

101 Fiction

Issue 24

September 2019

Welcome to issue 24: A little library of tiny bookish tales. You'll find a different take on the book theme with every turn of the page, showcasing the breadth of imagination, creativity and humanity that has become the hallmark of 101 Fiction.

From dark dystopias to the modern home. Books born of death, to life crawling off the page. Heartache and heroes, oppression and introspection, magic and booze.

There's fire in this issue, in defiance, in defence, in books on the pyre. There's knowledge, and truth, and all the dangers they can bring. There are aching hearts, through loss and love. There are forests, real and unreal. Some of the stories metaphorically dissect humanity, others more literally. There are monsters raised from the page, others who look just like you and I. And, as with all books, there are characters doomed to retread the same paths again and again.

Books are worlds you can live in, and the best flash fiction feels like a world encapsulated, an open door you only need to walk through to be there in that other world. Here we have nineteen living worlds, just waiting for you to step into.

Read.

Absorb.

Enjoy.

Flourishing

by Phil Dyer

“Just give us a name,” said the judge, waving again at the three slim volumes of incendiary manifesto. His eyes were not unkind. “This doesn’t have to fall on you.”

The woman in the dock spread her hands as far as manacles allowed. “I found them. I’m just the gardener.”

They burned the books in a pit behind the gallows. The ash fell with the rain, trickling grey through soil stained with thwarted revolution.

The first shoots appeared unnoticed. Pale leaves unfurled towards the sun, their irregular markings maturing from scrawl to careful text. A breeze ruffled the nascent pages.

Author bio: Phil Dyer does medical research in Liverpool and writes spec fic on the side. His stories have recently appeared in BFS Horizons, 101 Fiction, and Black Hare Press. He retweets animal gifs @ez_ozel.

Derelict

by Susan Carey

I saw a down-and-out reading a book in the park. Men and women in black uniforms fell on him: ants devouring a moth.

That night I sleepwalked to the local library. Barefoot over sharp rubble. Picked up a trashy romance that had escaped the burn: Love Conquers All.

“I had to prise it from your fingers.” Daisy puts on black clothes and hugs me.

The photo of us on Venice Beach, after I proposed, leaves a dark silhouette on the album page. I tuck it into my breast pocket.

I leave in secret. Daisy will have told them by now.

Author bio: Angela Williams, who writes as Susan Carey, lives in Amsterdam where she teaches English as a second language and writes stories in between the more important jobs of dog-walking and dreaming of worldwide renown. She has had short stories and flash fiction published and performed by amongst others; Mslexia, Liars' League, Stringybark Publishing, Writers Abroad, Reflex Fiction, Flash Flood Journal and Casket of Fictional Delights.

Twitter: @su_carey

Blog: <https://amsterdamorirole.com/writing/>

Paperwings

by Ben Kutina

The word we used was 'paperwings.' The learned ones who knew the symbols soared in their thoughts through worlds lost to time. Our tribe called them miracles, others named them sorcery. Wars were fought, blood was shed. We lost, and now they burn.

They made us watch.

They brought us to the pyre, their mouths smiling, eyes weeping from the smoke and exultation. They called themselves liberators even as our freedom burned. Our feathers clipped, our paper wings reduced to cinder, scorched and scorned and soaring, now nothing more than ash and memory.

The dead should stay silent, they said.

Author bio: Ben Kutina is a fledgling writer and graduate of SUNY Geneseo living in Western New York. He has been an editor for Gandy Dancer and his writing has appeared in Odyssey.

Bride

by PK Abiodun

'Come here, let them see you.'

One fidgets, shivers a little, One is not ready for this. Does not like this. The whole ceremony of it all. One has read too much. And that is the problem.

'Come here, stand with your other sisters. Let him see you very well.'

One is paraded. Her hands akimbo, her chin up, her gown cut short, kissing her knee. One is presented.

'You see, too many books have spoiled her. But she will listen. Take your pick.'

One waits for his touch. Spits. One has read too much. And that is the problem.

