

THE
JEFFREY 
ARCHER

— SHORT STORY CHALLENGE —
Collection



The Jeffrey Archer Short Story Challenge Collection

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The stories in this anthology are works of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

Cover Photography & Design: Scarlett Rugers (<http://www.scarlettrugers.com/>)

Introduction

Last year, Jeffrey Archer came to visit the 3-month Novel-Writing course at the Curtis Brown Creative writing school. He read the students his 100-word story ‘Unique’ and explained to them how, even in only 100 words, you can create a whole narrative arc – a proper story with a beginning, a middle and an end. He set them the homework of writing their own 100-word story, and chose a winner from the rather wonderful stories that they wrote.

We were so thrilled, this year, to have the chance to turn Jeffrey’s favourite 100-word story writing exercise into an international competition, thanks to the inspiration and energetic work from the Kobo Writing Life team. Around 1000 people sent in their stories, all of which were read by Kobo, who selected the 20 best to appear in this ebook. We’re sure you’ll agree there are some real gems here!

Jeffrey Archer has now also read these 20 stories and chosen his favourites. He will be announcing the three winners at the London Book Fair on 15th April. There’s then a further stage to this competition: Those three winning writers will have the chance to send the 3,000 word opening from a novel-in-progress to Curtis Brown’s team of literary agents, who will provide a detailed written report on their work. And one of these three will be selected by Curtis Brown as the overall winner and offered a place on our forthcoming online novel-writing course, with fee paid for in

full by Kobo.

Curtis Brown Group Limited is one of the world's leading literary and talent agencies, representing authors, playwrights, film and television writers and directors, theatre directors and designers, television and radio presenters and actors. We launched our creative writing school in May 2011 to help talented new writers shape their novels and learn about today's publishing industry.

Courses are taught by bestselling authors, top publishers and the Curtis Brown agents. Most of our courses are run from our London offices, but later this year we will be running our first online course to reach aspiring writers across the globe. We are delighted to have partnered with Kobo Writing Life for the Jeffrey Archer Short Story Challenge, and also for the new Kobo Writing Life Scholarship, which provides places on three of our upcoming courses for writers without the financial means to attend as fee-paying students. To find out more about Curtis Brown, Curtis Brown Creative and the Kobo Writing Life Scholarship, please visit our websites:

www.curtisbrowncreative.co.uk

www.curtisbrown.co.uk

Anna Davis

Director, Curtis Brown Creative

London, 21 March 2013

One of the most satisfying elements of my position at Kobo is not only working with writers, but to watch how their careers evolve and grow. And whether the author comes to Kobo Writing Life with experience from traditional publishing or this is their first venture into seeing their work available, there are so many interesting and fascinating ways by which different authors embrace that “DIY” spirit. Often, just watching how authors approach ePublishing is a great learning experience for those of us driving the Kobo Writing Life platform.

An additional thrill about working in this area is being able to partner with kindred spirits in the publishing industry (folks like Curtis Brown Creative), and collaborating to create great offers and contests geared toward two main goals: helping writers become better at their craft and helping writers become better at the business of writing.

Sometimes, becoming better at the business involves not just easy access to tools, services and analytics, but making connections within the industry – and that is why a contest like The Jeffrey Archer Short Story Challenge Collection, provides both craft and business exposure.

Asking writers to submit a complete self-contained story arc within a 100 word construct certainly helps challenge their storytelling and writing skills. And the opportunity to potentially have their work read by a Curtis Brown's literary agent as well as the renowned Sir Jeffrey Archer is an amazing opportunity for a writer that could lead to the break they have been looking for.

Of course, the other great opportunity here isn't for the writers, or for Curtis Brown or for Kobo. The other great opportunity is for you, the reader. Collected here are what two panels of judges felt were the very best of the stories submitted for this contest. Among them, three will be shortlisted and one will be chosen as the winner. But I would argue that, regardless of who ends up being "chosen" the real winner at this moment, is you.

