



# THE LOST FOR WORDS BOOKSHOP

by Stephanie Butland

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## *A Conversation with Stephanie Butland*

*Could you tell us a little bit about your background, and when you decided that you wanted to lead a literary life?*

I grew up in the northeast of England, where I now live, though I did spend twenty years in London, too. I always loved reading and writing, and studied it, but didn't start to write professionally until I was in my late thirties.

My home is close to the sea, and I find walking on the beach restful and inspiring. It's where I always go when I need some thinking time!

*Is there a book that most influenced your life? Or inspired you to become a writer?*

I think the simple act of reading—which has been, for as long as I can remember, the thing I love to do best—is the most influential thing in my life. I literally cannot imagine my life without reading. On the odd occasion when I've accidentally left the house without a book, I have to go back. I even get panicky when I've almost finished one book and am not sure what I'm going to read next!

*How did you become a writer? Would you care to share any writing tips?*

I always wanted to be a writer, but it wasn't until I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2008 at the age of thirty-seven that I found my way to blogging. I wrote two memoirs about my dance with cancer, then turned to fiction.

Writing tips? Don't try to write well. Just write. Write every day, whether you have an idea or not, whether you feel like it or not. Sooner or later



something will emerge that you want to invest in. Keep at it.

And when you're not writing—read! Read everything—classics, bestsellers, literature in translation, things you think you'll hate, and old favorites. Reading tells you what excites you as a writer.

***What was the inspiration for this novel?***

There's a wonderful secondhand bookshop near where I live, and I found an old postcard of California seashells in a book I bought there. It's in a frame above my desk now. Every time I look at it, I think about how much it brought with it, and I wonder, all over again, about the person who left it there.

***Can you tell us about what research, if any, you did before writing this novel? Do you have firsthand experience with its subject? Base any of the characters on people from your own life? What is the most interesting or surprising thing you learned as you set out to tell your story?***

I talked to people who had experienced some of the things I was writing about, either as professionals or through their family lives. I drew on my experience as a bookseller. And I learned to be a performance poet! And the sheer terrifying thrill of competing in poetry slams or taking the stage became addictive—I still do it whenever I can. I think it's important to get the technical details of a novel right, so I spoke to bookshop owners, foster parents, and people who live in York, and had a long weekend in Whitby, visiting Loveday's haunts.

***About the  
Author***

*Are you currently working on another book? And if so, can you tell us what it's about?*

*The Curious Heart of Ailsa Rae* is about a young woman who has received the heart transplant she needs to save her life—and now has to find out how to navigate the normal life she has always wished for. It's set in Edinburgh and has blogging, tango dancing, and a production of *Romeo and Juliet*. It was a lot of fun to research!



## *Archie's Chicken Soup Recipe*

I thought readers might enjoy making Archie's chicken soup, so here's the recipe. . . .

### *Archie's Chicken Soup*

This is a healing, nourishing soup that has a lot of ingredients but takes very little making. You can vary the vegetables you add to suit the season, or what's left in the fridge!

#### *Ingredients*

##### Part 1

- 1 chicken—if it's corn-fed, so much the better
- 1 1/2 liters of water
- 2 chicken stock cubes and 1 vegetable stock cube, dissolved in a mug of boiling water
- 500 milliliters white wine or sherry (or a mix of these, or any mix of leftover wine that's around—red works, too)
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 teaspoon each of dried parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme
- 8 black peppercorns (uncrushed)
- 1 whole head garlic, rinsed but unpeeled
- 1 lemon, cut in half
- 4 stalks celery, halved
- 4 carrots, peeled but left whole
- 2 onions, peeled and halved
- 200 grams arborio rice
- Salt, to taste

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## Part 2 (optional)

100 grams fresh or frozen peas

2 stalks celery, very finely chopped

1 leek, very finely chopped

Fresh basil, finely chopped

### *Method*

Take the biggest stockpot or pan you have. Put in all of the ingredients from Part 1. If the chicken isn't completely covered, add some more water.

Put the pan on a high heat until the soup is bubbling, then turn it down to the lowest possible heat, put a tight-fitting lid on it, and leave it to simmer for at least 90 minutes. (If you leave it for longer, it doesn't matter.) Give it a stir every 20 minutes or so, just to make sure that nothing is sticking to the bottom. Top up the water level if it's getting low.

When the chicken is soft and falling apart, remove it from the pan and put it to one side. Retrieve and discard the onions, celery, bay leaves, head of garlic, and lemon. Retrieve and keep the carrots.

Carefully take the meat from the chicken bones—you should be able to tear it off with a fork. Discard the chicken carcass and skin. Chop the meat into small-ish pieces and return it to the pan. Chop the cooked carrots and return them to the pan, too. Add salt to taste. Now you have a rich, flavorsome chicken soup with rice, herbs, and carrots.

You can gently heat the soup and serve it as it is, or you can add the Part 2 ingredients and simmer the

soup for 20 minutes or so, until the celery and leek are cooked through.

Serve in warmed bowls.

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## *Recommended Reading*

### *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

Anne Brontë

I really think this is the best of all the Brontë novels. The portrayal of a woman trying to raise a good son breaks my heart every time.

### *A Tale for the Time Being*

Ruth Ozeki

Such a fascinating, intricate story about a young woman understanding the world.

### *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*

Susanna Clarke

I love a big book, and this is one of the best. Magical realism, macabre humor, and characters that feel so real, even if half of them are faeries!

### *Days Without End*

Sebastian Barry

Evocative, clever, human, and gripping. Set during the American Civil War, full of guts and heart. I gobbled this up.

### *The Gustav Sonata*

Rose Tremain

Just a perfect novel; the story of a friendship between two boys growing up in Europe during the Second World War. I didn't want this to end.

### *Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories*

John Updike

Updike was a master craftsman and his stories are compassionate and full of humanity.





*Hag-Seed*

Margaret Atwood

Atwood's retelling of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. I had to put my life on hold while I finished it!

*Persuasion*

A. S. Byatt

One of Loveday's favorites and one of mine, too.

*Mansfield Park*

Jane Austen

I never stop rooting for Fanny Price! I read this novel, and *Emma*, probably once a year.

*Keep On  
Reading*



## *Reading Group Questions*

1. How important are books to Loveday? Does she have to work in a bookshop, or would another kind of shop serve her just as well?
2. If you were going to have a line from a book tattooed on your skin, which line would you choose?
3. Why does Loveday choose poetry to get her message across?
4. Do you have any sympathy for Rob?
5. What does this book tell us about mothers and daughters?
6. Loveday is not a fan of people in general, and men in particular. Is she justified in this?
7. How important are the settings of this novel?
8. Loveday collects things—books, shells, tattoos. Why does she do this? How can collections help us to make sense of our lives?
9. Can you pinpoint the moment that Loveday's life goes wrong?
10. Who would play Archie in a movie of this book?