SONYA HARTNETT is the award-winning author of many novels for teens, including *Thursday's Child*, winner of the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize; *What the Birds See*, which won the Age Book of the Year in Australia; *Stripes of the Sidestep Wolf*; *The Ghost's Child* and *Surrender*, a Michael L. Printz Honor Book. Her books for younger readers include *The Silver Donkey*, *The Midnight Zoo* and *Sadie and Ratz*, illustrated by Ann James. In 2008, Sonya was awarded the prestigious Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award for her body of work. She lives in Australia.

Surrender, Sonya says, "is set in a small, insular and kind of irrelevant country town in Australia. I wanted to look at what would happen, in such a place, when one of its own children turned against the town – when the havoc wreaked by a dark-hearted black sheep brought the outside world into the town, and turned the townspeople against each other. But at the heart of the novel is a much more individual idea: the notion that we can be haunted forever by a simple mistake, and what a destructive thing this can be."

PRAISE FOR SONYA HARTNETT

"Few British novelists for young people deliver with such density or so uncompromisingly. Hartnett writes without self-censorship or artificial boundaries between adults' and children's literature." *The Guardian*

"Hartnett's books, even when they are published on children's lists, have the literary quality to appeal to discriminating readers of any age."
Nicolette Jones, *The Sunday Times*

"Hartnett exemplifies a quality and complexity of contemporary children's books. She is superb." *The Guardian*

"What an original and intriguing writer Sonya Hartnett is." *The Observer*

"Harnett, often compared to Faulkner, doesn't waste a word. Yet she can create an emotional atmosphere and conjure up a landscape like few others."
Malorie Blackman, *The Observer Review*

"Sonya depicts the circumstances of young people without avoiding the darker sides of life. She does so with linguistic virtuosity and a brilliant narrative technique; her works are a source of strength."
Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award 2008 Jury

SURRENDER

SONYA HARTNETT
INTERNATIONAL AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR

WALKER
BOOKS

Also by Sonya Hartnett

Thursday's Child, *What the Birds See, Stripes of the Sidestep Wolf, Surrender, The Ghost's Child*

For younger readers

The Silver Donkey, The Midnight Zoo, Sadie and Ratz

Published by arrangement with Penguin Books Australia Ltd

First published in Great Britain 2005 by Walker Books Ltd
87 Vauxhall Walk, London SE11 5HJ

This edition published 2017

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

This book has been typeset in Fairfield

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data:
a catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-4063-6821-5

www.walker.co.uk

For Dmetri Kakmi

GABRIEL

I am dying: it's a beautiful word. Like the long slow sigh of a cello: *dying*. But the sound of it is the only beautiful thing about it.

Several times a week I must be cleaned. Water comes to me on a sponge. I must lift my arms, shift my heels, lower my flaming eyes. I must smell pink, antiseptic. I'm removed from my place while the bedsheets are changed and set to sag in a wheelchair. I am proffered a pan, and the sight of it shames me; at other times I can't call for it fast enough. My food comes mashed, raised on a spoon; spillage will dapple my lap. I am addressed as if an idiot, cooed over as though a child. I'm woken when I wish to sleep, told to sleep when I'd prefer to be awake. I am poked, prodded, pinched and flensed, I'm needled and wheedled and cajoled. My existence is nothing but a series of humiliations, what little life is left to me can hardly be called my own. All of this, this horror, just to say, "He's dying."

I hear the words blow like dust through town. From where I lie, in this lean white room, I hear them spoken under awnings, murmured over counters, delivered as knowing statements across gates. *It won't be long now. They say he's dying.*

They say he's fragile, his skin sugar-white; they say he must be handled like a delicate crown of thorns. They're saying he's as weightless as the skeleton of a crow.

Breathing is an undertaking: it takes minutes to sigh. My ribcage is the hull of a wrecked and submerged ship. My arms, thin as adders, are leaden as dropped boughs. The mattress, my closest friend, has been carved by the knots of my unfleshed bones into a landscape of dents. The soul might rise, but the body pulls down, accepting the inevitable, returning to where it began.

