



## Louise Hare and Beth Morrey with Sue Wall

SW: Hello everyone and welcome. My name is Sue Wall, and I'm delighted to be introducing this event from the Derby Book Festival as part of the Big Book Weekend, hosted by my virtual Literary Festival. I have the great privilege to be talking to not one, but two, debut authors today: Beth Morrey, author of *Saving Missy*, and Louise Hare, author of *This Lovely City*. Both of them were tipped as among the top 10 new authors of 2020, and I think the proof is in the sales and in the recognition that they've had since the start of the year. And anybody who's read their books will understand why they're being so successful. Over the next 45 minutes, I'm going to talk to each of them individually before moving into a shared discussion about writing and life as a successful author. So, alphabetical order, Beth first. Beth, let's begin with a bit about your life before you were published. I actually think you were born in Derbyshire. Is that right?

BETH MORREY: That's correct. My birth town is Chesterfield in Derbyshire, famous for its crooked spire.

SW: But then you moved away. How did life go from Chesterfield until writing *Saving Missy*?

BM: Well, I moved to university in Cambridge for a while, and then I did what I thought everybody did, which is move down to London. That just seemed like what everyone else was doing, so I did it, too. And initially it was very difficult being in a big city, coming from the Peak District, but I got it eventually, and now I've been here about, what, 20 years? I don't really like to think about that.

SW: I think a number of people will share, yes – Peak District versus London, absolutely. And have you always wanted to write and to write a novel?

BM: Yes. I've wanted to write a novel since I was about six, and we had to write a story about Icarus at primary school, and everybody wrote a page, and I just kept writing because I couldn't stop. And I had this idea that I really wanted to write a physical book. I wanted to write a book that I could go and visit in a bookshop. But I think I thought it was a bit like a museum piece that you just sort of visited it and stroked it. I didn't really have an idea that you actually had to sell it.

SW: Life changes as you grow, doesn't it?

BW: Yes.

SW: So now, can you briefly introduce *Saving Missy* to us? And in particular, what drew this to you? I mean, she's not your average debut novel heroine is she?



BW: No, it evolved very slowly. *Saving Missy* is about a very prickly, defensive and lonely old woman called Missy Carmichael, who has kind of faded out of society. She has lost touch with friends. She's mourning her husband. She's estranged from her daughter, her son's moved to the other side of the world. She feels completely lost. She's got no one. But one day she meets two women in the park who kind of offer her the possibility of a different life that's full of friendship and noise and activity. But the thing that's holding her back is some of her secrets, her history. So that's uncovered very gradually as she starts to build a new life for herself.

SW: The other thing that holds her back, well, for me anyway, is she is just so English. She's so typical of an English woman of that age really, with this wonderful thing about – she's so diffident and quite self-deprecating, describes herself as being silly. There's one quote, she meets her new friends and then says, 'I'll have to avoid the park now, in case they think I was trying to run into them'. And that seems so typical to me.

BM: Well, I felt it was more typical of me. There's another sentence where she says she wants to end the conversation before she wants to end it, rather than after they do. And that's often how I feel at parties. So I didn't think of it as particularly typical of, you know, old English ladies, but just more kind of typical of a certain type of woman.

SW: And what about the other characters in the book? I mean, there's a handful of key players, there's Sylvie, Angela, Otis, and of course, Bobby the dog. Did you start with more characters and reduce back, or were those always there leading the pack, as it were?

BM: They kind of evolved naturally in that Sylvie was always going to be in it. I had her from the beginning. And I didn't intend Angela to be in it at all, but she just marched into the scene.

SW: Well Angela would, wouldn't she?

BW: Yeah, she just kind of introduced herself, and I kind of went along with it because it was unexpected, but I liked her. Whereas with the others, it was more planned. And I wanted to have, not a big cast, quite a boutique cast, but of likeable and different and diverse people who were going to draw Missy out of her shell.

SW: And you've written it in the first person. Again, was that difficult? Was that something you played around with? Or was it always in your head that way?

BM: I wrote it in the first person for two reasons. One, because I was a writer starting out, and I felt like I wanted to just be in one person's head. And I felt like if I tried to jump between anybody else, either as third person or, you know, lots of different characters, that I might feel a bit overwhelmed by it. So really it was logistical in that I



wanted to keep it simple. And secondly, Missy is partly inspired by the character of Barbara Covett in *Notes on a Scandal*. And that was first person, so it felt kind of natural for her.