Author bio: PK Abiodun is a storyteller who codes and creates machines that understand literature. He is a lover of irreconcilable arts and music that do not announce themselves. PK writes from Nigeria.

Ornamental

by Sean Gregory

A new leather bound book was put on the shelf every month. "They're not for reading," Mum told me. When she left the books stopped arriving.

I skipped school and opened *Brave New World*. The text small, paper translucent, I sponged up the words. Next I took Shakespeare's Comedies and read *The Tempest*.

Dad came home to find books scattered. His eyes raging, I read aloud, "'Words can be like X-rays if you use them properly—'". He snatched the book off me, but I had memorised the whole page. "'They'll go through anything,'" I quoted, "'You read and you're pierced.'"

Author bio: Sean Gregory is a writer from the North of England.

Biography

by David Ford

The masterpiece it had taken him a lifetime to write was lying forgotten in the bottom of a drawer.

“Books you say,” he tapped the half empty bottle beside him. “They are more addictive than the booze. I would'na drink if I could write. My life has been a library of little hurts.”

He got up off the steps and staggered towards the park. He did not say goodbye. Later, I found him asleep on a bench, the familiar hand holding a battered old paperback he'd found in some bin.

That was the last time I ever saw my father.

Author bio: David Ford has published short stories and reviews in magazines. A collection of poems has been published by the Happenstance Press. He lives in London.

Dedicated

by Serena Jayne

You wrote the novel for “the one who got away” as though your lover’s heart simply sprouted wings and flew from its cage. Vanity overcomes reason and I, for one blessed moment, allow myself to believe I’m the beloved treasure you mourn losing. A never-ending pain you need to numb. An absence that shreds your soul.

The fragile construct of my delusion collapses and sorrow crushes my joy, for I never escaped. My desiccated heart remains entombed within your stronghold, cobweb-covered and cursed; forlorn and forgotten. I will be forever dedicated to you, yet your dedication, as always, lies elsewhere.

Author bio: Serena Jayne received her MFA in Writing Popular Fiction from Seton Hill University. Before becoming a writer, she 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. Her short fiction and poetry has appeared in Crack the Spine Literary Magazine, the Oddville Press, 101 Fiction, Switchblade Magazine, and other publications.

Makeover

by Raymond Sloan

The man took the present from his son. He looked at it for a long time, holding it in both hands. The boy watched his father, awaiting his gratitude.

“It’s great, Son. Thank you.”

The boy smiled, then took off.

After he left, the man switched it on, familiarised himself with the device – checked out the menu, the preloaded titles, the light it gave. He smelt it before switching it off. Sat it beside the box it came in.

His wife appeared in the doorway, holding a furniture catalogue, looking toward his packed bookshelves.

“All that lovely space,” she said.

Author bio: Raymond has been writing on and off for the past two years. He lives in Ireland with his wife, daughter and dog, Dolly. He has had a few pieces published online and is tweaking the ones that didn't quite make it.

Sanctuary

by Danielle Keiko Eyer

Dorothy Parker visits me every night in the basement of a bar.

I say, "You're late."

She says, "You're drunk."

A whisky sour slides into her hand. She sips. I sip.

I say, "Are you a ghost or hallucination?"

She says, "If you stopped drinking, you might find out."

She sips. I sip. I open a book. *The Best of Dorothy Parker*.

She says, "Stop reading and write your thesis already."

I say, "I'm too drunk."

She says, "How else are people going to remember me?"

I say, "We're too similar. Haunt someone else."

She says nothing. She's gone. Again.

Author bio: Danielle Keiko Eyer is an emerging writer, playwright, and stage manager based in Montreal, Canada. She has had writing published in anthologies by the Poetry Institute of Canada and Dreamspinner Press, as well as having been published in local journals such as Montréal Writes Literary Magazine. Roman Payne said that "all forms of madness, bizarre habits, awkwardness in society, general clumsiness, are justified in the person who creates good art." Luckily, Danielle benefits from every one of these.