This is where I began: I am dying in my childhood home. Beyond the window straggles the only world I know and wish to know; I was born and grew up in this few-thousand town. There is nothing about its weft and fold that isn't familiar to me. I know the cracks in the footpaths – I have stepped on them a thousand times. I know the product on the shelves and the reflection in the glass – I have seen myself there, left imprints of my hands. I've felt summer's Sahara heat and seen autumn's bedraggled blooms; I've kicked black crickets from my toes and fed wood to a hissing fire. I know which gate tilts in the wind, I know what's cropped in which field. I have

known the exact moment when every calf and child was born. From here, on the bed, where I see only panelled walls and a haze of curtain which ushers in the breeze, I can distinguish and put a name to every rooster's cry. The breeze brings to me the scent of sawdust, diesel, feathers, chicken soup. They say that smell is the last thing to fade, so I sniff about while I can.

It is as easy for me to die here, in the bedroom of my childhood home, as it would be to die anywhere. The procession of needlers and pinchers knows where to find me. The word on the street agrees, says, "It's better he's home, it's comforting there." My aunt takes care of me from day to day; she sleeps in the neighbouring room. I'll not pretend her task is enviable. The chronically ill make for difficult work; neither is it easy to be chronically ill. It is an effort for me to do anything – to think, talk, imagine, prepare – to do anything except concede to the demands of my squalling usurper. It rules me like a dictator; in turn I rule my aunt. When the end comes, Sarah will have earned her peace. In the meantime, she's not the sort to put a pillow to one's face: when the illness is looking elsewhere I apologize for the grief I cause and, "Gabriel," she replies, "I'll miss you."

Inside me roils a thunderstorm. When I breathe, the breath is winter. Lightning jags through my chest, splashes shocks of blood down my chin. Rain falls inside my lungs,

sloshes when I move. The thunder rolls like a great cat, settles with a feline weight. The marrow in my bones is ice. My eyes are hailstones.

And I feel old, as old as the mountains that the walls and window won't allow me to see, as old as if every moment has somehow stretched into a year. And anyone who didn't know me might mistake me for an ancient man – I have an old tranquillity. But I am young – I'm the martyr's age. At my age, hearts are pierced with arrows, and taped over with bombs. Mine is the saintly age, the sacrificial one: I am only twenty.

But there's no one here who doesn't know me.

In this small town, conversation is whispered. Treetops, when they buffet, do so mutedly. Cats don't purr, goats don't bleat, birds keep their tunes to themselves. The cow separated from her calf swallows back her moan. Children in their yards don't play, trucks take the long road round. Anything daring to slam with the wind is forcibly nailed down. The wind itself does its best to skulk unheard. Everything here is silenced, for me. Everything keeps a respectful hush. I lie alone in this small room, my childhood's unreliable sanctuary now my prison, soon my morgue, and silence, which is what awaits me, is what I've already received.

Fortunately my ears are sharp.

I hear that they are whispering, "What was missing is found."

FINNIGAN

The wind told me it's found.

I jump from my tree (they are all my trees) and click for Surrender and breach the hill, him running in the lead. Surrender has heavy bones, heavy ears, a timber tail, a gatepost skull, but he's light as butter on his feet: he runs back and forth, up and down, flushing birds that flew off yesterday, chasing rabbits that are stew. I don't call him, he won't come. I'm going to a place that's hidden, and though if anyone saw the dog they'd know I was near, Surrender won't be seen.

The fact that it's found is at my shoulders like a swarm, pushing me through the slop and fug, up and up the mountain. The earth I touch with my hands is cold (the earth is mine, the dirt, the seeds, the grass, the worms, the cracks, the clods, all of it, all). The mud makes cakes on my knees. Up high the breeze is colder, and smells like a snake's belly, and bites with a snake's fangs. I clamber higher, to the top. I need the peak, the

view. I need the world caught inside the black pit of my eyes.

I know where I'm going, the dip in the ground, the log and mucky gouge. Before me there's been fox and wombat, and the earth tangs of them. I sit in the gouge with my arms round my knees and stare, a gargoyle on the mountain's side. If I had wings they would be black: they would unfold with a creak like antique hide and, unfolded, drip oil.