What you have before you are micro stories you can enjoy in short moments stolen specifically for reading; perhaps as part of a public transit commute, or even in line at the grocery store – or maybe during a coffee or tea break in your work day or during your post work day time spent sitting down and relaxing with a good read.

No matter how you choose to enjoy the stories collected here, the possibility always exists that you will discover an author whose work speaks to you, and whose writing you choose to seek out and read more of – because, for all we know, one of the talented writers whose works grace this eBook might become an author

whose writing you continue to treasure and whose career you follow for years to come.

For all of these reasons, I am delighted that Kobo Writing Life and Curtis Brown Creative collaborated in this way, and invite you to enjoy this fine collection.

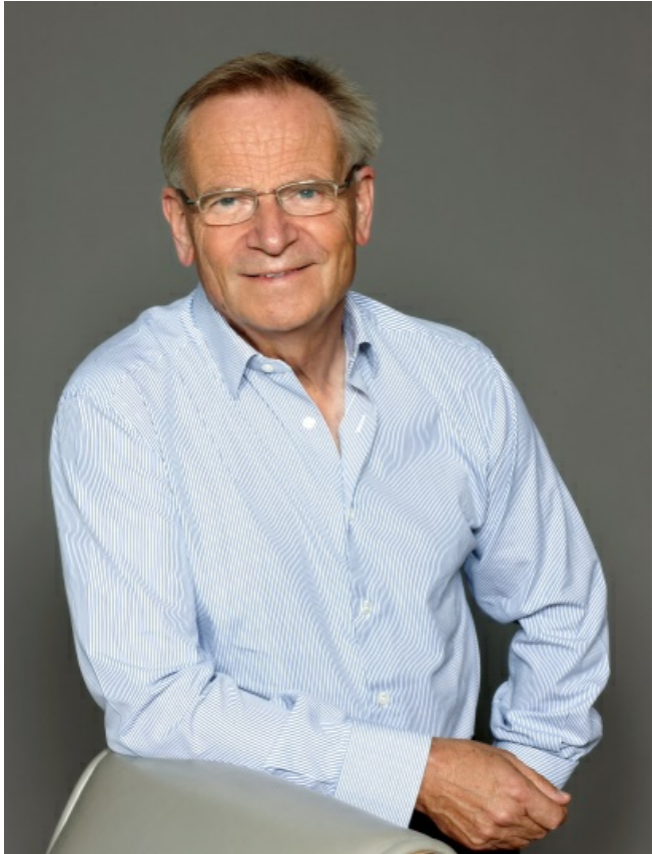
Mark Lefebvre

Director, Self-Publishing & Author Relations

Kobo, Inc.

An Example from Jeffrey Archer's Pen

What better way to kick off this collection than to include a story from Jeffrey Archer himself, who enjoys using the 100-word story challenge as an exercise when teaching elements of writing to students.



www.jeffreyarcher.com

Jeffrey Archer has topped the bestseller lists around the world, with sales of over 270 million copies in 97 countries and more than 37 languages of his sixteen novels, six collections of short stories, three plays, three children's books, three volumes of his prison diaries and a Gospel. He is the only author ever to have been a number one bestseller in fiction (fifteen times), short stories (four times) and non-fiction (*The Prison Diaries*).

He gained a Blue in Athletics at Oxford, was President of the University Athletics Club, and went on to run the 100 yards in 9.6 seconds for Great Britain in 1966. Jeffrey has served five years in the House of Commons and twenty years as a Member of the House of Lords.

His latest novel *Best Kept Secret*, published in March 2013, is the third volume in a five book saga called *The Clifton Chronicles*. Volume one, *Only Time Will Tell*, and volume two, *The Sins of the Father*, both went to No.1 in hardback on the Sunday Times Bestsellers list and around the world.

Jeffrey is also an art collector and amateur auctioneer, conducting around 30 charity auctions a year which have raised more than fifteen million pounds in the last ten years.