Twitter: @DanielleKEyer

Cookbook

by Allen Ashley

I purchased a recipe book in a second-hand emporium on Charing Cross Road. The mouth-watering concoctions consisted of a variety of pies and pasties but, curiously, the author, a Mrs Lovett, had not specified whether one should use pork, beef, rabbit or venison. I ascertained that her culinary establishment was just a short carriage ride away in Fleet Street. Alighting fifteen minutes later, I was disappointed by the "Closed" sign on her door. Rich smells exuded from beneath as if bringing my clutched cookbook to life. I determined to enquire at the barber's next door. Get a shave while here.

Author bio: Allen Ashley works as a creative writing tutor and is the founder of the advanced science fiction and fantasy group Clockhouse London Writers. He is the sole judge for the annual British Fantasy Society Short Story Competition. www.allenashley.com

Snuggles

by TM Upchurch

She turned the pages, 'Once upon a time...' her fingers felt for the edges, twisting, sliding, brushing the paper aside as the words rounded the corner, 'there were aliens who came to Earth and ate the mothers, all up, from the inside, except for the skin.' Her eyes skimmed left, right, left, 'No one knew if the mothers died, because the aliens left the skins intact, and lived within them. They moved a little jerky, paused occasionally, but they still looked, smelled, and felt the same.'

Her fingers faltered, found themselves, 'And they all,' she whispered, 'lived happily ever after.'

Author bio: TM Upchurch lives and writes in a small house overlooking the Atlantic. Her fiction has been published in print and online, and shortlisted for the Bridport Prize, Bath Flash Fiction Award, and HISSAC short story competition. She is working on her first novel.

Twitter: @tmupchurch

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Catalyst

by J.S. Myth

“How much will you ponder upon it?” the old archivist pushed the book in front of the young mage.

“So, will you have it or not?”

“That is no easy question. On the one hand, I will take this book and fulfil a destiny. On the other...” his eyes lingered on the heavy leather cover. “I have seen where this could lead. Cities turning upside down, lamp lights becoming pyres, seas falling from the skies...”

“So you’ve seen it. Does it mean it will happen?”

The mage touched a page, felt the earth shudder beneath him.

“It has already begun.”

Author bio: J.S. Myth is an author and a theatre director preoccupied with the interdisciplinary value of art. She perceives fantasy as being intertwined with reality and she believes in the importance of artistic expression in the process of changing the world.

<https://www.amazon.com/Notes-conquest-J-S-Myth-ebook/dp/B07T6CGHJB/>

Bookwyrn

by John Xero

Oscar walks the high library walls, reassured by the strike of his armoured feet on strong stone. Forty feet below, the undulating treetops shift like the seas of his homeland and his heart aches.

A susurrations breaks his reminiscence: the whisper of pages in the wind – wing beats. He looks up.

Her hide is leather-bound, gold-edged. Her hundred tails are ribbons of rainbow silk. Her eyes reflect his inner self and her voice is a thousand voices.

“Give/return/surrender me/l/my eggs/children/books.”

Oscar braces himself and raises his flickering torch, meagre fire against the mighty bookwyrn.

Author bio: All stories are eggs that hatch in your soft wet brain space; the strongest, the fittest, dig deep and live there a while. John Xero lays a lot of little eggs, but one day... one day, he dreams of bigger things.

The nest: xeroverse.com

The tweets: [@xeroverse](https://twitter.com/xeroverse)

Chimera

by Liz Tuckwell

'I was paper and ink,' I tell the pathetic human cowering in the abandoned library, 'until a sorcerer spelled me into flesh and blood.'

Sunlight streams through the ragged oilcloth at the windows. The foolish humans think me nocturnal. They have tried many times to spell me back into the bestiary. I can smell them over the mustiness. They have always failed. I hear someone by my nest of books and bones. A tiny whoosh. Paper catching alight. Blue-gold flames lick the pages, burn my skin, which blackens and cracks. My flesh smokes and my veins are molten agony. I...