From this towersome height this is what I see: miniature town, miniature trees, a world that's a toybox upturned. A mansion for dollies, trucks driven by fleas. Then there's bigger, other things, although further away. Forests, fields, mountains, clouds. Mountains like shark teeth, ivory, serrated; forest dense as moss. All this in my eye. Beyond this, nothing. There is no place beyond this. From here I'll see whatever comes, and I will see it before it sees I.

My hair blows in my eyes. I scrape it out with a nail.

Surrender returns, thinks, thinks about biting. His lip crooks like a wave. The one thing important to everything is this: my hound.

Another thing I see: the cemetery. Every town must have one: Mulyan has one too. No one lives forever (who'd let them?). In the cemetery everyone's related, and not just because of the state they're in. There's daughters, uncles, grandparents, fathers, sons, cousins, mothers, brothers, the same names again

again again. The clans gather together like it's Christmas under there. Some had the town in themselves – *Sacred to the Memory of John Mulyan Devine*. Now it's the town that has them, now they're dust, dirt, loam. Rabbits have dug tunnels through John Devine, his ribcage a nursery for kits.

Another thing about Mulyan: nobody chooses to come here. In this little town ringed by shark-tooth mountains we are far, far away. We know only each other. And the names on the gravestones stay the same.

Mulyan hangs, upturned in my eye; a town of abominable secrets and myth. Its elders gather in the Chamber to vote against everything. They are frightened of change, and defiant. "We are happy as we are!" They are pig-headed to a person. "We'll keep our own ways, thank you!"

I fullheartedly concur. Why wouldn't I? I am the ruler of this island-town. I'm happy as things are.

The wind's chilled me as blue as a corpse; my jaw is sore, my lips skinned. From my perch I oversee the yawning town, see it waking and greeting the dawn. I rub my hands, I breathe on them, I snuggle into the earth. I watch the tip-grubber's truck grind its way to the dump. On the tray of the truck lurch twelve scrawny mutts, each salvaged from the rubble of the tip, each bearing an apostle's name. I watch the tip-grubber to the end of the road, then jump back a mile to Mulyan. Surrender wanders

near. He sniffs my face, his coat is chill. I settle like a hawk.

McIllwraith the local law steps from his matchbox house. I lean forward to follow. He climbs into his minuscule car and leaves the gutter for the street. The car bucks and snorts with the cold, fog bleeding from its rear. I imagine him in the driver's seat, smiling smoothly to himself. The grave is found: it must mean good things for him. It might mean freedom, escape. He's been caged in Mulyan for years. Now the grave is open, maybe so is a door. Maybe now, at long last, someone will recognize a job well done.

A job well done, like a kiss.

I unfold into the wind. I whistle Surrender from the mountain's spine. He runs and pinecones tumble in his wake, but there isn't any hurry. In the grave they'll have found only bones, and bones don't require hurry. "Surrender," I say. "Surrender."

GABRIEL

What they have found will be bone, because it's been a long time. Femur, fibula, tibia, humerus; clavicle, mandible, scapula, vertebrae. Tiny little phalanges gnawed on by a rat. Animal becomes vegetable becomes mineral and it happens quickly, but everything mineral knows how to wait. Bones have the patience of the moon.

Now that they have been found, Finnigan will start to move. Wherever he's been holed up will suddenly feel precarious to him. If he is smart he will resist the urge to leave a trail of destruction behind him. There is nothing like a burning bush to cast light upon your face. And Finnigan is far from stupid – he is sharp as a trap. His cleverness has been his saving grace, and mine. Finnigan roams unhindered through the valley and town, the midnight raider of kitchens, the sleeper-in-woolsheds, the bareback horse-rider, the bather in rushing streams. He is dirt under fingernails and the stick of sap on skin. This clean

wan bed is my citadel, this room my continent. My powdered skin is silken, tinted airless-blue. If you touch me I will bruise; if I shift, to ease my weight, blood rivers from my nose. I am saintly, poetic; I am demise, otherworld. But when Finnigan runs, I run with him.

I am Gabriel, the messenger, the teller of astonishing truths. Now I am dying, my temperature soaring, my hands and memory tremoring: perhaps I should not be held accountable for everything I say.