SW: Oh, yes, yes. So how about you giving us a bit of a reading from the book so that we can hear it? Perhaps you need to just set the scene for us?

BM: Yes. So I'm reading... there's no real need to set the scene. It's quite early on. And it's just talking about how – well, it's Missy talking about her loneliness, really? That's it.

SW: Okay.

BM: 'What was this fear? This terror of being alone? When I was never particularly gregarious being and in fact used to go out of my way to avoid social engagements. It always felt like too much of a chore to go to one dinner party or another, where I'd inevitably have to have a drink to relax or worry about staying up late when I had to get up with the children. Leo was more of an extrovert, but he had his club, his golf, his books, and was mostly oblivious to the invitations I declined on his behalf. Was there another reason I said no? The more people, the more women he met, the more likely he would realise what was lacking at home. I bound him to me, but was always fearful he could loosen the ties. When Alistair was born in Leo's image, I thought perhaps the completion of our family and our new home, the *oikos*, might secure him and me. But years after I'm so tired, the dreary call of childcare wore me down and the thread started to fray. While I struggled, he soared off. Dr Leonard Carmichael, respected historian, lauded biographer, lecturer, jetting around the world, speaking on the radio, writing for the papers. When we were out, I felt he was always looking over my shoulder for the other person he knew, just like when we met.'

SW: Thank you. That certainly brings the Missy that I know to life. And, one other question before we move to Louise. How much research did you have to do? Because clearly, when Missy reflects back it's to a life much earlier than – way before you were born. But you've got lots of lovely touches of language there and references: Barbara Woodhouse with the dog, the dog training, and a lovely phrase, 'flicking through her Rolodex of worries'. But these are words from way before you were born. So how did you get them? How did you get these references?

BM: Firstly, I'm an old soul and I very much remember Barbara Woodhouse. I'd become interested in a particular period in history, 50s and 60s. Because I'd gone back to an event at my old college, which is Missy's old college, and I'd read a lot of first-hand accounts of students who lived there during the 50s and 60s, and I just feel it completely fascinating. And it sort of got me in to the whole idea of that period. So I



read around that a lot. I read a lot about the kind of events that were going on at the time. And I would say that the major bit of research I did was that originally Missy was supposed to be an English scholar. But it was her who told me that she was actually a classicist, and I don't know anything about classics, so I had a lot of reading to do.

SW: Right, well, that's a lovely point to stop, because it links neatly across to the era that Louise has set her book in, which is 1948 and 1950. So thanks for that, Beth. And now let's turn and talk to Louise, with another runaway success debut novel, your book, *This Lovely City*. And again, Louise. Let's start with just a bit about your early life before you were a writer.

LH: Yes, so, I grew up in Warrington in the North West, and ended up coming to London about 15 years ago for work. And I hadn't written until about five years ago, since I was a kid, since I was a school. And I think I just had this sort of career – mid-career crisis, I think. I thought, you know, do I want to sit in those meetings for hours on a Monday morning for the rest of my working life? And the answer was no. So I was like, what do I do now? I'm not qualified for anything else that comes to the top of my head. So I sort of thought, 'Well, what would my dream job be?' And the answer was writer. And so I just did a week's course, just to have a go at it. I thought it was a bit of a pipe dream, and eventually, after lots of false starts and rejection, it worked out.

SW: And you actually did an MA in creative writing. You mentioned you did perhaps a week's course. But you then did a full MA.

LH: Yeah.

SW: How did you manage to do that? You're working full time. I mean, it's quite a juggling act, wasn't it?

LH: Yeah, I mean, one thing that actually being in my previous job taught me was time management. That was actually quite a good skill just to organise my time. So I was writing this book, but then I also had coursework for the MA that was different. So it was kind of almost juggling three different things at once and just trying to work that into the working weeks, and getting up early, and just trying to be disciplined. And so it was difficult at times, but it's paid off.

SW: So how long did it actually – I mean, between the MA in creative writing and the publication of or, shall we say, the acceptance and confirmed release of *This Lovely City* – how long a period was that? Did it all happen quite fast?

LH: The book actually started as a short story that I wrote on the MA. And then it ended up turning into a novel and it was also my dissertation. I did the MA part time,



over two years. So that was kind of the period of writing. And then just after I'd sort of finished the MA was when I got the publishing deal.

