

## 101 Fiction

Issue 21

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Curl up someplace warm, try to keep the cold from your bones; check the locks, check behind the sofa (just to be sure). That chill's not just winter at the door, it's the sixteen tiny ghost stories right here, waiting to haunt you. Welcome them in... Welcome to issue 21.

Ghost stories strike a chord, there's something about ghastly visions and voices from beyond that thrill us as much as they chill us. We love that shiver, in the safety of our own cosy homes. Ghost stories can run a whole rainbow of emotions though. We've got revenge and retribution, naturally, the dead who won't, who *can't*, let go. Then there are those aching for what they've lost: heartache, reflections and memory, echoes of lives and loves gone before. There's fear and freedom, guilt and obsession.

There's murder, of course there's murder; nothing like an unnatural death to spawn an unquiet spirit. There's a deep yearning, from both sides; from the dead for the simple things of life, or for life itself; from the living for what has been taken from them. There are soldiers and sailors. There's a duke, a highwayman, tech support and... a pigeon.

What our authors have all achieved, whether their story be spooky or scary or heart-wrenching, is something that will haunt you, something that will linger even after the words are no longer before you. The stories, in their own ways, echo, they create their own ghosts, wandering through the walls of your mind.

Read.

Absorb.

Enjoy.

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## **Whispers**

*by Levi Krain*

Every morning, he looks for her in the bathroom mirror. Dimly seen, her luxuriant hair frames an ivory grin.

At noon, his office phone rings. It's only whispers, barely audible except for the sweet tone of her soft voice.

In the evening, she stares out the kitchen window, shoulders trembling, and stands in the shadows of the living room, eyes round, mouth set firmly.

At night, he curls up, eager for morning's glimpse. Tries to keep his eyes off the wet form by the bed. Tries to ignore her bulging eyes, grey skin, the seawater leaking from her slack mouth.

*Author bio: Levi Krain rose from a clear, cold northern lake and enveloped a small American city. Since then, he has moved on to bigger and better things and now resides in the heart of New England where he spins tales and refuses to drink the water from the well.*

*Twitter: @LeviKrain.*

## **Retribution**

*by Shannon Bell*

I run my fingers through the dust that has settled on these forgotten things, in this darkened room.

My soul is dry. Guilt spins memories like cobwebs in my mind. I remember their pain, their screams and their fear. I recall their torture, their blood, the taste of their deaths.

If only I had known their misery would fester within me, rupture inside me.

They see me, these shadows, these ghosts, these remnants of lives I slowly tore apart. They part the air and step through.

Lonely hearts. Broken minds. Emptiness. This damage cannot be fixed.

I await their vengeance.

*Author bio: Shannon Bell is addicted to words. You will find him madly writing away in the spare time he has available between holding down a full-time job, being part of a dysfunctional family and looking after his attention seeking dog. His stories have been published in Dark Edifice, Short & Twisted, 101 Fiction and strippedlit500. You can follow Shannon on Twitter at @ShannonBell1967.*

## **Stepmother**

by Serena Jayne

You inhabit every inch of the memory-infused home you begged our husband to buy.

I see you in our daughter. In ice-blue eyes. A stubborn tilt of chin. The way she smiles through tears after failing to conceive and deciding to adopt. Her inability to call me mom.

I hoped now she'd understand how, although she came from your womb, I love her as my own.

New toddler in tow, she cradles your ashes. "Elaine, meet your grandma."

I'm gutted.

The name on her lips, your name, marks the child yours alone.

You died, but I'm the one who's gone.

*Author bio: Serena Jayne received her MFA in Writing Popular Fiction from Seton Hill University, and is a member of Romance Writers of America and Sisters in Crime. She's worked as a research scientist, a fish stick slinger, a chat wrangler, and a race horse narc. When she isn't trolling art museums for works that move her, she enjoys writing in multiple fiction genres. While her first love is all things paranormal, the mundane world provides plenty of story ideas.*

*My social media links are as follows:*

*<https://www.facebook.com/SerenaJayneWriter/>*

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## **Spurned**

*by Sandra Davies*

I leave my husband's bed. Know the boards which creak, not to make hinges squeak. Leave the room.