I remember my first sight of him – the sound and scavenger look of him – surrounded by summer; I remember the stillness of the day and the density of the air. Neither of us was older than nine or ten. I was skimming a car along the garden fence when Finnigan crossed the brink of my vision. At first I feigned ignorance or disdain of his presence, but the car beneath my fingertips bunny-hopped and soon stalled. I slid a glance at him. At school we had seen a wildlife film projected onto a wall, and the boy who was watching me was a hyena. His dark eyes were set apart and seemed to have no arena of white. He didn't move or say a thing but I knew, just from his watching, that he could sever my arm. We were the same height and same age and built along similar leggy lines, but he was a hyena while I was a small, ashy, alpine moth. From the footpath side of the fence he stared at me, and my gaze floated grudgingly from the toy. He swiped

a fly from his face. "You're that boy," he said.

"… What boy?"

"You know. That boy. You know. What you did. Everybody knows."

I pressed my thumb on the bonnet of the car. I looked my interrogator up and down. His clothes were shabby and ill-fitting. The fly had returned to his face. "You're the kook boy," he elaborated, conversationally. "Your mother and father are kooks too. Everybody knows."

I considered the situation, his evident supremacy. Diplomatically, I laughed. "Kooks," I said, and found it a sweet word, confectionery. I hopped illustratively from one foot to the other, waggling my head. The boy smiled; I saw myself jumping inside his lush eyes. "Kooks," I chirruped again, to prove I'd taken no offence.

He leaned on the pickets; his gaze dipped to the car and away. "Your mother is a witch," he said. "Everybody knows."

There seemed no response required to this so I smiled and, suddenly inspired, pretended my knee itched, and attended to scratching it. The gypsy boy watched silently, the fly sniffing the corner of his mouth. I stamped my foot on the soft garden earth. The wind shifted shadows on our hands. I had never seen this boy before, and was honoured that a stranger should have given my family such thought. I didn't want him to go

away. I asked, "How come you don't go to school?"

"Why would I?" he replied.

His eyes returned to the car parked on the fence railing. I poked it so it rattled forward over the terrain. My father's sister Sarah had sent the car in the mail, my name printed clearly on the grey cardboard box. The plaything had so far managed to escape my mother's ruthless confiscation. The visitor's eyes lingered on the car until I felt a twitch of nerves – then, mercifully, his gaze moved on, travelling the walls of the house. The wind rolled, scattering dust; I smelt the paint on the fence, the heat in the leaves, the parched conclusion of the afternoon. The boy, so close, smelt of nothing. He slipped a fist between the pickets and asked, "What do I have in my hand?"

I looked at the fist curled under my nose, the wrist lightly touching the rail. His fingers were brown as the legs of a huntsman, the skin on the knuckles broken. In my mind's eye I pictured what such fingers could hide. A tooth, a stone, a beetle. "Money?"

He smiled. "You cheated." His fingers unfurled, there lay three damp coins. I had never seen such riches in the palm of a boy: "Where did you get it?" I asked.

"Took it from Mother's purse." His smile grew.

"Won't she find out? You'll get in trouble."

"She won't find out. Not unless you tell."

"I won't." I would always do whatever he wanted. "What will you do with it?"

He shrugged; his gaze again brushed the car. He looked too poor to own toys or to have an aunt who could send them. My heart was gripped with sudden horror: "This is mine!" I squeaked.

The boy stared evenly at me: then the tawny lips bent in scorn. "Why would I want it?" he asked.

My face drenched scarlet, I glanced away. In that moment I hated the car, hated my aunt for giving it to me, felt painful pity for them both. I scooped up the toy gently, as if it were injured, and slipped it between the buttons of my shirt. I knew I would never play with it again. The dark boy watched in silence, slouched against the fence. After a time he said, "Come out into the street."

I shook my head unhappily, unable to look at him. "I'm not allowed. I have to stay in the yard."

The boy pinched the fence with his toes. "That's a kook thing."

"On Saturdays I can play in the street."

My voice was hitched – somewhere there were tears. The boy considered me while the wind flipped his hair. The road had stayed empty for such a long time. "What day is today?"

I glanced up, surprised. "Don't you know?"

"Why should I?"