Jeffrey has been married to Dame Mary Archer for 46 years, and they have two sons.

Follow Jeffrey on [Facebook](#) and Twitter @Jeffrey_Archer

Unique

By Jeffrey Archer

Paris, March 14th, 1921

The collector relit his cigar, picked up the magnifying glass and studied the triangular

1874 Cape of Good Hope.

‘I did warn you there were two,’ said the dealer, ‘so yours is not unique.’

‘How much?’

‘Ten thousand francs.’

The collector wrote out a cheque, before taking a puff on his cigar, but it was no longer alight. He picked up a match, struck it, and set light to the stamp.

The dealer stared in disbelief as the stamp went up in

smoke.

The collector smiled. 'You were wrong, my friend,' he said, 'mine is unique.'

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The Semi-Finalists

Roger Noble



<http://www.rogernoble.net>

In my formative years I spent several years living on a kibbutz in the Upper Galilee. That's where I really started writing - though I thought of it as a quirk. When I moved to Jerusalem, I studied Psychology, and worked in a language school. In what was then a

very mixed city I met a huge crowd of different characters. Writing then was a sort of record keeping activity.

Returning to England I got married and had kids. Writing grew into story-telling. I trained as a clinical psychologist, and writing was an avoidance activity. In Brighton, working in services for people with learning disabilities, writing was a way of expressing my anger.

When I researched my doctoral thesis on logic programming, writing was a displacement activity. Dragged back into clinical psychology, in an increasingly chaotic NHS, I began to realise that I was actually a writer. Eventually, recognising that fact, I enrolled on the National Academy of Writing Diploma course.

Since then I have edited an anthology, completed a volume of my short stories, written a couple of books about family history and completed a novel. Thus my mind is wondering and wandering - and new ideas cohere. I am working on my next novel, and editing the next selection of short stories.

Coda

By Roger Noble

The Great Writer was dying. Around him, his family waited, wondering. Where was his final manuscript? But he could see only the shadows – his Creations. Rudy, the flawed hero, and Louis, the self-obsessed villain. They also waited. Concerned.

‘Don't worry,’ the Great Writer whispered. ‘You'll all be there. In the pages.’

The Physicals shuddered. Surely not the real story?

The Great Writer died, and the Physicals and the Creations shuffled off to search for the manuscript.

Louis found it, and destroyed it.

But Rudy smiled. He knew the story by heart. And he went off to find another author.

Damnait Monaghan



<http://www.writeitdownith.wordpress.com>

Born and raised in Canada, Damnait moved to the United Kingdom 12 years ago. A former teacher and lawyer, she recently

completed a Masters in Creative & Critical Writing at Winchester University. Her stories have appeared in Word Gumbo and Vortex. She is currently working on her first novel.

Changes

By Damhnait Monaghan

Since the move to the city, you've changed. True, the upkeep is expensive, but the blonde highlights lift your mousy hair, while the manicures and pedicures lift your spirit. These days, you wear pencil skirts and silk blouses, not faded jeans. All that waxing is a killer, but you're worth it. You even found a shop that carries heels for wide feet.

On the outside, you're an attractive, confident woman. But, you know better. Back at the flat, when you shut the door and kick off your heels, you see what others don't. You're still the same bloke from Devon.

Tanaz Bhathena



<http://tanazb.wordpress.com/>

Tanaz Bhathena writes Middle Eastern and South Asian fiction. Her work has appeared in literary journals such as Blackbird, Witness, Room and Asia Literary Review. She is currently working on a novel.

Born in An Indian Village

By Tanaz Bhathena

I thought of the ayahs the day she was born. Vengeful city maids who pressed pillows over newborns, snuffing the life out of them for not getting a raise. Some did not even need the pillows. They used their hands alone, palms hardened by floor and steel, squeezing gently, holding firm, imprinting their fingers into a baby's soft skull.

