

101 Fiction

Issue 23

June 2019

Welcome to issue 23, our picture-themed issue: enter the gallery, take in the exhibition. We have nineteen images conjured in words for you to observe, to absorb, to witness... from photos to paintings, analogue to digital, the real world and far, far beyond.

There's everything you would expect from a picture-themed issue. Darkness and light; meaning and metaphor; shifting tones. The close-ups: the human stories, the deep horrors of real life, or the magic of a child's love, and the panoramas: universe spanning, space-travelling, reality warping weirdness and grandeur.

There's everything you would expect from an issue of 101 Fiction. Death and revenge, creation and destruction, a little weirdness, a little cold sober reality, magic, heartache and stars. Stories that really key into the modern age and resonate all the more deeply for it. Tales that delve into the shadows of the human soul and explore the infinity of colours that bind us all together.

But there's more: a wolf that stalks below the skin; a second chance, taken alone; memories adrift on a painted sea; a love leant eternity on canvas; images that steal a little more than light; an assortment of astronauts; brides without faces...

Read.

Absorb.

Enjoy.

Neuds

by Daniel Gooding

[do u wont 2 mete up?]

[can u send pics first?]

[...]

[Image file:]

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[what was that?]

[...]

[neuds]

[can u send again?]

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He hears the letterbox flap open. Lying on the floor is a mangled Polaroid, still wet from the developing fluid. As he picks it up, he tries to recall if Polaroids actually use fluid. Then he turns the picture over, and all other thoughts leak from his mind.

Something thuds heavily against his door, as if losing patience. His phone pings once more.

[OPN TH FUCKIN DOORE]

Author bio: Daniel Gooding was born in 1984, and his flash fiction stories "Chum", "Kindness" and "Seepier" have appeared previously in '101 Fiction'. He is also featured in the two latest anthologies by New Lit Salon Press, "Startling Sci-Fi: New Tales of the Beyond" and "First Came Fear: New Tales of Horror." He occasionally writes for The Guardian and currently lives in Bath, UK.

Snapped

by Shannon Bell

I look at this photo of my soul. It's blurry, shades of bitterness, anger and disappointment swirl like a vortex.

My light no longer shines. I am no one to nobody. I have nothing. I am nothing.

The bullet sits there, mocking me, my name scratched onto its cold surface.

Death watches me, loading the gun with my autographed cartridge.

"Please," I beg. "Take me. End this." The victim inside, it craves a tragic, beautiful ending.

That sweet angel of death, he strokes my cheek and smiles. "You're mine now. Death will unfuck you like life never could, my friend."

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.

Veils

by Joanna Koch

Norma Desmond and I go way back, trading husbands, settling scores. We've always been big. It's the insults that got small.

Hag heads bloom like black holes in your weddings albums, cigarette burns through white bridal sheets. Your cursor hovers over wives you've silenced by shoving more than cake in their mouths. Does a gentleman tag his ghosts? The technology's beyond you these days.

Hold your phone over a candle until hags melt into holes.

Norma and I come through curtains in close up, burned. You were the first and last to tear open our veils.

We had faces then.

Author bio: Author Joanna Koch writes literary horror and surrealist trash. Her short stories have been published in journals and anthologies such as Synth, Honey & Sulphur, and In Darkness Delight: Masters of Midnight. An artist and Contemplative Psychotherapy graduate of Naropa University, Joanna lives near Detroit. Follow her monstrous musings at horrorsong.blog.

Serpent

by Micah Harper

Weighted by the chains of pride and knowledge he sank into the darkened world to paint his final piece. He poisoned his fellow adepts and the master who had given him the knowledge of sin's power. He wasn't like they who allow the current to pull life to purpose. He would be the new will of reality. His fist the spark of life. As he finished painting the twelve-jewelled crown the horns of the golden dawn sounded in the third realm. He watched as the painting contorted. He saw as a pale man set the crown upon his horned head.

Author bio: Micah Harper is a writer from Queens New York, primarily writing horror and fantasy. When not writing, he enjoys baking cupcakes.