His lack of shame was awesome. "It's Thursday."

"Every day's the same to me."

"Come back on Saturday." I shifted closer. "Not tomorrow, the next day."

I watched him intently, beggingly, felt I'd fall down if he refused. I knew I couldn't bring him into the house, that I shouldn't mention him to my mother or father, but I longed to have his promise, I hungered for the prospect of him. If my visitor walked away now he would seem like a daydream, like touching a tiger's face in the dark. And my visitor seemed indifferent to the proposal, continuing to pinch the fence with his toes. He opened his fist, which still rested on the rail, and checked that the coins remained there. Unexpectedly he said, "Do us a favour?"

"Yes, I will! What?"

"Hide this money in your pocket."

I shied away, gormless. "How come?"

"No pockets." He slapped his trousers. "Just until Saturday."

My throat went dry. Stealing from a purse was a crime with which I did not wish to be associated. "If your mother won't know you took it," I said, "why do you need me to hide it?"

The boy considered me coolly; then, disgusted, turned

away. "Wait!" I yipped. He stopped, and stood there saying nothing while I flailed with my conscience. I desperately wanted to befriend this gypsy, but he would not return without reason. He would have no use for a friend who lacked a spirit as robust as his own. I pressed to the fence, my voice husky: "What would I do with it?"

"Bury it?"

"But – couldn't you?"

He snorted. "If *I* hide it, it won't be hidden, will it?"

I gulped and meekly shuffled as he dropped the coins in my shirt pocket, where they beat like a steely heart. He cocked his head to study me, and seemed satisfied. "Give them back on Saturday. Don't tell anyone."

I nodded breathlessly. "What's your name?"

A cat's smile touched his lips: I hung on the fence while he scouted in the gutter until he found a weathered piece of glass which he held up ceremoniously to my gaze. He nudged my hands aside and I watched with quickening disquiet as he applied the point of the glass to the thick paint on the fence rail. A hundred protests shrieked in my mind as he carefully carved one letter after another, and frail spirals of waxy paint curled away from the blade and blew off in the breeze. I dredged my voice from the depths: "Stop!" I gasped. "Don't do that!"

"It's finished now," he said, as if the offence, completed, was

somehow lessened. He wiped a palm across what he'd written and I leaned closer to look. He had carved a long word in a somersault language that seemed oddly familiar to me:

When I glanced up, he was watching me, an oily shine in his eyes. In them I saw the reflection of the house behind me, the crimson windows and doorframe, the anorexic tangle of roses planted against the weatherboard.

"Anwell!"

I jumped, my heart skidding. I turned to see my mother standing at the flywire screen. Finnigan vanished instantly, leaving no trace behind. "Inside," my mother ordered. "Come inside."

I come back to my room as if thrown into it. Inside my lungs the thunderstorm clashes, spliced by lightning. Coughing rakes my lungs, strains the cartilage between my bones. Blood splatters my chin and chest, warm, thick as cream. I hunch under the agony, pillows tumbling down my back, and across the chalk-white cotton sheets the ruby stains anchor, disperse, extend.

Then Sarah is beside me, holding the cloth to my lips, her

strong hands circling my breaking spine. Like sailors on a raging sea, neither of us can do anything but wait until the storm is done. Sarah smooths my hair, murmurs words, lets me know I'm not alone. Tears slip to my chin but I'm not overcome, they mean nothing, they are simply a symptom.

Not yet, I'm thinking, not yet. I will, and soon, I promise, but not yet. Give me just a little more time: when she's come and gone, I'll go.

And it pleases itself to give me a little more time.

I do not look too closely at the cloth with which Sarah wipes my chest. Nothing sears the eyes more deeply than the sight of one's own blood on cloth. She brings a glass of water and helps me drink from it: I swallow the blood that's coated my teeth and the taste of dying swills away. The pain fades, my lungs fill, and the illness retreats good-naturedly – as if all this time it's just been playing, as if all this has just been a joke.

There is blood on my nightshirt, its outline like a continent, detailed at the edges. The article is removed and discarded, as is the blemished sheet. The clean nightshirt my aunt drapes over me is freezing against my skin. I am shivering, stupefied.

