

KATE HORSLEY FROM BAILRIGG - WINNER

Rules for Looking After Ian

You come with a numbered list  
tucked between a mango  
and a toy car in the carrier.

I babble, though I know we  
don't speak a common word.  
You're calm. Or maybe bored.

Your rules don't say, advising  
me to water you often,  
feed you, brush your hair

(it flocks like a whorl of black  
birds swooping to peck the dark  
field of your tender skin).

It would be easy to spoil you,  
disappoint you, lose you.  
The instructions don't say

how to keep you safe, or sing  
to you at night or how to feel  
when, on the journey home

your head nods on your chest  
each time the bus stops and your  
small hand dreamingly grasps mine.