SW: Well, quite a mid-life change of career, there. I think many people would echo some of your sentiments. Can you give us a brief introduction to *This Lovely City*? It's a book which some have described as a murder mystery. But I have to say for me it was much more, and as I read it, I was very much caught up with your two leading characters. It felt like a book about them.

LH: Yeah.

SW: How would you describe it?

LH: Yeah, I think that's right. I think when I started writing, I didn't know what genre to put it in because it does kind of follow different sort of paths, and definitely it turned into a different book to what I started out with, or what I thought I was writing. So yeah, it's a story about Lawrie and Evie. It's kind of a love story. And the narrative sort of split between their points of view. So Lawrie's a guy who came over on the Windrush in 1948. And he's from Jamaica, and it's sort of about his struggle to make a life for himself. And then Evie's his girlfriend, and she's mixed race, but she grew up in London. So she's had a very different experience from Lawrie. So where he's shocked by things that happen to him, she's just kind of, you know, that's kind of how it is. She's a bit more resigned. And it's about him making a quite shocking discovery at the end of the first chapter, and ending up being a suspect in a murder case.

SW: And would you like to give us a reading from the book to give us a flavour?

LH: Yeah, so I'm just gonna read right from the beginning. So Lawrie's a musician. And he sort of does a bit of moonlighting. He's a postie during the day and he moonlights in the evening as a jazz musician. So we'll start at the beginning:

"The basement club spat Lawrie out into the dirty maze of Soho, a freezing mist settling over him like a damp jacket. He shivered and tightened his grip on the clarinet case in his right hand. He'd best hurry on home before the fog thickened into a 'pea souper', as they called it around here. The hour was later than he'd have liked. The club had been packed and the manager always paid extra if the band stuck around, keeping the crowd drinking. 'Done for the night?'. The doorman leaned against the wall by the entrance, waiting for the last stragglers to leave. Laurie nodded. He'd been invited to stop for a drink with the band after the last set, but he had somewhere to be. The night's moonlighting had been a last-minute call out. He'd already arranged to take Evie out to the pictures, but he needed the money and his name was just getting known around town. Mr Reliable, able to fit in with any band at short notice. Call Lawrie Matthews. Easy man, he'll play anything for a shilling or two. It might be after



three in the morning, but the street was still open for trade. Across the road, a couple of girls loitered hardly dressed for the March weather, their legs bare and their jackets open. They sheltered in the shop doorway, huddled together as they smoked. One of them called over to him, but he pretended he hadn't heard. That sort of entertainment wasn't for him. A few minutes of pleasure taken in a dark piss-scented alleyway could not outweigh the guilt. This he knew.

SW: Thank you. Again, similar question to the one I had for Beth earlier. How much research did you have to do? Because again, you've set it in 1948 and 1950s. But it's very descriptive to me. I mean, I can almost feel that post-war era: the cold, the racism, the unwelcoming nature of London.

LH: Yeah, it was actually – it wasn't as bad as I thought. Because I'd written this as a short story to start off with, I hadn't really expected to have to do this sort of historical research. That wasn't really my plan. And actually, there's quite a lot of really good fiction, *Lonely Londoners* by Sam Selvon and *To Sir, with Love* by ER Braithwaite, that were written by men who had gone through Lawrie's experiences. They'd actually, you know, had these books published in the 50s. So I read those as a starting point, just to get me in to the head space, I guess, because you know, I'm not a guy. So just to get a male perspective of what it was like, and then also, you know, they describe their experiences with racism and getting work really well. And so I took a lot of that. And then lots of general research about the 1950s, learning about what rationing was like at that point, because some things had been taken off rationing, some things were still rationed. And just trying to get those little details right.

SW: And I was interested by your range of different styles. I mean, the book's written in the third person, very descriptive, but the characters, for me, really come alive – particularly how young they are, Evie and Lawrie. But you also use clips from newspapers. And those felt very authentic to me, from the period. And there are the letters, as well, written between Evie's mum and aunt. So tell me how you chose to use the extra bits, and why the newspaper or the letters fitted?

