage Répertoire' which loosely means List of Learning. TWD: Goddess of Charm.

As a couple she and Quiz have their own unique language too, which can be infectious. It's smattered with French and Franglais, and they brought research books with them packed in joint trunks which are leather and labelled 'Winterby and Wilson' like a firm of city solicitors.

To complete my early observations - or my reverie as it turns out! - I would say that, I believe that in Diane's case, I would have added an 'A' to the end of her name. She certainly gives the impression of being more a Diana than a Diane. In fact the simple letter A can take a girl quite far in the world, Julie-a, Christine-a, Susan-a, Helen-a. I would go as far as to say it is the most aspirational letter in the alphabet.

And expanding on that, if she were to swap her middle A and I over, it would make her a Daine, which conjures a lady

from Denmark, or maybe the son of a shoemaker. At any rate, I'm only recording all this to get into good habits of description. As I mentioned, Taverna policy encourages observations which are not based on people's looks . . . which brings me back to Quiz.

The handsome devil seems an intense sort of person and sometimes I find intense people can knock the tops off all your emotional scabs. But in Quiz's case he has always taken the trouble to put me back together again if he's taken me apart with enquiries.

We were chatting in Café English this evening over hugely enjoyable cocktails and I expressed my concerns that as I've never been to university and am the youngest here by a long way, I'm not sure I'm going to come up to scratch. By way of reassuring me he mentioned a writer called Blasé Pascal who wrote a book he called simply 'Pensees'. Which means simply, 'Thoughts'. This sort of information drips from Quiz's mouth like honey. I think I can get his TWD down to one - dazzling.

*Thurs Feb 11 1 am
In my bunk*

Perhaps it was my being scrupulously honest enough to describe Quiz as dazzling that has caused me to sit up in my bunk and feel so forlorn about missing Joe. Quiz *is* breathtaking, and if I am trying to be scrupulously honest, I confess to my shame I have discovered I am vulnerable to infatuation. But Quiz doesn't have that little thing that Joe has, that indefinable quality.

I can't describe it, but it is something which leads me out of my little dark place. Joe has the ability to do that like no one else. I miss that, I'm not particularly good at doing it for myself. But Joe can blow the cobwebs away with the simplest of pleasures, like a trip to the garden centre, or a spin out on his bike, for something as ordinary as picking up Aunt Coral's prescription.

I suppose what I mean is that he is that lethal combination of maternal and masculine. Maybe that's why I fell for him. He represents everything that I am missing. And if the boot were on the other foot, in my amateur opinion, for Joe I would be one of those girlfriends who is more like his oldest child, for what he craves more than most boys of his age is a family.

He told me his dream in life is a warm house, with lots of kids and an old cat asleep on the stairs. He called it 'a house with more than one type of mustard' and I understand his shorthand. And I feel a little homesick tonight, and not for Titford, my childhood home, or even for the refuge of Green Place, but for the one that hasn't existed yet, maybe the one with the old cat.

Thursday February 11 1988, 11am

In homage to Di I have decided to keep an

Apprentiessiage Repertoirez

(Word List)

And today the first words on it are

Bathos and Pathos

And in homage to Quiz, I've decided to record

Pensees

Here is my first one:

A slim woman devours nothing but paperbacks. SB

Local Guru, the Cretan Professor John Mushrooms, heads up the majority of our tutorials in Zola when Mr O'Carroll is busy with his own personal group Tolstoy.

Professor Mushrooms doesn't approve of too long or difficult a name in a book, because he says it can be jarring

to keep coming up against names like, for example *Zolhanriantin*, because it takes so long to think how to pronounce it that you forget where you are in the plot. (This is the main reason why I have translated Greek names to English, as I mentioned.)

His lectures take place in Classroom 6 above Café English, where a buffet's prepared each morning and we are tormented by the smells from lunch.

I have three categories of homework on-going with Professor John: fiction prose, personal reflection, and technical ability. He was telling us earlier today in a talk about marine life that sharks lay their eggs in something called a mermaid's slipper, and though I believe in mermaids, I'm pretty sure that in this case that is still a part of the shark?

His main note for me so far is that my writing is too middle class. I tried to explain that, actually, I now consider myself to be upper class but without money, or at least upper-slash-middle. And I attempted to describe a bohemian, which of course is a class in itself, denoting those who've had money but who now live in reduced circumstances and wear bobbly hats, like Aunt Coral and her favourite tenants. I put myself in the upper-class category because Green Place is now my home. And whilst on paper it is amongst the aristocracy of buildings, we have no money to restore it. This is largely due to Aunt Coral's spending.

