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Watching Perfume Ads With The Sound Off

He looks at her / getting onto a plane / his lips are parted / she turns / glares at him / disappears / in a train carriage / he jumps / over many people / he's wearing thermal underwear / she's escaped / a cage / she's in a bed / she's in a desert / she's outside in the grandest courtyard / she kisses men with no shirts on / these are farmers / picking grapes / it's backbreaking work / a man arrives / his white shirt is clean / he's running / between grapevines / getting no dirt on himself at all / a man and a woman kiss / she runs along a beach / he drives a car along the same beach / not crashing into her / she turns / her hair is a cloud / she says a thin word / he can't lipread a woman in a wide green dress / now she's dancing like a lemur / in front of an enormous mirror / another woman dressed in gold / eats chocolate / pours chocolate / shouts something / no one hears / she runs away / she punches a man / brown eyes dissolve into the ocean / a woman chases birds away from herself / in another desert / a rich man sneaks up on a rich woman / she acts like she doesn't know he's there / two sailor men (might be girls) pretend to be boys / almost or not quite in love / circle around the heads of yet another man and woman / distance is usual / he breathes on the gap / between her lips and breakable neck / coiled with ivory and adders / sand colours the sky in / another aeroplane / a woman gets into a yellow bath / tall indoor ferns / water drips from her skin / she's not even wet / is that glue?

No one in a perfume ad ever experiences winter / no one's on a waiting list / no one is in a war-zone / no one has greys or wrinkles / no one in a perfume ad / sleeps under a bridge / dies in a tower-block / lives in a street of terraced houses / no one lights fires / is shot at school / plants bulbs for next spring / shoplifts nappies / cries / comes home late / doesn't come home / votes and hopes for something to change / has dreams of deep lakes / no one in a perfume ad / hangs out the washing / gives birth / saves a crow from drowning in the canal / buys fish and chips / chats to snails / closes an account / adopts a stray and toothless cat / no one in a perfume ad / repairs a cracked wall / calls their confused mum / finds someone's bank card / watches a murmuration of starlings / lays flowers for Dad / turns the thermostat down / leans in a doorway / smells soil after rain / checks on quiet neighbours / minds the baby next door / kisses their spouse / shares spare cabbages / walks dogs beside a brown river / picks blackberries at the edge of the dual carriageway / counts bees and worries / sells their coughing car / knocks on a door for help / no one in a perfume ad / watches rainclouds clearing / darns woollen socks / loses their job / waits for the sparrows to hatch in the air-vent / gets a new job / boil-washes dishcloths / has their identity stolen

/ cooks a fry-up from leftovers / finds an old book of stamps / asks awkward questions / dances around their kitchen to whatever the 4a.m. radio's playing / prays for a cooler summer next year / the next year / the next / is there nothing here to envy?

With thanks to Laurie Bolger.

Jess Richards

Jess Richards is the author of three fiction novels: *Snake Ropes*, *Cooking with Bones* and *City of Circles* (Sceptre). Her most recent is nonfiction: *Birds and Ghosts* (Linen Press). Originally from Scotland, Jess now lives in West Yorkshire with her wife and two cats.