I looked at my own hand, the fingers long and knobby, the span of my palm nearly as wide as the face of the daughter I held in my lap – the third my husband would bury alive – strung to me for now with a dark blue cord, her eyes still closed.

Sue Burns



<https://www.facebook.com/susan.burns.351756>

<http://www.twitter.com/@Sburnsauthor>

As first-time novelist, I have been a writer all my life, though my writing was limited to the telling of other's stories for a very select readership. My work as a paralegal for 25 years in both family law and criminal fields have allowed me to fine-tune my love of story-

telling, taking true events and painting authentic pictures for my readers with the client's unique voice. I am currently working on my second novel.

Conquering Fear

By Sue Burns

The darkened hallway beckoned her to come, pulling her down its narrow passageway until, finding the doorway, she shuddered from the uneasiness creeping up her spine. Reaching stealthily, she willed her fingers to move as she reached inside the door-frame, just as a cold breath drifted across her shoulders and fear turned her six-year-old heart to stone. She closed her eyes tight for it was right behind her, breathing down her neck. Hoping the only thing that could save her was within her grasp, she reached and then smiled knowingly as the switch moved, her monster again vanquished by light.

Kate Harris



<http://www.facebook.com/quinn.tyrell>

http://www.twitter.com/TGI_QT

When told to write a book's sequel for a school project, Kate

trimmed the pages, designed a cover and sewed it together. She didn't come top of the class. When her schoolmates became doctors, she wrote basketball articles. When her brother left school, instead of writing a card, she wrote him a book.

Kate Harris lives in Essex with her parents, a freakishly intelligent cat, and an owl that doesn't match the intelligent stereotype. She has never seen an episode of TOWIE.

Heat

By Kate Harris

Her boss was still inside.

Even from the fire assembly point, she could feel the flames against her cheeks.

She could still feel his touch against her skin, the feel of his lips...
Her knees gave way.

'Poor dear,' said a somewhat distant voice. It reached her ears as a colleague's hand fell onto her arm. 'She's in shock.'

As flames swallowed the building, she felt lighter. Tearful hysteria gave way to relieved sobs, in turn melting into a gentle chuckle. Her fists unclenched. The charred match fell to the floor.

She'd warned that pervert about his wandering hands...

YK Kim



YK Kim is an unpublished author. This is the first piece that she has submitted to a competition. She is a graduate of Harvard College, and is currently pursuing her law degree at Oxford.

Untitled

By YK Kim

She got on the train. A man ambled over and sat down beside her. She placed her hands on her lap. He placed his left hand on her knee. She felt his eyes search her body, like dirty fingers, peeling.

She slowly lifted her right hand, and placed it neatly on his fat knee.

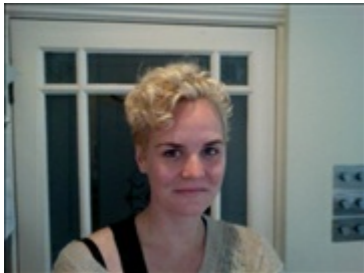
She massaged it, kneaded it like dough.

“Don’t you scream now,” she said.

The man stood up quickly and ran out of the carriage.

She smiled to herself, checked her watch, reached into her bag, pulled out her glasses, and then her knitting.

Phoebe Stubbs



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<http://pcstubbs.com>

I am a visual artist, editor and writer. I have edited several books on art and design with Black Dog Publishing, including *Material Matters: New Materials in Design*, and now work on several independent arts publishing projects. I write fiction as part of my own artistic process and am now working on my first novel, *Red*, which I hope to finish this year.

Red Light Game

By Phoebe Stubbs

For some time he had been practising the art of asking his mother a difficult question as they were nearing a changing traffic light. Timed just right, she would turn for a moment to answer him. If the question was complicated enough, she would close her eyes for a fraction, take one hand off the steering wheel and hold her breath. He felt he had the power to pause her.

This time: “Does Dad love you?”

The fast rolling car slipped them under the red light. Squinting at it, his heart thumped in his throat. The winner.