Odyssey

by Louis Cennamo

I am an observer now, eyes gradually adjusting to the shockwave as moving images coalesce. A spaceman lost in time, alone in a bedroom somewhere at the furthest edge of endless space. Defying logic, yet here I am.

I sense the flickering light vibrations of death and rebirth, amid rousing music from a source above my dying brain's fading perception. Still formless memory-snaps persist, of an insanely misguided quest – to seek an answer in the heavenly void of outer space.

Another timeless shockwave, a spaceman returning to a home he never left.

Journeying inward, unborn to newborn... requiem to fanfare.

Author bio: Louis Cennamo is a retired British musician, poet and creative writer. His international career as a bassist, and extensive spiritual practices over many years, contribute to a rhythmic, articulate and esoteric writing style. There is often a metaphysical theme to his poems and stories, many of which have been published in online magazines and printed anthologies. He lives in London.

Alone

by John Xero

My love is dead, while I hurtle through space in my tin can made for one, eking out rations in defiant futility. All that remains of her is an unflattering photo, pinned to my console, blurred through a filter of tears.

I watched the asteroid pass. The computer was right and I was intentionally wrong, an entire mission flawed by mistrust of the machine. The failure all mine; the final check, the final flight corrections made, by me, to save my own life.

Earth impact was four hours ago.

My love is dead.

I killed her.

I killed them all.

Author bio: John Xero writes tiny specks of distant light, bright enough to inspire ideas of other worlds and numerous enough to fill his hard drive with galaxies.

Stardust: twitter.com/xeroverse

Visible light: [instagram.com/johnxero](https://www.instagram.com/johnxero)

Universe: xeroverse.com

Impressions

by Phil Dyer

“This is ridiculous,” he says, squeaking a crayon peevishly across his faceplate.

“We’re not risking interstellar crisis for your ego,” I tell him, scrawling some final curls on my own helmet. “The Naur won’t speak to someone without a face. Self-expression is very important.”

“You’re sure the radiation-”

“It’s bad. Reflective visors only out there. Your eyes would boil.”

“Fine, done. Let’s get this over with.” We stand. We look like armoured clowns.

The Naur are also big on practical jokes. I nod to the others. Behind his back, we wipe our helmets clean and follow him onto the stage.

Author bio: Phil Dyer does medical research in Liverpool and writes spec fic on the side. His stories have appeared in Unfit Magazine, 101 Words and The Drabble. He retweets animal videos @ez_ozel.

Thousand

by A.F.E. Smith

From the shop window, it speaks to me: love and loss, beauty and despair, all caught on a single canvas.

A bell jangles as I walk in.

"How much for the painting in the window?" I ask.

The shopkeeper smiles. "It's worth what every picture is worth."

I hesitate, before nodding. It's a small price to pay.

He raises his hands to my temples, taking the thousand with a touch.

When I get home, I hang the painting on the wall. So perfect, the way it captures... those feelings...

But I can't name them. I no longer have the words.

Author bio: A.F.E. Smith is a fantasy author. You can find her on Twitter @afesmith or visit her website, www.afesmith.com.

Understudies

by Graham Scott

Carol's husband left her for a hairdresser just before her daughter went to camp.

"I'm okay," Carol told May. "I'm fine. Go have fun."

But when May looked out the bus window, her mother was shaking.

The camp's rec room has a box of stubby old crayons. May draws animals she sees and sends them home, touched by tears and kisses. These, Carol posts on the fridge.

Every night, the animals scamper down, and for two weeks, they do dishes, bring Carol breakfast, nestle with her on the couch.

They keep all of May's spots warm until she's home again.

Author bio: Graham Robert Scott has published science-fiction in Nature, horror in Barrelhouse, and tiny stories in 50-Word Stories and on his Twitter feed (@graythebruce). His personal website, hemicyon.wordpress.com, takes its name from the prehistoric bear-dog, a toothy hunter that couldn't make up its mind what it was. As a college professor by day and creative writer by night, Graham identifies.

