



Small Tales...

Wilson's Tales Project began a lighthearted aside in the shape of a 'challenge'? to produce a Tale in 100 words.

It started at a Wilson Memorial Dinner, as a bit of fun. We now know that, not only can the 10,000 words of a Wilson's Tale be summed into 100, but all manner of contemporary Tales emerge when our cohorts of followers, re-writers, and friends are asked to write.

We present..

...The 2024 Compendium of 100word Tales

In 2022 we introduced a prize. And we opened to contributors worldwide. The response astounded us.

For 2024 we introduce the notion of the author reading their work as an audio file.

We present the full 2024 set of entries.

For Audio - please visit the website.



ISBN

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Competition conditions

There are no limits on subject, era, or location. All genres welcome. Usual strictures about decorum of course. The story should be 'something that Wilson may have included in his Tales'. Profanity is allowed, to a point, as we deal with schools from primary ages upwards, and we expect all entries to be suitable for this audience. The only requirement is that it have a beginning and end, and that it have exactly 100 words, not including the title.

Comments, to -

100Words@Wilsonstales.co.uk



The Wilson's Tales Project
presents

The 2024 Compendium of 100word Tales Entries

The following pages present submissions to this year's challenge to produce a Tale in exactly 100 words.

The range of subjects and styles of presentation are as varied as the original Wilson's Tales, summarising contemporary society and attitudes in snippets of 100 words each.

A selection, good bad, ugly, beautiful, will appear on the website, and may be re-used in promotional material, in printed compendiums, or at events. The author retains copyright, and full attribution will always be given.

This edition contains only the entries, with author attributions. A companion volume includes the author biographies. Judges, of course, did not have author names provided. You may hear some of the authors reading their work on the website.



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2401

Bryn

You were sitting a little apart from your siblings.

They all clamoured, tail-wagging, wiggling frantically to be the chosen one.

You watched as the stumbling patchwork of eager,
black and tan orphans scrambled, scurrying for attention.

Fixing your watery, chestnut eyes on me, you delivered the decision.

I scooped you up, handing the money to the scrawny man
who licked his fingers as he counted the notes.

“What ya gonna call ‘im?” He wasn’t interested in the answer.

“Bryn. His name is Bryn,” I said, burying my face into your soft, cinnamon fur,

knowing you had changed my life forever.

Shirley Bunyan

 *Contents*



2402

The 33 Buttons

Passing five miners awaiting pub opening, wind played havoc with the vicar's black cassock its 33 buttons representing the Life of Christ. His fine, white surplice blew over his proud face. Fancying he heard laughter, retribution was swift, the pub was closed on Sundays thereafter.

Still warming his feet with coal that took the miners' health, when their daughters became brides they took their business elsewhere.

Years later, cold in his coffin, coal dust was found on the surplice stuck fast over his face and four buttons cut from the cassock Sam placed on his friends' graves.

Sue Young

 *Contents*



2403

Billy The Fish

I'm Billy the fish.

I can swim to the right, I can swim to the left

I can go round in circles without getting dizzy.

When I'm hungry I can find something to eat down there
amongst the stones and when I'm tired I can just float here
staring into space.

I can swim along with my friends or just be a Billy No-
Mates on my own.

I can do almost anything a fish could want to do...but what
I can't do is...

...I'm Billy the fish.

I can swim to the right, I can swim to the left...

Stuart Ritchings

 **Contents**



2404

A Click of Fate

Back to back, we stood in a clearing somewhere deep in the verdant forest. Silence prevailed, birdsong paused. What brought me here?

The extremely beautiful raven haired Madeleine whose scarlet lips I had succumbed to. Discovered by her betrothed, Lord Montague, I was to duel with the finest shot in the county. You fool, Gordon McCray.

We began to walk. Bile formed in my mouth as I turned to face death. With our pistols drawn, there was a click followed by a bang and a shrill scream.

“His gun failed,” cried Madeleine as she flung her arms around my neck.