Cold feet on damp stones, wet sand.

To the beach where Paul awaits me. Wraps me round inside his heavy greatcoat, rough grey wool across my throat, smell of earth and smoke.

I shiver. Mud to blood to thunder, shouts of men.

Paul murmurs a warning, "He is coming, he is coming."

Paul is no longer there.

My husband wraps me in a blanket. Tells me, "Paul is dead. I held him as he died. And promised him I'd care for you."

*Author bio: Sandra Davies eased herself from printmaking to writing when the wardrobe got full. Current passion is directed towards a series of novels best be described as love triangles with murder. Drabbles are practised weekly at The Prediction, links to which can be found via [sandra-linesofcommunication.blogspot.co.uk](http://sandra-linesofcommunication.blogspot.co.uk)*

## **Shadowgasp**

*by Joachim Heijndermans*

I wish I could be home, play the cello once more. Not in this trench, with Fritz poised to fire from the other side of No Man's Land. I would play. Oh, how I would play to my heart's content.

Men hurry past, uniforms slick with mud. Young Tommies, readying for the push, faces full of guts and fear. I reach out to stop them before they plunge into the maw of the war. No avail. Oblivious, they walk right through me. I sigh without breath. My shadowgasp.

How I wish I could be home, play the cello once more.

*Author bio: My name is Joachim Heijndermans. I am a writer and artist from the Netherlands. My work can be found at [www.joachimheijndermans.com](http://www.joachimheijndermans.com), as well as on Instagram at [joaheijndermans\\_art](https://www.instagram.com/joaheijndermans_art) and [@jheijndermans](https://twitter.com/jheijndermans) on twitter.*

## **Caught**

*by Holly Karlsson*

She slashes the rusted bayonet left, right, a wild flailing in the dark. She can hear her own breath, panting, hitching. Something is splattering against the walls with every swing of the broken steel. She's yet to realize it's her own blood, flying away from gashed palms.

He's laughing again, a delirious undulation of elation and rage, and the sound skitters across the back of her shoulders, her naked neck.

"Please, Will." She slashes again, sobs as she spins, meeting nothing.

He giggles wildly, soul caught along the bayonet's edge, mirroring her as she moves.

She clings to the blade.

*Author bio: Holly Karlsson is a storyteller and fervent mountain roamer. Her flash fiction can be found online at [hollyjkarlsson.com](http://hollyjkarlsson.com).*

## **Revenge**

*by Graeme King*

Listen up and I'll tell you what I saw:

Two men lying boot heel to boot heel by the side of the road.

The town's only road.

If you wanted to visit Chapel Knox, and some damned fools, like these two, did, you used the same stretch of sun-scorched mud coming as you did leaving.

If you left, that is.

They helped each other up, smacked the dust from their bloodstained clothes, left their bodies behind and went in search of the woman who'd put an end to their cruel, felonious lives with two upward slashes of her bone-handled dagger.

*Author bio: Twitter: @koebnig*

## **Highwayman**

*by David Lewis Pogson*

*'Christmas break. C18th Inn. Hampstead Heath. Highwayman tour.'*

No computing for him, no cooking for her.

Sam woke suddenly, de-hydrated. Snow-reflected moonlight filtered through the curtains. A glow from the bar beckoned.

The Landlord sat in a panelled booth. A tankard, chewing-tobacco and knife lay on the table before him.

"Help thissen." In his guide costume and still in character.

Sam sat opposite with his J20.

"Great performance today. Exaggerated for the punters? That Highwaymen, murder, gallows at the crossroads stuff?"

