

Identity Papers

Also by Ian Seed

Anonymous Intruder (Shearsman Books, 2009)

Shifting Registers (Shearsman Books, 2011)

Makers of Empty Dreams (Shearsman Books, 2014)

Chapbooks

No One Else at Home

(translated from the Polish of Joanna Skalska) (Flax, 2007)

the straw which comes apart

(translated from the Italian of Ivano Fermini) (Oystercatcher Press, 2010)

Amore mio (Flaxebooks, 2010)

Threadbare Fables (Like This Press, 2012)

Sleeping with the Ice Cream Vendor (Knives, Forks and Spoons Press, 2012)

Ian Seed

*Identity
Papers*

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(this address not for correspondence)

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Ian Seed

'I thought my first wife lay on my left arm and somebody took her away from my side which made me wake up unhappy I thought as I awoke somebody said Mary but nobody was near—I lay down with my head towards the north to show my self the steering point in the morning.'

—John Clare

For Justyna and Chiara

Place to Rent

The concierge told us that the flat had been occupied by an old bachelor. We left our toddler daughter with her and made our way up the steep winding staircase to have a look. It was not what we expected. The walls were undecorated, and there were small jagged holes where the cold came through. A single steel bed without a mattress was the only piece of furniture. The air reeked of loneliness. My wife wanted to leave. But here was our daughter in the doorway. How had she climbed up the staircase without falling? How had she known where to find us?

In the Pavilion

After wandering around all morning, I sat down on an iron bench and fell asleep. I was woken by a young waitress asking me for my order.

'I hadn't even realised this part of the pavilion was a café,' I said.

She smiled invitingly. 'Wouldn't you like to try our lunchtime roast pork with apple sauce?' I couldn't refuse, although I knew my wife would be making a meal at home.

When I had eaten, a small, strangely-coloured bird appeared. It fluttered just above my forehead. I put the back of my hand out, partly to invite the bird to perch there, partly to ward it away from my face. But the bird just moved down and hovered near my lips as if it might find a crumb on them.

Only when the waitress arrived with the bill, did the bird fly away. I wondered if she could tell me what kind of bird it was, but she said she knew of no such thing in the pavilion.

Parenthood

I have just discovered that I have a son, now a grown man. While I wait at the station to meet him for the first time, I wonder how vulnerable he must have been growing up without his father.

But my son turns out to be a tall, strong woman. Over coffee she tells me that she makes her living as a priest and as a comedian. 'Everyone is full of such contradictions,' she says, 'but few of us have the joy of living them out.'

She makes me realise I no longer need to hide so much away. So I take my newfound son to my mother's house.

'My God, isn't she beautiful!' my mother says. Then she gives us the news that she herself is pregnant. Soon I will have a baby brother or sister.

News

Sitting on the back seat on the top deck of a double decker bus, I wonder how I shall announce the number of children my father had. I have to count on my fingers to remember. Sixteen in all! After his death I found out that he had a fourth family. His third family thought that they were the last, the chosen ones, that my father's first two families were just rehearsals to prepare the ground for them, his real family. How will they react when they find out the truth? And how will his fourth family feel when they learn of us? They are still children, while I am almost an old man. They live on the other side of town. I am on my way now to see them for the first time.

Affair

The storm was so strong it brought down the oak tree in my garden. Amongst its wreckage I found a bedraggled youth, who told me he had been living in the tree. Now he had nowhere to go. When I took him into my home, he was grateful, but showed no respect for the people in the village. He spent most of his time playing pranks on them.

One day he disappeared. As the weeks went by, I couldn't help hoping he would never return, even as I prayed for his well-being. When a naked body was found in the river, we all assumed it was his. Then one summer dawn I drew back the curtains of my French windows and found him hiding there. He wanted to know who I had been messing about with in his absence.

Honoured Guest

Walking with my wife and daughter in the park, I came across a small boy. He started throwing stones at us. I went up to him and grabbed his wrist. 'Where do you live?' I asked as gently as I could. To my surprise, he said he would show me. He took me down a hill to a small wood. He led me to a tin hut which he shared with his mother, grandmother and older sister. They invited me in, and made me a strong black tea. I remembered I had left my wife and daughter back in the park. I wondered if they would believe my story about the family in the tin hut.

The House that Jack Built

I entered the museum that contained the house that Jack built. The original purpose of the house had been to keep everyone out, and I thought that the game would be to find the secret door. I found instead a house without walls. A man with a strong, kind face was cooking broth on a stove for two boys in nightshirts, who had fallen asleep over a kitchen table. The scene looked warm and welcoming, yet I felt increasingly irritated by a faint waxen glow surrounding it. Moreover, ever since entering the museum I'd had the distinct sensation that the fingertips of my right hand were brushing against the bottom of someone's front teeth. I decided to have a word with the museum attendant.