Patsy Collins



<http://www.facebook.com/PatsyCollins.writer>

<https://twitter.com/PatsyCollins>

<http://patsy-collins.blogspot.co.uk/>

Patsy Collins began writing in 2001. Her first success was in 2002 with a 40 word story, for which she won a book token and tea with the Mayor of Gosport. Since then she's won dinner in the House of Commons, a Greek translation of one of her stories, cheques, a kobo and publication of her romantic novel, 'Escape to the Country'.

Patsy's short stories (200+ to date) have appeared in a range of UK, Irish and Australian publications and many of these are available to download from Alfie Dog Fiction.

When she's not writing, Patsy tends her allotment, travels with her husband in their campervan acting as his photographic assistant, and eats cakes. Patsy's blog gives details of free to enter writing competitions. She chats about writing and her other interests and would love you to visit.

Out for Revenge

By Patsy Collins

He dumped her. OK, that happens but he didn't do it gently, privately. He humiliated her. Publicly, nastily. A mistake.

She's now a women scorned: showing her fury. She must have

revenge. He must die.

How?

Accident, murder, cancer, volcano, suicide? Nothing is beyond her control. She will watch him ugly with pain, degraded, begging forgiveness.

Or maybe she won't. Perhaps he'll just vanish without trace. Will he be missed and mourned, or quickly forgotten as though he'd never existed? It doesn't matter; he won't ever be back.

When you're a soap actor, you must never, never upset the scriptwriter.

Timothy Reynolds



<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Tim-Reynolds/19479122503>

<https://twitter.com/TGMReynolds>

"Tim Reynolds is a Canadian 'twistorian', bending and twisting historical facts into fictional shapes for sheer entertainment. His stories range from lighthearted fantasy to turn-on-the-damned-lights-now horror. His latest publishing credits include a short tale of a dying folk singer trying to teach Death a love song, and a story of a bus driver who kills all his passengers, for the good of mankind.

Temper Temper

By Timothy Reynolds

Leon slammed the spade's blade into the dirt cellar floor. "Hack *my* Facebook account will she? Bitch! No wonder Dad ran off with the babysitter-slash-cheerleader when I was ten."

The pile of dirt grew. A car door banged shut. He dug faster, mumbling. "I'll kill her, bury her, hack *her* Facebook account, and make it look like she's travelling." The shovel hit something hard. "What the hell?" He brushed off dirt. In the dim light it looked like two skulls and a pompom.

"Whatcha doing, Honey?"

Leon spun at the sound of his mother's voice, but not fast enough.



I'm an eye surgeon at Temple St Children's hospital by day and for many years I've also been writing by night. I'm extensively published in the academic world with more than 30 scientific peer-reviewed papers and contributions to four multi-author books. I've written an award winning popular science blog (www.journeybystarlight.com) which has been developed into a science book for young adults in the style of a graphic novel - 'Journey by Starlight - A time traveller's guide to life, the universe and everything' published in 2013 by One Peace Books.

My first novel 'The Reluctant Cannibals' was one of the winners of the 2012 Irish Writers' Centre Novel Fair competition. I am working on my second novel and have a growing collection of growing collection of rather macabre food related short stories provisionally titled, 'Deliciously Dark'.

Faithful Beyond Human Fidelity

By Ian Flitcroft

I knew Amelia was sick. I could smell it. The dark, shining green scent of death. I couldn't believe HE could just sit there on the sofa beside us and do nothing. I tried to tell him. You'd think he didn't care. I've always loved her more than he ever could. When he finally got her to the doctor it was too late. Now she's dead, he's got himself a new woman. That's the problem with you humans. You don't know what faithful means and you don't listen when a

dog has something important to say.

Robert Maslen



Robert Maslen is a writer and linguist from Yorkshire. His short-short stories have appeared in *Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine*, the *Bridport Prize Anthology* and *The Frogmore Papers* (this autumn).