LH: Yeah, so the letters started out – originally I had a lot more letters and I was kind of using it because Lawrie's a postman. It was kind of a way of telling that side of things, and there were a lot more letters going between different characters, but we ended up stripping a lot of that out in edits. And then I do think it was just a really good way to cheat. It's a really easy way to just give the reader lots of information without writing really stilted expositional scenes. You can kind of fill in a few gaps quite quickly. And it's quite interesting putting them together as well, thinking, what attitudes would have been, you know, how would this article have been put together?



SW: So it was anything but a cheat really. You had to put quite a lot of thought into it. And finally, Lawrie as the jazz musician, the clarinettist – is music important to you? Are you a jazz fan anyway? Is this an area where you need more research?

LH: Yes, I do play the clarinet, not as well as I did 15 years ago. I don't play that often anymore. But it was just an easy way of building a group of people around Lawrie was to put him in a band. And then obviously because I play clarinet, that was easy. And then because I do quite like jazz – because I thought about maybe doing some like Calypso or something like that, but actually I felt that I could write about jazz more easily. And I think with Lawrie's background, it was an easy sort of way to link those two things together as well.

SW: I don't think you've got much time for picking up a clarinet at the moment, given the success of your book. Thanks, Louise. Now, I'd like to move on into a discussion involving both of you. Looking at your individual experiences as writers and sharing them. The first question is about, really, the craft of writing and the technique of your novels. I mean, for me, they're extraordinarily good stories, page turners. The characters come alive. I want to get through. But both have very unexpected twists or revelations, if you like, at the end. And then when you go back, all the clues are there. The revelations shouldn't be as unexpected as perhaps they were. So how do you achieve that? I mean, you've got very fluid writing, but clearly you've been crafting and putting the plot together as you go. Beth, do you want to kick off as to how you found it, doing that, bringing it all together?

BM: Well, yes. The twist that you mention in my book – when I started it, I didn't particularly know how it was going to end. Not every detail. I worked out as I went along. But that *thing* – no spoilers...

SW: No, no spoilers.

BM: ... No. I did know that from the beginning, that that would be the end of the book. And initially what I did was, I went through trying to sort of scatter ambiguous clues as I went along. But really the proper work of that was in the edit. So once I had a rough draft, I went back through and thought where are the points at which I could hint at this, give the reader all the clues that they need? They could work it out. Some people have worked out. I don't mind. It's not, you know, it's not supposed to be a kind of bomb twist. It's more just kind of, 'Oh, I didn't realise' kind of moment. And all the clues are there, but I probably put most of them in afterwards, seeding everything through.

SW: And what about you, Louise?



LH: I always knew who had done it. So then it was, how do you reveal that in a satisfactory way at the end? Also, how'd you send people a little bit off on the wrong trail? So it was quite difficult at times to, you know, not make things too obvious, to try and get the balance right. But I think it kind of worked.

BM: Can I just say, when I read Louise's novel, halfway through I was convinced I knew who'd done it. I really thought I was right. And I totally wasn't right.

[laughter]

LH: Perfect.

SW: That's what we all wanted to hear. I found I was just following it so much as a love story, I was almost brushing the murder part of it aside. You both also have this thing about linking time, or switching from one period of time to another. I mean, Louise, you help us along by, yes, it's clear it's 1948 or – how difficult, again, is it to get the balance of the book when you're switching time? When the action switches from one period to the other?

LH: It was a lot in the editing. So I pretty much wrote all of the 1948 chapters in one go. Because they do follow their own little story. And then it was sort of breaking up, and sort of working out where it should fit in. Because obviously, if you read too much of the 1948 at once, you can kind of guess a lot of the stuff that's gonna happen later. So it was just trying to get that balance right, really.

SW: And Beth, I mean, you choose – there was obviously a decision taken that Missy would go back and be reviewing her early life or her time at university. Again, was that editing or was that almost as you wrote it through the first time?

BM: It was a mix. Mostly, I wrote it as I went along, because I wanted to tell the story of how she got to where she was as a kind of separate linear flashback, so it would start early on, and it would get her gradually up to present. And, in a way, I found the flashback scenes easier to write than the present day scenes. And I still don't quite know why. It was somehow like they'd already happened, and I was just recounting because I knew her so well. So I kind of did great big chunks of that. But then when I got the book as a whole, I went back to see what gaps there were in her history, how I could flesh it out a bit more and enrich it a bit more. So a few of the chapters, for example, and I'm not giving anything away here, chapter 17, I think it is the breastfeeding scene, was the last thing I wrote, pretty much.