"Maybe so..." left hand unwinding the scarf revealing the rope-burn around his neck... "Maybe not..." knife in his right.

*Author bio: David Lewis Pogson lives in North Lancashire, England. His writing has been published in a variety of media. He is fiction writer for ACES 'The Terrier' magazine. Winner of the Cumbria Local History Federation Prize for 'The Ulverston Bank Clock' later published as a book, the Freerange Theatre Company's Playframe Short Story and Microcosmsfic.com Flash Fiction competitions.*

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## **Reflection**

*by Marie Anderson*

The aging beauty glares at the mirror. She opens a drawer. Removes the gun left behind by her man.

The mirror chuckles. "Guess he's cooking with fresher meat."

She points the gun.

The mirror jeers, "Age has tiered your peers into faraway condos where the living's assisted, or nursing homes where the living's resisted. Until Death spears all you old worms into caskets or urns."

**BANG!**

Shards of glass splinter from the aging beauty trapped in the mirror.

The beauty studies the shattered corpse. She shivers, smiles, then lets her memory-eyes surrender to the ghosts of her glorious, glorious youth.

*Author bio: Marie Anderson is a Chicago area writer. She's had 40 stories appear in various publications, including LampLight, Gathering Storm, Woman's World, Brain Child, St. Anthony Messenger, and most recently, Every Day Fiction. In her daily life, she strives for tidiness, timeliness, and simplicity.*

## **Hush**

*by Andy Myers*

The Duke maintains a stony expression, despite his secret terror.

“Surely you can hear it, Daddy,” says his daughter. “Where was it recorded, Beecham?”

“Library, ma’am. After the promotional film. A microphone was left on all night.”

They listen; a static hiss, then a sudden exhalation – a faint, pained murmur.

“What does she say?”

“Rubbish,” he insists.

“Ssh. It sounds like – He burned my bones. How odd.”

After they’ve gone, he listens again. A familiar voice, one he’s heard every night since he strangled her.

Her cold breath whispers in his ear again.

“Good try, darling,” he says, pressing delete.

*Author bio: I am a UK based writer who has had a number of short stories published in various publications. My YA Science Fiction Novel ‘The Ides’ is currently available through my website [anmyers.com](http://anmyers.com).*

## **Digital**

*by Laila Amado*

“You’ve reached Technical Support – virus, hacking, or possession?”

“Well, the browser freezes and there’s this music and the sound of static. It closes the files I’m working on and changes them, adds letters.”

“I can see an intrusion, but the trace... disappears. What do the letters say?”

The laptop’s on my bed, the eye of its webcam flashing. I go through the affected files and jot down the letters, keep searching. When I’m finished, my eyes are burning. The words on the paper quiver: “They are coming for you, Rabbit. Run.”

Only my brother called me Rabbit. My dead brother.

*Author bio: Laila Amado is a migrating researcher currently adjusting to life somewhere in Southern Europe. Writing flash fiction makes her happy. You can meet her @onbonbon7*

## **Curser**

*by Serena Jayne*

Curser was the perfect name for the blasted thing. Its blinking burrowed into Hannah's head, invading her dreams, and stealing every spare second.

It beat like a heart. Something alive. Something undead.

Into a fugue state she'd slide, losing time as well as smidgens of her sanity. The curser drew her in, becoming a gateway for the novel from hell to drag her in. Leach-like, the document drained her energy and spirit. She'd add words to the page, delete some, add more. The never-ending hamster wheel of revision.

"Bestseller," the ghost in the machine whispered.

Hannah believed its pretty lie.

*Author bio: Serena Jayne received her MFA in Writing Popular Fiction from Seton Hill University, and is a member of Romance Writers of America and Sisters in Crime. She's worked as a research scientist, a fish stick slinger, a chat wrangler, and a race horse narc. When she isn't trolling art museums for works that move her, she enjoys writing in multiple fiction genres. While her first love is all things paranormal, the mundane world provides plenty of story ideas.*

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*Twitter: @SJ\_Writer*

*Instagram: @jayneserenawriter*

*Website: serenajayne.com*

## **Pigeon**

*by Douglas Jensen*

“Take up your feathers; leave your bones behind.”