Voices

By Robert Maslen

Never date a ventriloquist, I mean never.

Okay, first couple of weeks, there's a novelty. Soup complains to the waiter, the dog squatting in the park asks for *Sports Illustrated*. Funny.

And bed, voices from every which way, like banging the Cleveland Browns. I had worse.

But it wears thin. Then at Uncle Arty's funeral, he does the little voice coming out of the box. And pandemonium. That did it.

Ventriloquists? Trust me, steer clear.

New guy? Fixes high voltage cables wearing chain mail, way up, half a mile or something. Guy like that, you know where you are.

Ian Madden



Ian Madden's short fiction has appeared in the Edinburgh Review, Wasafiri and several anthologies including the Bridport Prize. In 2010 he was awarded first prize in By Invitation Only: A Collection of Short Stories published to mark National Short Story Week. Earlier in 2013 he won a place on the Escalator Scheme at the Writers' Centre Norwich.

The Injured Party

By Ian Madden

Biddy ambles from the riverbank to the bridge and drops something else into the river. This plops rather than plashes, but is satisfying all the same.

She had remained surprisingly calm when it dawned. His unaccustomed deliberation over those precious cuff-links before going out should have been clue enough. Now here she is, the mother of two grown-up children, giggling on her way round town wondering if, when he discovers one of each set is missing, he will own up. Or just act the injured party?

That's a matter for the future. For now, she has spotted a drain grate.

Ann Bremer



Ann Bremer is the mother of six children and an aspiring novelist. She was a contributor to the book *Gifts: Mothers Reflect on How Children with Down Syndrome Enrich Their Lives* and was a semi-finalist in the 2012 Notes & Words essay contest.

Priorities

By Ann Bremer

Cold, dark and gray. His face the same color as the sky. Penzy didn't want him to die, but she stood as frozen as the snow under

her feet.

“Looks like a heart attack,” said the man next to her. “Does anyone know CPR?”

I'm already late, she thought pulling her scarf over her mouth and nose. She took two steps back then turned and ran to catch the 9:05 train.

Penzy Simpson's interview went well. “You can start next week,” said the round faced woman behind the desk. “We need good nurses like you.”

Caroline Bond



My writing credentials to date are a case of ...“close, but no cigar!” I started writing, like many people, with short stories; a format I still enjoy. My greatest success, was winning first prize, publication and £1,000 in the Writer’s Bureau Short Story Competition in 2011. I then focused more on screen/script writing. Here I achieved the relative, but only partial success of being shortlisted for The Red Planet Drama Prize in 2010. Then in 2011/2012 I had two adult drama ideas go through to full script review/ feedback with the BBC writersroom. In 2011 I also got through to the last 25; the longlist, for a children's TV concept in the BBC’s Get A Squiggle On competition.

From mid 2012 I have concentrated on children’s drama and fiction. I have just finished Junk, my first full length novel. This book is at the final tidying up/illustration stages, nearly ready for submission. I am currently working on a young adult mystery involving a teenage boy, a blind dad and a corpse in a toilet.

In 'real' life I'm a qualitative researcher who spends her life asking questions. I also volunteer with Victim Support, listening to and supporting victims of violence. In both aspects of my working life I am privileged to be able to talk to a broad mix of people with very diverse experiences and views of the world. I am also a running mum.

Only One Winner

By Caroline Bond

It lay on the tablecloth between them, exactly positioned within easy reach of the head of the table and the guest to the left. Joe was the guest to the left.

The smeary wine glass full of blood red Bordeaux would be the first casualty. The tall delicate stem, with the flowing elegant bowl looked fragile, easily smashed.

Joe worried about the etiquette. He was just the guest; he couldn't make the first move. Marcus would.

Marcus, head of the table and of the firm.

It was over quickly. A grab, a tussle. Bang.

The victor's grin.

Bloody Christmas crackers.

