

SAMPLER

*A Pair of Three*

*Also by Claire Crowther*

*Stretch of Closures*

*The Clockwork Gift*

*On Narrowness*

*Solar Cruise*

*Bare George* (chapbook)

SAMPLER

Claire Crowther

*A Pair of Threes*

SAMPLE

Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2022 by  
Shearsman Books Ltd  
PO Box 4239  
Swindon  
SN3 9FN

Shearsman Books Ltd Registered Office  
30–31 St. James Place, Mangotsfield, Bristol BS16 9JB  
(this address not for correspondence)

[www.shearsman.com](http://www.shearsman.com)

ISBN 978-1-84861-821-3

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to *Blackbox Manifold*, *Perverse*, *prototype*, *Scintilla*, *Shearsman*,  
*Stand*, *Tentacular*, *The Fortnightly Review*, *The Next Review*, *The North*,  
*Under the Radar* for publishing some of the poems in this collection.

I would like to thank the Stockwell poets (Anne Berkeley, Rhona  
McAdam, Sue Rose, Tamar Yoseloff) and the Helyar poets  
(Fiona Benson, Patrick Brandon, John Clark, Julia Copus, Jane  
Draycott, Carrie Etter, Annie Freud, Jenny Lewis) for their regular  
help and reminders that writing poetry does not have to be done  
alone. David Thompson is a meticulous first responder and has saved  
me from many blunders; Linda Black gives rigorous and sympathetic  
support whenever I ask; Carrie Etter is a friend of extensive wisdom  
without whom I could not do.

Most specially, thanks to my stepdaughters and Keith  
for bearing with my trespass on their loss.

Thanks beyond thanks to Jude.

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for Jude Barnham 1942–1994

*The silence of eternity  
Interpreted by love!  
—John Greenleaf Whittier*

*Put me not to shame,  
Because I am  
Thy clay that weeps, thy dust that calls.  
—George Herbert*

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*\*Jude Barnham, first wife of Claire Crowther's partner, died of breast cancer after a long illness and is still much missed.*

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EPIGRAPHERY

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## A Pair of Three

He goes out later than a new wife wants  
up to The Lookout.  
Does he meet someone?

He keeps two photos of his weddings –  
each pair of us –  
her him me.

I wonder about the singularity  
of a pair of three –  
an us.

It's late. No, partner, not too late. Still  
one of us is late: she finds him  
in The Lookout.

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## The Visitor

While he was out I read a book.  
I had to rest that day.  
Then I heard a key in the lock  
and steps in the hallway.

How could there be somebody there?  
Yet listen: rustling bags,  
clinking cup and running tap,  
the snap of the kettle's plug.

Someone in her own place  
settled with her tea.  
Someone opened an old book  
and sat relaxed like me.

I heard humming through the house  
and skipping up the stair  
yet when I held out my hand  
I touched nothing there.

Later we sat down to eat  
and talked about the day.  
He shared difficult things but I...  
I thought but couldn't say.

## Foot and Stair

*'The dreadful footyng doth so often change'*

—John Lydgate, *Danse Macabre*, 1426

We came as strangers to this wormholed wood,  
pile on clay,  
the dreadful footings of the danse macabre.

We chose high:  
an attic – stone-sunk windows overlook  
dunes of roofs

silted from inland seas. We tiptoed up  
to our room  
on treads so short a slight foot could over-

reach – here imps  
peg the windings, and demons of tightness  
trick to trip.

I took care not to lose my footing scaling  
wooden hills  
and at the top landing steadied: below

were fruit-full  
arthritic fig trees, down where old stories  
would be told.

## Over

How could he guess she was fixing  
adamant on that view?

How could she lie so quiet  
when she had mending to do?

How could he search for a vase  
while she made him a widower?

How could visitors ask for tea  
*weak strong sugar?*

How could she turn as she lay  
and hold to her daughters' gaze?

How could I step in and sit down  
wordfilled in her room?



## An Apprehension of Gingerbread

A barrage of boxes in the hall.  
The mattress had torn on one corner.  
It bled lead-grey wool.

Her picture lay dazed in the stairwell,  
its unprotected glaze smashed against  
a rat's tail cactus.

After he'd carried her to the shed  
glass particles gleamed along the way  
back through red roses,

the front garden's upright standards fixed  
in that grave yard of home. He looked up.  
Started his car. Fled.

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