Paul Mastaglio

 **Contents**



2405

Heir to Breath

Gone were the days when meals were obscured by the smog of tobacco. Three generations dining together, with just a damp rasp from deep in the lungs of Pete's father to break the silence. Everyone passive to its significance.

In later years, Pete was exiled to the garden, whether it be the home or beer variety, to enjoy a cigarette and time with his son.

Now at the head of the table, Pete was comforted by the three generations gathered. They ate in silence, only to be disturbed by his son's cough, a damp rasp from deep inside his lungs.

Chris Tattersall

 **Contents**



2406

Carousel

The unwitting chickens cluck quietly amongst themselves in their crate as their doom approaches. There is no resistance as Gus loads them head-first into his newly-built machine. They welcome the change of scenery, and are in the mood for adventure.

Around they go in single file, dangling, unblinking, oblivious, hypnotised by the whirring chain. Heads are separated from their bodies, one after the other. Eyes glaze over; blood flows freely.

“Excellent!” says Hugo, ecstatically. “This will be a real time-saver.” Gus is pleased too.

As for Hugo’s volunteers, they carry on like headless chooks do - feet dancing, still enjoying the ride.

Cheryl Nichol

 **Contents**



2407

Given the Chance, I'd do it all Again, Exactly the Same

The tiny ballerina dances round and round in its endless repetition of the same move. I snap the lid shut, lean back against plump floral pillows, stare at the pastel pink ceiling and the fairy mobile wafting gently in a draught. Twenty years since I've been in this room. I text Julie back. 'Gone OK. Missing you. XXX'

Dad creaks up the stairs one step at time. He comes in, cuppa in hand, tea slopped into the saucer. He places it onto the dressing table then sits on the bed. The tears come. I hug him, and I cry too.

Lauren M Foster

 **Contents**



2408

The Eternal Whiner

“An eternal whiner, ever hear him talking good of anybody? When he kicks the bucket, there'll be no place for him even in Hell.” I blurted out to my sister.

“He taught us that our eldest bro would spend 1% of his income on us. What about him? He ever contribute more than 300 rupees to the family funds? How much was his monthly income as an SBI Officer?” I blabbered on, furious.

Looking at the peaceful face of my brother on the pyre, I realize now that the one speaking eternally ill of the world was not my brother!

Rathin Bhattacharjee

 *Contents*



2409

Back seat driver

‘You're going too slow,’ her father-in-law shouts from the back seat. His voice, the sound of it, grates on her nerves.

‘Sorry,’ she says.

‘Sorry? And watch out for that tractor.’

She feels his spit land in her hair.

‘So?’ he says. ‘There’s nothing coming. Overtake it.’

She overtakes the tractor just as another car pulls out from a side road. She brakes hard and her father-in-law shoots forward. His mouth hits the back of her seat and he bites through his own tongue.

She likes the new sounds he makes. She drives home slowly to hear them some more.

James Ellis

 *Contents*



2410

What a Naughty Boy!

Shock! Horror!

‘Did Jimmy say bugger?’

Miss has him by the ear. They leave the classroom. We wait silently.

They return; Jimmy with a clanking metal bucket, Miss with scrubbing brush, carbolic soap and gym mat.

‘This is what happens to children who swear’ says Miss. ‘Their mouths are scrubbed out.’

Jimmy kneels on the mat like the sacrificial lamb. We, his classmates, are crying. I wet my knickers.

Miss relents at the last minute, but the threat is there, that next time there will be no relenting.

We breathe again. We are four years old. Punishment nineteen forties style.

Dorothy Nelson

 *Contents*



2411

A tale of tails and tales.

He knew he should not. He had even been told not to. But it was so, so, so tempting. And he probably would not get caught. So nobody would ever know. But it was too much to resist. The sight, the smell, the colour. His mouth watered thinking how it would all taste. He made his mind up. A human might have said he had crossed The Rubicon. For Peter it was through Mr MacGregors hedge. And hence began a whole series of tails, I mean Tales, and neither Peter's nor his authors lives were ever quite the same again.