Nomi McCabe



<http://www.facebook.com/NomiMcCabe>

<https://twitter.com/NomiMcCabe>

<http://nomimccabe.com/>

As a legally blind mother of three girls, finding time to write can be the biggest challenge. I've written for as long as I can remember, likely since I learned to hold my first pencil, but was afraid to do anything with my work. I finally decided I had to try. What kind of mother would I be, telling my girls nothing is impossible, while holding my own dream close to my heart and never letting it soar?

Final Embrace

By Nomi McCabe

Arianna stared out the window as rain trickled like tears; she wished she could cry. Lightning illuminated the empty driveway. Running long fingers through her hair, she resisted looking at the clock.

The storm raged, worry swelled; the news had announced a horrific accident, a blue sedan just like Luke's, sandwiched between two rigs. Thunder clapped; Arianna's heart leapt – with joy as Luke

glided towards her. Embracing him, she allowed her tears to spill at last as she shivered.

His husky voice raised the small hairs on her neck. “I couldn’t leave without saying good-bye.”

Simon Gary



I'm yet to be fully exposed, gazelle like, to the main beam of the writing world. An honourable mention in a magazine competition aside, I have written comedy for the football and music website www.2uptop.com and have two novels maturing on the drive of my laptop. I hope being in this excellent and innovative Kobo competition will spur me on the greater efforts! Thanks for reading.

Leo

By Simon Gary

There are stones in my sandal making it uncomfortable to walk. I'm sure those around me are having similar problems, but their minds seem otherwise occupied, which is good for them. We can't all worry about stones.

Still, the crowds seem pleased to see me, I almost feel I should take a bow, but the others haven't – and I would so hate to stand out.

There is another roar of approval, not for me this time, but directed to the opening of a gate. A couple of large cats bound through. That must be what a lion looks like.

Michael Middleton



<https://twitter.com/MikeyMiddleton>

This is the first writing competition I've ever entered, and my writing achievements are virtually non-existent. I've been writing since a young age however and last year graduated from the University of York with a First Class degree in 'Writing, Directing & Performance'. At University, I contributed as a film critic in the student newspaper. I am currently traveling (and blogging) around

the world... looking for stories.

Untitled

By Michael Middleton

He was an ABBA-loving vegetarian, prone to bouts of depression. She was a career woman with a tumour and a Ford Mondeo. They met on the Internet; where else?

At dinner, they discussed how they'd do it. He didn't trust himself to pull a trigger, he said. She didn't either, she said, and suggested her car.

As they cleared out his garage, she admired his paintings. "Art classes" he explained. He admired her tidy stacking. "Anal retentiveness" she explained.

As the fumes surrounded them, he held her hand. It was a good first date, but now it was over.

Fiona Elliot



<https://www.facebook.com/BlueprintEditing>

<https://twitter.com/blueprinteditor>

<http://blueprintwriting.wordpress.com/>

Fiona is a freelance editor, proofreader and writer of both fiction and non-fiction. Her writing has been published in magazines and online, read out at public events and shortlisted for production by BBC Radio Scotland. She is writing her first novel *Rogue's Wife* and is looking for a publisher for her children's book *Just a Minute*. She lives in East Ayrshire with her young family and several chickens.

Storm

By Fiona Elliot

Hordes of murky clouds throng the sky. Darkness is fleetingly, silently, splintered as ghoulish fingers stab repeatedly into the nightscape, followed by soft, menacing growls. Suddenly, scrambling fingernails cover the roof; seeking a way in between the slates. A thousand rage-filled fingertips are at the windows, rapping insistently for admittance. The wind batters furiously against strong-bolted doors and wails its frustration.

Deep within the angry, darkened building an infant whimpers.

The mother stirs and, leaving her warm imprint and sleeping lover behind, tiptoes to her child's side.

“Hush, wee darling, don’t be afraid,” she whispers. “Sshhh... it’s just a metaphor.”

Giuliano Blaquera



I am new to writing, with no prior experience or background in the field. I am currently a student, and working on attaining my honours BA in Psychology. I do enjoy writing, and hope to continue it in the future.