Itch

by Lucy Billington-Murphy

She admired her new tattoo: a black wolf, fangs bared, eyes blood red.

"It'll itch," he said. His tattoos were all predators, bloody-jawed after the hunt.

She woke that night with an itch in her arm that practically burned but when she looked at it her skin was clean like the needle had never been there. Across the room, red eyes glowed and something in the shadows moved so suddenly she never even blinked.

The tattooist slept. An image stalked across his arm, like ink on wet paper. A black wolf with red eyes, clutching a head in its jaws.

Author bio: Lucy loves to write and is starting to explore micro-fiction, which she finds an interesting challenge. She has been published at The Story Seed Vault and amongst other things, likes photography, tea, cats and mythology. She can be found on twitter @Tea_Faerie

Appropriation

by Laila Amado

The artist came to town in September. He was quite a celebrity, his work evocative of early Picasso with its dancing shadows and splashes of ethereal light.

In the Arts School auditorium students crowded the stage, asking for autographs, offering to pose. She was thrilled when he chose her to sit for a portrait. After the first session, her roommate said she looked pale. After the second, the colour of her eyes dulled.

At the vernissage, the viewers praised the painting for its vibrant colours, its unique palette. Rumours were that the model had gone missing. Disappeared without a trace.

Author bio: Laila Amado has lived in four countries on two very different continents and is now settling into her new island life. A scientist by day, she is a writer of fiction and poetry by night. You can find her work in 365 Tomorrows, 101 Fiction, Enchanted Conversation Magazine, Gyroscope Review, and other publications. Follow her on Twitter at @onbonbon7

Airbrushed

by A.F.E. Smith

I stare at the photo. You. Her. Eyes creased in sunlight. Matching smiles.

My replacement is young. Beautiful. As flawless as a cover model.

Save. Open. Edit. A frenzy of clicks. She may be lovely, but I can make this picture perfect.

First her face. Erase. Replace with sky.

Extend the wall, one brick at a time, to conceal her body.

Reconstruct your arm, occluded by her shoulders. Try not to remember the strength of it. The safety.

Finally, I've finished. The photo shows you, alone. Happy. Embracing empty air.

Elsewhere, you wake with a start to find her gone.

Author bio: A.F.E. Smith is a fantasy author. You can find her on Twitter @afesmith or visit her website, www.afesmith.com.

Regret

by *E. M. Eastick*

The grown children greeted him cordially, curiously; a long-lost relative come to pay respects to their father, the family resemblance unmistakable – a familiar stranger.

The widow paled and reached for the photo frame perched on the coffin. Every detail was the same: the hair, the clothes, the casual smile. She remembered the day, a week before their wedding. They were young, in love and shamefully naïve.

“How?” she whispered, conscious of her age-torn face.

“Forgive me, dear.” He smiled sadly and turned for the door.

In her hands, the picture faded. Tears streaked the glass of wasted years. “I do.”

Author bio: E. M. Eastick is an Australian writer of no-fixed form or genre, whose creative efforts have appeared in The Literary Hatchet, Space Squid, and many fine anthologies.

Dearest

by Susi J Smith

The scars deforming me don't show, but I feel them, encasing my soul.

Each night hatred, revulsion, regret, battles fear, need, love. I watch out of uncurtained windows as night scurries into cracks and crevices. Constant nausea slims my frame, my clothes hang loose, unwashed. Photos of happy times mock me from my bedside and I rise to forage the empty kitchen.

In the living room my mother lies unconscious, her crack pipe on the bare floor. Her body jerks. Foam froths at her mouth then she stills. I pick up my school bag and head for the door, hopeful.

Author bio: Susi J Smith has been writing for over ten years and enjoys writing short stories and flash fiction. She is also a member of a local writing group. Susi has previously been published in 101Words.org, Zeroflash, and McStorrytellers. For more information, follow her on Twitter: @susi_moff or check out her Facebook page:<https://www.facebook.com/SusiJSmith/>

Disfigured

by Bob Thurber

This is Lola in black and white. The turtleneck accentuates the sharpness of her birdlike bones while concealing her bruised throat.

