

Each month we will focus on an inspiring author based in or writing about Wales! You'll have an introduction to their latest book, what inspires them to write, and any advice they have for young writers!

# Get to know

## Carly Holmes



Carly Holmes lives and writes in a small village on the banks of the river Teifi in west Wales. Her debut novel, *The Scrapbook*, was shortlisted for the International Rubery Book Award, and her Literary Strange debut short story collection, *Figurehead*, was published by Tartarus Press in limited-edition hardback, to critical acclaim. Her award-winning stories have appeared in journals and anthologies such as *Ambit*, *The Ghastling*, and *Uncertainties*, and have twice appeared in Ellen Datlow's Best Horror of the Year anthology series. *Crow Face, Doll Face* is her second novel.



### Summary:

*Crow Face, Doll Face* is an uncanny, brooding tale of domestic disturbances, dysfunctional families, flawed mothers, and unfulfilled dreams.

Annie surrendered her fantasy of travelling the world, settled instead for marrying her beloved Peter and becoming a mother. When her two youngest daughters – her Crow Face and her Doll Face – perform a seemingly impossible act of levitation at a family picnic, Annie realises that they are truly extraordinary. Magical. And it's her role to protect them. With growing paranoia and a bitter fatalism, she spirits her daughters away from their home and the wreck of her marriage. But she commits a terrible, unthinkable, unmotherly act on the way.

### What influences and memories stand out from your childhood?

I was a timid and shy child who was happiest when in my bedroom with my cat, reading a book. With the move to Wales we suddenly had big skies, no near neighbours, and nights that were so dark you couldn't see your hand in front of your face once you'd stepped outside into the garden. My parents rescued battery chickens and added a waddle of ducks and a blind gosling to the flock. My natural introversion and my sense of kinship with animals flourished during those teenage years. They stood me in good stead, I think, for the solitude that comes with writing.

### What are your influences now?

My literary influences now include Shirley Jackson, Una Mannion, Maggie O'Farrell, Sarah Moss, Stephen King, Sarah Hall. Other influences include my cats, being alone in woodland, Amanda Palmer (both as musician and feminist icon), tending my garden, and watching the wild animals

that visit. A lot of the stories in my collection *Figurehead* were influenced by reading *Mad, Bad and Sad* by Lisa Appignanesi and discovering the kind of atrocities that were visited on women through the centuries in the name of 'healing' them.

### When did you become aware of wanting to write, did any particular factors play a part?

I started writing stories when I was a young child and read them out to primary school friends. I've always been a huge reader; I can't imagine a world without the comfort of books. The move to Wales and the solitude and outsider status that brought with it definitely set me on the path of becoming a writer, though it was never on my radar to think I could actually 'be' a published writer as I couldn't comprehend how a person from a working-class background with no cultural or material privileges could make that leap from scribbling in notebooks to securing a publishing deal. That wasn't a world I had any experience of.