Untitled

By Giuliano Blaquera

There's a monster in my closet.

I stared in the eyes of a monster. Its skin was pale, as white as a ghost. Its limbs were long and gangly, like tree branches that reached out towards me when the wind blows on a chilly night.

The hands were creepy, with veins protruding as if worms crawling under the skin. Its fingers were frail, undeniably cold to the touch. The face was hideous, holding nothing but a blank deceitful stare.

Suddenly, a voice ran through the walls, "Honey! Dinner!"

No thanks mom, already ate. I'm not hungry!

I pulled away from the mirror and closed the door.

Penny Ayres



<https://twitter.com/PennyAyres>

This is my first foray into published fiction after over a decade writing fact for publications ranging from my local parish magazine to Channel 4's FactCheck website. I couldn't be more delighted, and slightly amazed, that someone else also likes my story enough to select me as a semi-finalist, and that probably makes this my greatest accomplishment as a writer to date.

Wedding Day

By Penny Ayres

She paused halfway down the stairs.

Below, her dad held the front door open. Everyone else had already left.

In the stillness she sensed the imprint of her childhood; the faded teenage posters in her empty bedroom, the phantom smell of her dad's cigars, the forgotten echoes of her mum clattering crockery.

She took a deep breath. This house would never again be her home.

Her dad looked up and smiled. "Ready?"

She twisted the ring on her left hand and nodded. Today was a new

beginning. With a few small steps she crossed the threshold.

The Honourable Mentions

While the Curtis Brown Creative judges will only be selecting possible finalists and the winner from the twenty Semi-Finalists previously listed, the original jury of judges wanted to also share an additional three authors in the “Honourable Mentions” category. These are stories that captured the judges hearts as definitely worth mentioning, but which didn't end up making it into the Semi-Finalist round.

Anita Kuparinen



Anita lives in North York, and when she isn't writing, she works as a medical office administrator. Her first book "Through the Darkness" is published as an e-book and she is currently working on her second one. Anita has also almost completed her diploma in Creative Writing through the Stratford Career Institute.

Shadows

By Anita Kuparinen

She could see the dark figure bending over his victim. He didn't know that she was watching. She was cold, but beads of sweat began to form on her forehead. She wiped them with the end of the scarf that hung around her neck. Now, he picked up his victim.

Did she detect tenderness in the way he handled the body? Even with his burden, he moved with surprising swiftness. Another figure appeared. Who was that?

“Ma’am?” the bus driver’s voice brought her back to the present.
“This is your stop.”

She sighed and switched off her Kobo. She would have to find out later.

Beth Newton



I've just completed my Masters in Creative Writing following on from my BA in Creative Writing and Video Production in 2008. My current project is completing the science fiction novel I began during my dissertation, thirteen chapters down and twenty one to go.

Untitled

By Bethany Newton

She said no. He believed her.



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I've self-published five novels to date, having written my first 100,000-word standalone story, *Living Hell*, over twenty years ago when I was 18. I originally wanted to write Romance, but growing up with a lot of brothers gave me a wicked sense of humour. So whenever I came up with a storyline it would kick in as I started writing, telling me to focus on the most absurd of observations, or to add more souped-up cars, and possibly zombies. In the last year I've focused on writing comedy and parodies, and having the most fun with writing ever! I also write screenplays, and would love to write for animation in the future.

Performance Car

By Lisa Scullard

The car was making a funny, discordant noise. Although the gauges said everything was fine, I still had forty miles to go. So I stopped to take a look.

Popping the hood, I wedged it open.

"What's all this racket?" I asked.

The tiny conductor looked at me, baton in hand.

"Just tuning up," he said, sheepishly.

The brass section huffed idly on their instruments, while the strings tried to look busy.

"You don't stop and re-tune in the middle of a performance," I told him.

"Won't happen again," he apologised, and rallied his orchestra.

"From the top!"