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FOREWORD

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Ford Madox Ford wrote of a city's population as being a "gnat-swarm", and described "modern life" as a "gnat-dance" "so extraordinary, so hazy, so tenuous with, still, such definite and concrete spots in it". John Dowell, the narrator of Ford's novel *The Good Soldier* (1915), noted: "the whole world for me is like spots of colour on an immense canvas. Perhaps if it weren't so I should have something to catch hold of now." Ford set himself and other writers the challenge of rendering the "gnat-dance", to try to make some sense of it, perhaps better to understand the "canvas", however briefly.

At the end of the twentieth century, William Trevor said of the short story: "I think it is the art of the glimpse. If the novel is like an intricate Renaissance painting, the short story is an Impressionist painting. It *should* be an explosion of truth." Ford would probably have agreed, but would perhaps have observed that a single "glimpse" is limited, its "truth" a narrow illumination. A collection of glimpses, however, might go some way to being a wider and more profound understanding of modern life.

An Anatomy of Chester is a collection of fifty-five short-short stories that, in its entirety, attempts to capture the "gnat-swarm" of a city at the start of the twenty-first century. The rules for each story were simple: each must be 50-350 words (including title) and be set in the present. Short-short stories (also known as flash fictions, sudden fictions, postcard fictions, minute fictions, furious fictions, fast fictions, quick fictions, skinny fictions and micro fictions) are brief but resonant explosions, and when numerous create a *gestalt* of multiple perspectives, multiple truths; a focussed view and a broad view that help make sense of "hazy" modern life.

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