Author bio: Liz Tuckwell is a British science fiction and fantasy writer, living in London. She's recently had a short horror story "A Monster Met" published by Demain Publishing and a short story in the anthology "MCSI: Magical Crime Scene Investigations". Her stories have been published in 101 Fiction and Speculative 66. Follow her on Twitter @liztuckwell1. Or have a look at www.liztuckwell.co.uk.

Peeled

by Shannon Bell

Georgia held the piece of skin up to the light. "Will it all be this translucent?"

"Of course."

"So paper-thin and see-through. Your knife skills are exquisite."

"Thank you."

"Such delicate bones." Georgia stroked the girl's hand, held up the fingers. "Can you carve quills from these?"

"Absolutely."

Georgia dipped her finger into the gore pooling around the girl's leg, brought it to her lips, curled her tongue around it. "Can ink be brewed from her blood?"

"Most definitely."

"What beautiful books we'll make from you." Georgia fingered the girl's creamy thigh. "What stories we'll tell now yours has ended."

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.

Bound

by Rachel Wallach

The spine cracked open, revealing a world she would never know. Trapped inside the musings of someone else's mind, the young girl felt violated by grimy, freshly licked fingers and scarred by the folded edges of delicate corners.

Forced into a life inside oily, prose-filled pages, it pained her to consider those desolate chapters home. The girl was doomed to relive the same exposition, climax, conflict, and resolution under their gleeful, prying eyes.

Bound to a two-dimensional prison, she longed for someone to rip her from the binding and set fire to every single word.

What a cruel, never-ending sentence.

Author bio: Rachel Wallach is a communications professional in New York, who likes to write. Her story Aflame was previously published in 101 Fiction.

Forest

by John Xero

He woke in darkness, the only sound a dry whisper as of a gentle breeze disturbing dead leaves. He had the impression of slim trunks surrounding him, stretching upwards, he could only assume into a night sky though he saw no stars, no moon. The trees, if they were, stretched in every direction; for further than he could imagine, he felt sure.

Words wound through the whisper. "You read the black book. You were warned."

He remembered the librarian – so thin he looked ill – and the warning. But what choice had he, than to seek the book that ate souls?

Author bio: All good books steal a little of your soul, don't they? But they give back so much. John Xero's forest is full of life and very distracting, with too many interesting looking paths to wander down.

The librarian: @xeroverse

The library: xeroverse.com

The bestiary: instagram.com/johnxero

Familiar

by Grove Koger

"It looks familiar," I said, staring at the faded cover. "I'm sure I owned a copy as a child, but something's a little... off."

We'd gotten into town an hour before, checked into our hotel and set out to reconnoitre, even though it was the siesta. Everything was closed, but a cart of dusty stock had been left outside the door of the old shop.

Puzzled, I opened the book to the first page and started reading: *"It looks familiar," I said, staring at the cover. "I'm sure I owned a copy as a child, but something's a little... off."*

*Author bio: Grove Koger is the author of *When the Going Was Good: A Guide to the 99 Best Narratives of Travel, Exploration, and Adventure* (Scarecrow Press, 2002) and Assistant Editor of *Art Patron Magazine* and *Deus Loci: The Lawrence Durrell Journal*. He blogs at worldenoughblog.wordpress.com.*

Rereading

by Tom O'Brien

"This passage..." Herve said, holding up the dog-eared paperback. He pinched the air in front of him, as if to release the essence of the word he needed. "...It sings."

I waited while he found it again on the page, then listened as his sonorous voice read. He was right. The words were wise, succinct, poignant and droll.

I remembered, though he didn't, when he'd read them to me before; two hours ago. And yesterday. And the first time, forty-seven years ago, from loose typed pages scattered across our bed, when he woke me to read what he'd just written.

Author bio: Tom O'Brien is an Irishman living in London. He's been published in numerous places across the web and has short stories printed in Blood & Bourbon, Blink-Ink and DEFY! Anthologies. His novella-in-flash Straw Gods was shortlisted by Ellipsis Magazine in their publication competition.

He's on twitter @tomwrote and his website is www.tomobrien.co.uk.

Thanks for reading.

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