

THE HARBOUR FESTIVAL

A (very) short story by A.A. Abbott

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Sun scorches Cally's skin. The smell of fried onions wafts through the air, and a bass beat thuds from the band by the harbour. Cally is jostled by crowds and dazzled by reflections from the silver water as she searches for Anna's boat among the hundreds gathered for the festival.

At last, she sees the bright green houseboat. Anna waves from the deck, her tanned limbs wrapped in a white floaty dress. Cally remembers how hard it is to have a glamorous sister. Apprehensively, she steps onto the boat.

"Let's have a drink," Anna says. "I need one; I've been cleaning the place now Stan's gone."

The barge is spick and span. How did super-organised Anna ever cope with Stan? He was always so untidy. Unlike Cally, Anna could take her pick of men. Cally's cheeks burn as she recalls the night Stan said he was leaving her for Anna.

Despite the heat, Cally shivers. She half expects Stan to clomp on deck in his trademark Doc Martens. Awkwardly, she blurts, "Where's Stan?"

Anna laughs. "Men come and go."

Silence hangs heavy, until Anna says, "I've got elderflower cider. Want some?"

As ever, it slips down like lemonade. Cally can't recall much afterwards, only giggles, hugs and a sense of reconciliation. Stan is just a ghost to her now. It's mere chance she sees some Doc Martens washed up on the riverbank a week later. Cally shrugs. Blood is thicker than water, she thinks.

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This story was performed by actor Jo Butler at a Story Walk in Bristol for National Flash Fiction Day 2016. Read more short stories and subscribe to the A.A. Abbott Author Newsletter at <http://aaabbott.co.uk/> for a free e-book.