SW: Oh, really? Yes. Yes. That's a lovely, unexpected touch. Yes, I warmed to that the second time when I was going back. I thought, Oh, yes, that's a really beautiful scene. Can we move to the setting of your books? Both of the books are set in London, and Louise, I heard you somewhere describing London as the third character in your novel.



So what was the role that you felt that London was playing as the third character in the novel?

LH: I suppose, because it's so intrinsic to the story and the fact that, you know, you have this community in Brixton, and, you know, the story couldn't have happened in this way anywhere else. And also it's so lovely to write about these areas of London and to imagine, you know, I can get a bus – well, not at the moment, but in normal circumstances – I can get a bus through London and go down the streets and walk down the streets that Lawrie and Evie walked down 70 years ago, not really but, you know. It's just got so much history to London that it was just a real pleasure to go and walk through Brixton and walk across Clapham Common and sort of look at these sites that I wanted to describe and how a lot of them are still there. And even those that aren't, you know, just finding out little tidbits of knowledge was really exciting.

SW: And for you Beth, I mean, you write in present day London, a London I feel I know and recognise – I appreciate it's a bit different at the moment – but how important to you was it to be using a familiar setting there?

BM: Well, I used it for myself because I live there. And again, because I was a new writer, it felt like it was better to write what I knew, because it kept things simpler, but in a way, I think I could have set it anywhere. And it wasn't London that was particularly central to the novel, more the park. If you were looking for the third character in my novel, it was the park. And that's Clissold Park in Stoke Newington, but I never named it in the book because I felt like I wanted a reader to imagine that it could be any park. And that felt quite important. Even though some people have said that their parks aren't as friendly as ours are. Our park is that friendly.

SW: And what about when – again, still back on the craft of writing, the skill of writing – Beth, you have said you wanted to write comedy. Do you actually find it easier to do dialogue? Or the description? Or is it just, it all just took itself through?

BM: That's a really interesting question. I'm not really sure. Um, I think writing description or prose, rather than dialogue, is easier. Sometimes I find the dialogue quite difficult. Not what they actually say, but the extra bits outside. The kind of 'he said, doing this'. And that's something I'm working on at the moment, because you find yourself repeating too many things. I've always got people doing things like pinching the bridge of their nose, so that I can get the rhythms right. 'Oh,' he said, pinching the bridge of his nose. 'Oh,' she replied, pinching the bridge of her nose. And you realise how lazy you can get in having those to get the metre right. And so actually at the moment I'm finding dialogue quite hard to write.

SW: Oh, interesting. What about you, Louise?



LH: Oh, yeah, I think dialogue can be really tricky, because it's that balance of not making it wooden. As part of my MA, I did play writing which actually really helped because obviously then you've really got to put everything into the dialogue, when you're writing a play script. So that helped me quite a lot. And also, reading it aloud. So when I'm editing I do very often try and print off on paper and then I walk up and down my living room and I read aloud. And that really helps with dialogue, because you can kind of spot the repetitions and you can spot when, you know, you hear it. I mean, nobody speaks like that. And then you realise you've got to start again.

SW: But of course, you also, with dialogue, you have to change it between the different groups of characters, you know, how the young Lawrie speaks, how Evie's mother would speak, and so on. So you actually have to attune your ear to a whole range of voices.

LH: Yeah, definitely. I mean, I definitely had to about my Jamaican characters versus my English characters and how they would interact and you know, having those little mistakes in translation, even though Lawrie speaks English he doesn't quite understand. So it's getting those things in there as well.

SW: Thanks for that. And Beth, now we know, to get your dialogue better, read it aloud. Let's move away from the hard work of the writing. How do you feel when you actually finish the novel? There's really two parts to this. I mean, when do you finish? Is it when you finished the first draft? Is it when you send it off and somebody has accepted it? Is it when you hold it in your hand as a real book in a cover, type thing? But secondly, how do you feel? Do you feel relieved? Do you feel bereft because these characters are not in your life anymore? Do you feel satisfied? Job done? Beth, maybe start.