Here she is in colour with her hair pinned up, minus the shirt.

That blotchy discoloration runs ear to ear.

A physician informed us the ruptured blood vessels may never recover.

So Lola uses makeup to hide the fact I took too long to rescue her.

My penknife was sharp but the rope, fisherman grade, was coarse and thick. I had to work at an impossible angle, one-handed, while shouldering her weight.

Lola's lighter than a shadow.

But still...

Author bio: Bob Thurber is the author of "Paperboy: A Dysfunctional Novel" and the recipient of a long list of awards for short fiction.

Visit his website at www.BobThurber.net

See his books at: <https://www.amazon.com/Bob-Thurber/e/B004XPMPCO>

Afterlife

by John Xero

Languid sunlight oozed like honey through stained glass panels, coating the hallway, preserving lives in amber.

An oak-mounted barometer, fascinating, useless. A grandfather clock, pendulum still swinging when all other life had ceased. A painting: old troubled skies over a churning sea, one small vessel, two indistinct figures aboard.

Arthur imagined his grandparents still in the kitchen, pottering around, preparing tea and biscuits.

Saltwater spray kissed him. Wild currents dragged him under.

Cold drenched him, stole his breath. Weathered hands anchored him, pulled him from the convulsing sea, held him close as his grandparents' voices wrapped him like a blanket.

Author bio: John Xero believes all sorts of worlds and possibilities lie a simple sidestep away, if only you learn to step between the warp and weft of reality. After all, what are pictures if not windows, or perhaps doorways?

Thumbnails: twitter.com/xeroverse

Portraits: [instagram.com/johnxero](https://www.instagram.com/johnxero)

Landscapes: xeroverse.com

Disappeared

by Tami Orendain

The portrait of my missing wife sits against our bedroom wall. It's not quite finished yet. "It looks exactly like her," people say, "before she disappeared."

Whenever she looks unhappy, I've painted in things she likes. First, her favorite books. Then, our poodle. People think I gave the books and the dog away, but I didn't. I just painted them.

Yet she's lonely. She cries gloopy paint tears. There's only one thing left to add. I've already brought the mirror to the bedroom for reference. "I'm coming," I whisper, stroking my brush near her cheek. She shivers. "Be there soon."

Author bio: Tami Orendain is a Filipino-American writer who creates content for magazines (DisneyExaminer and SheLeadsDaily) and is carefully stepping into the world of fiction. By day she works for a children's hospital, and by night she stays up way too late reading and writing stories.

Tuscany

by Voima Oy

Light flashed on his ruby ring. *You make me look handsome*, he laughed. *I can see why you're the talk of Florence. Yes, I'd like another portrait. My new young wife.*

The new young wife was shy and obedient. She would meet him in the afternoons. *You have beautiful eyes*, he said.

My husband will be pleased with the portrait, she said. *Could you paint the background just for me? Paint the fields of Tuscany. Paint two lovers under a tree. Paint your name and mine in the leaves, and two birds flying free.* She smiled. *He will never know.*

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 VERStype, Unbroken Journal, Molotov Cocktail – Flash Worlds, The Cabinet of Heed, Burning House Press, Paragraph Planet and 101 Fiction.

Follow her on Twitter @voimaoy and #vss365

Landscapes

by T. L. Sherwood

My grandmother was a truly gifted oil painter, exceptional. She took a necessary day job to pay the rent and purchase supplies. From her notebooks, I learned to pool saliva on my tongue, wet the bristles, then pull it out from between pursed lips with a counterclockwise twirl. She learned this from one of her fellow workers, another artist already suffering from radium exposure. They sat in a stuffy factory applying meticulous lines to the faces of clocks. Grandmother's work lit up time in dark bedrooms, her body could trigger a Geiger counter, but her paintings, her paintings illuminated souls.

Author bio: T. L. Sherwood's work appears in Rosebud, New World Writing, and Vestal Review among other places. Her blog, "Creekside Reflections" can be found here: <http://tlsherwood.wordpress.com/>

Thanks for reading.

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