That was what my mother used to sing. When I first picked myself up off the roadside, the thunder of the tram already fading, I didn't know words like 'feather' and 'bone'. Those I plucked from the skull of a naturalist I found crawling the grounds of the museum. My voice I took from the Earl of Arundel who lies coiled around the feet of his own statue – even in death, human beings cling to the earth. But I remember my mother's song and I know the truth; that everything is sky.

*Author bio: Douglas Jensen is originally from Fife in Scotland and currently lives in Sheffield. He writes short stories and poems, and his story 'When Last We Spoke' was highly commended in the TSS Flash 400 Autumn competition. He has also written and drawn a number of self-published comics and zines. He can be found on twitter @thatdougjensen*

## **Lagoon**

*by Dennis Mombauer*

One more time, Nishan returned without catch.

The lagoon had changed with the sluice gate. Fish decayed on the sand, the white shrimp were gone, the shallows turned dark and treacherous.

Fog drifted as Nishan rowed back. He heard a voice both alien and familiar. It sang of deep, salt-strong waters, of a village with a blue temple. It sang of green fields and swarms of children running through them. It sang of tangled forests swaying in the breeze.

The fog cleared, and Nishan steered his boat toward the village. In the surrounding lagoon, dead fish floated on the waters.

*Author bio: Dennis Mombauer currently lives in Colombo as a freelance writer of fiction, textual experiments, reviews, & essays on climate change & education. Co-publisher of "Die Novelle – Magazine for Experimentalism". Publications in various small- to medium-sized magazines & anthologies. German novel publication "Das Maskenhandwerk" (The Mask Trade).  
Homepage: [www.dennismombauer.com](http://www.dennismombauer.com) | Facebook: [www.facebook.com/DMombauer](https://www.facebook.com/DMombauer)*

## **Salt**

*by Voima Oy*

A stone spoke to me on the beach, round and warm in my hand. It turned into a figure of sea breeze and mist.

I was a sailor, he said. Now I'm a ghost of a man. But once I knew a girl in Lisbon, brown eyes and short bobbed hair. What I wouldn't give to hold her again. I wanted our kisses to last forever. But that was years ago!

He touched me, and I could feel the salt on my face. I remembered the bright water in the sun, as my heart rose and fell with the waves.

*Author bio: Voima Oy lives on the western rim of Chicago, near the expressway and the Blue Line trains. Her writing can be found online at Paragraph Planet, 101 Fiction, Unbroken Journal, Vignette Review, Molotov Cocktail – Flash Worlds, Burning House Press, and The Cabinet of Heed.*

*Follow her on Twitter, too— @voimaoy and #vss365.*

## **Outside**

*by John Xero*

Greg woke to a touch on his shoulder, a voice in his ear.

“Something’s scratching at the window.”

Gentle illumination bloomed, responding to his movement. The clock showed his two hours’ sleep.

“Elliot,” he groaned. “No.”

“Please, Greg. Something’s outside, trying to get in.”

Greg hauled himself up, his brain dragging, still catching up on two weeks of long shifts and short sleeps. He went to the porthole, stared out into deep space, saw only the silent shine of distant stars.

“Nothing, always nothing.”

Reflections shifted in the porthole. Greg turned, but the bed, the room, was empty, always empty.

*Author bio: John Xero thinks all stories are the ghosts of things that have gone before; it’s the author’s job and skill to breathe new life into these echoes of old tales.*

*Old stories: [xeroverse.com](http://xeroverse.com) (and maybe some new stories, one day...)*

*Disembodied voices: [twitter.com/xeroverse](https://twitter.com/xeroverse)*

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Thanks for reading.

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