It is her true nature, as far as price tags are concerned, to make sure she adds zeros to the end of them. She is not one for the sales, thrift, or a bargain. Aunt Coral would head straight for Harrods if she was let off the lead and might well never come back.

Professor Mushrooms set us some further homework today, to be completed by the end of July, 3 months after the course is finished here. It is something which he calls a *long finger* exercise, meaning it will take longer than other

written tasks. But Mr O'Carroll and most everybody else refer to this exercise as 'a dissertation'. We will have to present the dissertation for passing before we can be issued with a pass certificate for our Diplomas from the Taverna, so it is the most important part of our coursework. The exercise, in essence, is to research something factual from history and use it as a theme, and then use that theme as a setting for a story with fictional characters in it. At the moment my interest is torn between Russian literature and mermaids.

5pm

This is my favourite time of day here, just after five o'clock when lessons are done and I can come down to the beach to sit on a comfortable rock to write. From here I can look back to the Taverna and observe Tolstoy coming out on to the terrace. This last tutorial often goes on until 5.30, because Mr O'Carroll gets carried away. He likes to linger with the group after their session when they break to take coffee and soft fruit.

How glamorous they all look up there, how giddy the fall of their laughter. And the setting of the sparkling sun on the silvery sea only contributes to this spirit of bedazzlement, but then, the air here is somewhat narcotic. Yet, I have that relieved feeling, like when all the politicians go on holiday, and I do feel amazed to have come through such an unfathomably heartbreaking time.

Fiction Prose Sketch

DOONYASHA
by Sue Bowl

"Halt! Who goes there?" said the traveller "Speak Mon, I will brook no nonsense."

"I am Doonyasha," he said

"My Father lost our home in a card game, my mother is always weeping."

"Where do you live?"

"On the Glade," said the boy, "with my Aunt Bettia Pulnietzova. My sister has been sent to London, but I will find her and bring her home. And then I will throw myself into the gorse and two fingers to the thorns."

"But why do you stay in the forest tell me? What ails ye?"

"I'm making plans," he said.

Green Place
Clockhouse Lane
Egham
Weds Feb 3 1988

Dear Sue,

Thank you for your letter and I hope you're taking care of your verruca.

I write with some news on a couple of matters. Firstly, that Jackie County has produced some interesting findings from her initial archive trawl.

She has managed to exhume plans, issued by my Great Great Grandfather Edmund Garden, dating from 1857 for the walled garden, which also feature some hand drawings by the designer Herbert Frank Hotston-Moore. Of the four walls, one faces due south, while another is shaded by the Egham chain. The idea being that plants can then be carefully laid out according to their preferences.

Hotston-Moore's notes suggest that pears be grown against the warm bricks of the south wall and shade-loving blackberries and cotoneasters on the north. His garden design is crowned at the heart with a beautiful Victorian sundial, the base of which he suggests should be submerged slightly below ground level, in order that the shadow of the dial can be seen from great distances within the two-acre plot. Imagine!

And the old sundial remains well preserved in situ at the very core of our ruins. The Admiral was drawn to it like a magnet, as was my Texan B and B guest, Mr Hart. Mr Bellamy nearly mowed it down in his digger, but fortunately stopped just in time. When it was revealed, the sundial was caked in mud and detritus and its face was a slab of dried earth as hard as stone.

But we knew it must bear an inscription, so the Admiral got into his boiler suit and scrubbed it down, and he got some tracing paper and a wax crayon and did a little rubbing. When he had the imprint on the paper, it read: '*For the Concern of the Rich and the Poor*'.

An unusual inscription, but rather beautiful none the less. We used to have one at school that said 'I stand amidst ye lumiere flowers, to show you passing

of the hours'.

It's extraordinary what has been unearthed here, and I feel certain much more is to come.

My second piece of news is that I have been in touch with Johnny Look-at-the-Moon, and the Admiral and I have decided to help him fund a trip to Australia to visit his son, Christie. The poor fellow hasn't seen him for some time, due to a lack of funds. Johnny sent his particular love to you and looks forward to seeing you again on his return. Exciting to know that along with a brand-new Grandfather, you have an Uncle Christie!

I do hope all is going well on the course, and that you're managing to keep up with the heavies. And I expect by now you've probably managed to discover the meaning of pathetic fallacy. It isn't at all what you thought.

I must dash now darling, Mr Hart's calling me. We are likely to come close to a frost tonight and he is considering staying up with a blow heater over the dahlias. It's such a shame that what remains of the old glasshouse in the walled garden is in such a state, as it would be a comfortable place for them to overwinter.

I'll finish by saying something heartfelt, which I'm sure I don't do enough in my letters, but without you Green Place is just a huge draughty house, yet with you it is the heart of the world. No pressure!

All love,

Aunt Coral Xx