BM: It never really feels finished. So I guess when I finished the first draft of *Missy*, I was in Cambridge. I booked a weekend specifically to finish it. I needed to write about 15,000 words. And I remember when I wrote the last line, I went out for a walk and I felt slightly tearful, because it was the first book I'd ever written in entirety. And even if it was rubbish, it kind of was recognisably a book. So I do remember feeling quite emotional when I finished it, but after that, you go through so many drafts that you don't really know when it's going to be the final one. Even as you're sending off pretty much the last edit, you're thinking, 'Oh, it probably will come back again'. So it's quite hard to judge that. And then when you get, you know, the finished copy, obviously it's a wonderful moment, but I must confess I daren't open it, you know, the book, for many weeks after I get it because I'm too terrified that I'm going to open it and go well, that's a rubbish scene – oh, I should have missed out that word. So I feel too



tense about it. So generally, I kind of hold it without looking inside it. Um, so I guess I would say that that moment when you finish the first draft, and you know that there's a lot of work to do, but you know that you have the bare bones of it, is probably the most satisfying bit of the process, I think.

SW: And how was it for you, Louise?

LH: Yeah, I mean, I thought of a really good thing that I'd really like to put in my book a few days ago, and it's a bit late.

SW: Little bit late, yes!

LH: If that answers that. I think, for me, I mean, my first draft was great, but it was also a mess. So I think actually, one of the key moments is when you get – your publisher sends you these things called proof pages, which is when it's all been typeset. It's printed out for you. And hopefully you're going to read through it and just check in case any last mistakes, and that is it. They don't really want you to change very much at all. And actually that, just holding that weight of paper in my hand, and it had the title page, and I think that was probably the first moment when I was like, okay, they're probably not going to back out now. It's probably gonna get into an independent bookshop at some point. So yeah, probably then.

SW: So for both of you, it's quite a mix of emotions. And since publication, I mean, both of you have been phenomenally successful. Obviously the suggestion that you might be amongst the top 10 in 2020 of the debut novelists has proved to be absolutely accurate for both of you. I think you've both got international – you know, you're going to be published in other countries or maybe already are. How has life changed? Has it changed dramatically? Is it what you thought would happen, Louise, when you completed your MA?

LH: Well, my book came out on 12 March, so we've been in lockdown for most of my book's life, so it's not quite what I envisaged. But it's been exciting. I did actually get to go into the bookshop. I was quite lucky that bookshops were still open for about a week after it was published. So, I did do a little mini tour of book shops in my area to make sure that they had it in stock. And it's come out in North America since, a week or so ago. And so yeah, it's exciting to think that people in completely different continents are now buying my book. I mean, that's not even anything I thought – you know, I didn't think anything beyond the UK at all when I was writing it, even if I was looking to get a publishing deal, so the fact that there are people in other countries reading it is very exciting.

SW: And what about you Beth. How's your life changed?



BM: Well, I mean, I now write full time, which was the kind of biggest and most exciting – well, for now, I write full time – and that's the biggest and most exciting change because, you know, in addition to being able to manage my own schedule and be around for my kids and all, I get to write almost full time when I'm not home-schooling during a lockdown, which is a tremendous privilege. Around publication, I was lucky enough to be published a few weeks before Louise, and so at least I was able to have a few weeks of, you know, proper sales and going to bookshops to see my book, and things. That was lovely. But what I think I realised was there's a lot of excitement around publication and you get used to the buzz of that. And then when it dies down inevitably you feel a bit kind of flat, like, what's my excitement now? And I think what I have to learn to do, and I am learning to do, is to get back into the idea that if you are writing full time, the main business is writing, and everything else is just a kind of fun bonus. So I now very much look forward to, you know, if lockdown gets eased in anyway, and I can go back to my writing cafe. That's what it's really about. And I'm trying to hold on to that. But that said, somebody did tell me on Facebook the other day that they do did my book from the New York Library. And that was one of the most exciting things I've ever heard.

SW: Oh, wow, yes, absolutely. I can I can see why that would happen. Yes. And Louise. I mean, you've told us that you decided this was your sort of change-your-career moment. We know that Beth is now a full-time writer, how have things changed for you in terms of work, which work, and work-life balance?

LH: I left my job at the end of January for a period, which was actually quite a good decision because I did work in the travel industry. So I don't think any of my old friends are working at the moment, either. So yeah, just to see how things go. So hopefully this works out, because I don't know if my job will be there back in the travel industry in six months' time. We'll have to see.

SW: That's a bit unknown, isn't it, yes. You mentioned that you're quite disciplined and you're quite good at managing your time. Is that important now?