Sarah asks me if I need the pan. I tell her to leave me alone. A housecall from the illness always leaves me morose. I bury myself in blankets, into a dark private place. Inside my lungs,

air is probing passages that are suddenly unblocked; other routes are newly closed, clogged with the debris of the storm. Every time the illness wreaks havoc, it leaves a few more passages irreversibly barricaded. I am suffocating.

When I close my eyes I see Finnigan as plainly as if he were beside me.

My mother discovered the coins almost immediately – I had no talent for secrecy then. The few sad coins she fished from my pocket looked like teardrops or bullet holes in her palm. She held them close to her nose, stared at them, nostrils flaring; I stood gazing at the bony flank of her hand. She wore a bruising diamond ring on her wedding finger. She sniffed sharply, her lip jerked. "Where did you get this?" she asked.

I could not say. The hallway of our house was long and always cold; the exit doors, back and front, were kept frowningly closed. The warmth of outside was shaved from my skin and fell in curls to the floor.

"Anwell? Answer me. Where did you get this?"

She was staring over her fingers at me, her face lean as a goat's. I looked away, because I could never meet her eye. My gaze ran like a fearful mouse along the skirting-board and up the wall. A field of pink rosebuds were wallpapered flatly there. My mother cuffed me to attention. "Anwell!"

Dizziness wobbled through me. I said, "I can't say."

Mother gazed at me, her face a tomb, her body a pole. "Did you steal them?"

"No—"

"Did you take them from my purse? From your father's wallet? My God – from someone on the street?"

"No!"

She grabbed my wrist like a snare grabs a fox. I jumped backwards, a snared fox, and her grip tightened. Her body piked down so her eyes were at mine. "Because you know you are a thief," she said. "This whole town knows what you are. They whisper about you. *Look at the little beast. What a burden for his poor mother.* Look at me, with your lying face, and tell me the truth!"

"I didn't steal it." Fear sang like violins. "I swear—"

She wasn't listening. Her fingers crushed my wrist. "You want to make a fool of your mother. You want your mother to die of shame. You want to kill your mother."

"No!" I yelped, and struggled madly, leaping like a fox. "I don't – I didn't!"

"Then *where* did you get it, Anwell? Answer me!"

I pressed my lips together: I would not tell a lie. My mother, staring into my face, made a sound like a dog or a bird. Clutching my wrist she rushed me down the hall, bursting into her bedroom like a gale. Her black bead handbag lay on the bed and from its maw Mother pulled her purse, twisting its clip

as if breaking bones. I retreated stumblingly, till my shoulders knocked the wall. Rosebuds cascaded from the ceiling to the floor. Mother stared with satisfaction into the purse, her skull pressed hard against the flesh, her throat swallowing sourly. She looked at me, her face crumpling. "How could you?" Her eyes like axes. "How could you?"

I caught my breath. "Mama, I—"

"You terrible creature. How could you?"

Tears dashed down my cheeks, each one quicker than the last. I leaned against the wall and sobbed, struggling to swallow back the terror because she hated tears, they enraged her. She lowered her shattered self to the bed, crumpling the purse in her hand. She gazed at the wall, white-eyed. "All the dreadful things you've done," she whispered, from somewhere in the clouds.

I stood miserably beside the wall, a thread of tears making the short plunge from my chin to the floor. I longed to beg her forgiveness, but my voice would not come. The icebox odour of my mother's bedroom made my empty stomach clench. My socks were bunched inside my shoes, my tears greasing the floor. I still had the toy car hidden in my shirt. A disjoined part of me fretted over the loss of Finnigan's coins, and worried about what he would say.

My mother finally looked at me. "Look what you do to poor Mother," she sighed.

I licked my salty lips. "I'm sorry."

"You know I must tell Father."

"But I didn't—"

"Anwell," she said, "I despise you when you lie."

We were both quiet. The afternoon light was netted by the lace curtains; no colour came into this room. "Maybe you don't have to tell him," I suggested.

"I won't be a liar like you."

So we waited, me with my shoulders to the cool rosebud wall, and she, upright as a church-goer, propped on the end of the bed. I kept my thoughts anchored on the word carved into the fence.