



**Blue in Green (extract)**

by **Kit de Waal**

shortlisted for the 2014  
SI Leeds Literary Prize

## 16. Rue Lepic, Arab quarter, Marseille 1981

This was the beautiful part, this tracing of the contours of the body, this touch, this being touched. This was what could not be imagined, what could not be spoken of, what could not be thought.

This could only be felt. This touch of the bud of the breast, this taste, this twinning, knowing and being known, falling into valleys, letting go, dropping off cliffs, swimming in seas, this losing and finding, reading the map of the heart. This was the beautiful part of their love and as soon as they understood this, they knew they had to leave.

They awoke suddenly, both of them, hot. They hadn't meant to sleep and now both naked, limbs knotted, hair tangled, pore to pore, they awoke suddenly, both of them and they laughed. Not the secret, silent, intimate laugh that passed between them like a song when they first came into the room, undressed, explored, nervous, excited, scared, hopeful, desperate. No, this was the belly-rippling laugh of relief and joy. They had love, that's what they had. They had found love and what was funniest of all was that love had, all along, lived right around the corner. Love had been waiting only fifteen minutes down the road these ten years. Love had come in, sat down, eaten a meal and made natural conversation a hundred times, two hundred maybe. And now love lay down and laughed until the tears came, until the tears were kissed away, until the kissing was no longer enough.

'Quickly, Ghadda! Get dressed.'

Thalia was first to pull away. How long had they been there? True, they had spent hours in her bedroom before but this, of course, was different. Now they had something to hide. But Ghadda only smiled and Thalia, seeing that smile with her skin still on fire, could only smile back.

'No. Come on, really. Dress. Please. For me.'

Ghadda pulled her clothes on roughly and with a steadying hand on the bedstead began fastening shoelaces and tying knots. Thalia tugged the bedclothes around until the evidence of their love was lost.

They stood at the door, turned the silent handle and listened. Downstairs they could hear the clanging of pots and pans in the kitchen at the back of the house. Thalia's mother was making dinner. The whole family was coming. There

would be twelve at least. What they needed now was to remember the faces they wore before. What did those faces look like? What did innocence look like? How were they to look at one another now? What would be read in their eyes? What they needed now was to remember their lives before they found one another.

A footstep on the stairs. Thalia's brother. It was Ghadda who pulled the door open wide and stood slouching on the door jamb as the oaf lumbered past, saying 'What are you two looking at?'

When he had closed the door to his room, Thalia let out her breath and touched Ghadda on the face.

'You're so brave.'

The two girls waited a few more moments then walked together down the narrow staircase to help with the food.

They went first to Paris, a trip to Ghadda's aunt and then, left alone for half a day, they packed quickly and ran across the street to the metro. They ran from the metro to the train and dashed onto the ferry and then, standing on the deck looking back they nestled in together and watched the land disappear.

London was freezing. They arrived at the bus terminal at Victoria at seven o'clock in the evening and walked in the sleet towards a café with orange plastic tables and chairs welded together. Thalia sat down and threaded her hands through their bags, pulling them towards her, looking around.

'I'll get coffee,' said Ghadda and went to the counter. She was limping again.

The coffee was undrinkable but both girls curved their hands around their mugs for warmth.

'Wait here for five minutes,' Ghadda said. When she returned she sat next to Thalia and put an arm around her. She was smiling.

'Okay, there's a small hotel around the corner and it's got a room. We stay there one night, it's cheap and tomorrow we start looking for jobs. Cheer up, Thalia' she said. 'I have something to show you.'

'What?'

'This.'

Ghadda took Thalia's face in her hands and kissed her on the lips.

'We're in London. We're free. I can kiss you.'

The next day they began walking the streets but the shop work they were looking for couldn't be found. Ghadda shuffled across the lobby of a big hotel and asked for work for them both as chambermaids but they were told to make full written applications through a recruitment agency. They needed qualifications and police checks to work with children in nurseries or youth clubs and every café and restaurant they tried seemed to be staffed by family members or people like themselves, desperate. They were staying in a filthy dive where the landlord let them share a single bed but charged them both for it. Eventually, ten days into their search with barely enough money to eat, Ghadda returned to their room with a piece of paper.

'I've got interviews for both of us today.'

Thalia began to cry.

'Look, here. 'Club Zero'. It's not far. Whatever they say, we get the job. It's going to be alright. This is the one.'

Thalia sniffed and said nothing.

'I know, I know. As soon as we have jobs we start saving up and looking for our own place. Don't cry, Thalia. I will take care of you. Trust me. Everything will be different now. I promise.'