LH: Yeah, I think since lockdown that's kind of gone out the window a little bit, just because it was a real struggle to write for the first few weeks. I've sort of slowly been getting back into it, and just trying to get into a bit of a routine and just trying to figure out what the point is life about now that we can't go outside. So yeah, it's been interesting because obviously, it's so unprecedented. So, yeah, I don't know what will happen to my writing schedule after this. Hopefully I'll be a little bit more disciplined again.



SW: And where are you, for both of you, before we move to the final stage of the interview, where are you both in terms of the next book or the next publishing deal? Have you got books ready going forward? Are you struggling? How's it going? Beth, how are you? How are things looking forward? You mentioned you want to get back to the cafe to write.

BM: Yes, so yesterday I finished the latest draft of my second book, which is probably about the 108th draft. But that's done, and it's by no means finished. I assume that there will be another 108 drafts to do, but it felt like a good point to just set it aside for a little bit. And it's been really hard. Really hard. Because I wrote the first one without any kind of pressure. It was just a fun hobby at a whim. And you know, if it didn't work out, then no big deal. And now it feels so much more pressure.

SW: You were combining writing your first novel with motherhood and pushing a pushchair, I believe? So the writing could have been very enjoyable as a contrast, perhaps. But now is it more of a duty or...?

BM: You definitely feel the different sense that there are kind of – I kind of feel self-conscious when I'm writing, because I'm aware of my publisher and my editors kind of *there*, the kind of unspoken voice. So it's quite a different experience. And I'm still kind of settling into it. I enjoyed it very much writing book two, but it's been a very different process and a struggle.

SW: And what about you, Louise?

LH: I've written a second book, which I'm now editing, and again, it was something I started on my MA. So I was quite lucky that I wasn't having to come up with a fresh new idea. When I sat down to write I did already have sort of a plot, and it is more of a standard murder mystery. So I actually found it a little bit easier to write my first book? I've sort of cheated and used a bit of the structure in terms of the time, switching between the two different times again, so I sort of felt a bit more confident this time around. It still took me a full 12 months to write a first draft. So you know, it wasn't super quick, but it's a bit more of a lighter feel than the first book, not quite as heavy. So it was a bit more fun, I think.

SW: And for both of you, what was the most unexpected – leave aside lockdown and the situation we all find ourselves in – but when you got your book accepted, and moving into publication, what was the thing you least expected that actually happened either within yourself, or recognition from outside? Just what was the big surprise, once, yes, you've got the publishing deal, you've got the book in your hands? Beth, what took you by surprise? What didn't you expect?



BM: Well as I said, at the beginning, when I imagined being published, I always thought that you've got a copy of your book in Waterstones, just one, and you went to visit it and stroke it like a museum piece. In my head, that was how it worked. It just didn't occur to me that people would buy it. And I think the thing that surprised me and gratified me the most – I don't read reviews because it's just too torturous – but every now and then, somebody will send me a review or I'll get an email from someone, and there'll be something that they say that makes me realise that they got it. They really, really got it. And that's one of the most exciting and thrilling things. But I never imagined it 'cause I never thought of anyone buying it.

SW: And you would only have the one book. Did you explain this to your agent when you signed the deal, that actually we're only going to have one copy?

BM: No, I think she thought I was insane.

SW: I'll go into Waterstones and stroke a few books when I can. What about you, Louise?

LH: Sort of similar to what Beth said, but also how supportive other writers are. It's been really, really nice, just constant contact with people online. Especially at the moment. It's just been so useful, when you're worried about something, when you're like, you know, am I the only person that's had *this* happen? Because the publishing process is quite mysterious in a lot of ways and quite often your editor will say something and you're sort of nodding and going, 'I don't know what that means'. So it's so handy to have people that you can check back with and go, 'they said this, what does that mean?' And they say, 'Oh, it's just that, you know, nothing to worry about', and things like that. So that's just been really nice, finding different little online groups, or just friends I've met along the way, who really sort of helped take the stress out of the process.

SW: Well, thank you both. I've really enjoyed chatting to you. And I think we could go on much longer. It's a pity we can't meet face to face, but I'm so delighted to know you've both got second books already written. And hopefully we can invite you to the Derby Book Festival at some point in the future. And good luck with the rest of your writing careers. And we're looking forward to the third and subsequent books. Thank you both.

BM and LH: Thank you.