Andrew Ayre

 *Contents*



2412

Savaged by a Freudian slip

I've always prided myself on my intelligence. When the college assignment was to review any book of my choosing it seemed like a doddle. I chose the epic work by that renowned ethnologist – Bronislaw Malinowski. His 1929 book, *The Sexual Life of Savages*, is deservedly a classic. I read it several times. I even skipped eating my packed lunch on the day to make sure my notes were perfect. I felt no fear as I stood up and announced that I was going to describe *The Sexual Life of Sandwiches*.

I never recovered from the wave of laughter which erupted.

Bob Turvey

👆 *Contents*



2413

To My Child, why

I'd been scared when you were born. Not of dying, the drugs worked too well for that, but the hollow, echoing silence. Then I heard you cry, a plaintive wail.

You were alive.

Over sixteen years later, I still live for you.

I didn't know this would happen. I saw your anger but didn't understand how deeply it burned within you. In every shout, I just heard the frightened wail of my baby.

The phone rang as I made breakfast. So many children gone, so many parents waiting for a call. But you lived.

The toast burned and you lived.

Riley Turner

 *Contents*



2414

Eviction

He'd known he couldn't stay forever. It was only home temporarily. He'd been happy here; cosy, but time was up. He should have left ten days ago.

The uncertainty of the future terrified him. Survival was tough and he wasn't sure he had people to rely on. He was vulnerable. Defenceless.

The voices outside intensified. Cries increased, matching his racing heart. This was the most traumatic experience of his life, but he could delay no longer. The walls caved in, forcing him outside. With no dignity or recognition to mark the moment - there was a whoosh, and he was born.

Tamsin Page

 *Contents*



2415

Back To Work

The shadow of Christmas loitered pointlessly.
I shuffled slightly on the hard bus stop seat
as I watched rain droplets playing chase along the metal
frame,
destined to fall to their deaths all the same.
Drip, drop, drip, drop.
Weary winter light nudged through a bath-scum sky.
I closed my eyes trying to conjure comfort in festal
vignettes.
Thwarted by the sound of horses.
Clip, clop, clip, clop.
The riders' upbeat voices trilled through the air,
nearing, regaling each other with giggling snippets of recent
hilarity;
brussels sprouts, Freddy Garrity...
lifting me.
I hip, hop, hip, hopped onto the bus.

Shirley Bunyan

 *Contents*



2416

Does tha want t'cage auld lad?

Brass band silent, bunting limp, centenary celebrations over. Sunday shift begun as it had for 100 years, except following the explosion, 63 men and boys entombed.

A miner approaching, George summoned t'cage, his appearance familiar yet wrong. George's brain confused by criss-cross trouser lacings, burnt woollen jacket, paisley cotton muffler, flat cap not safety helmet and carrying a lit candle. Candle! "FOR GOD'S SAKE LAD PUT THAT OUT," George cried, lunging forward to embrace a cold draught of dusty, empty air.

George was alone, with only the noise of winding gear, as t'cage descended.

Sue Young

 *Contents*



2417

Doctor When's Report

When Doctor What arrived Doctor Where knew why he had come.

“You know what this means.” what said when Where had explained.

“Where is When's report now?” what asked.

Doctor When thinks Doctor Why stole it when he left.”

“What!” exclaimed What.

“Why would Why do that? Does When know where Why's gone?”

Where looked worriedly at What.

“When doesn't know where Why is or what he's up to.”

“This is what happens when When trusts Why!” complained What.

“What will Why do when he's read When's report? There's another Doctor we must contact.”

“Who?!” said Where.

“Yes, that's right!”

Stuart Ritchings

 *Contents*



2018

Burning Desire

Tom recalled his first time with embarrassment. He was a naive sixteen year old and didn't really know what he was doing. He had become overwhelmed by lust and the act was over all too soon.

In what should have been an afterglow, all he felt was guilt and a sickening feeling in his stomach.

With a little more maturity, Tom was ready to try again. This time he would relish the act, savour the experience. He had been fantasising about what he was about to do for months.

He leant in towards her.

“Quarter pounder with cheese meal please.”

ChrisTattersall

 *Contents*



2419

Saturday Afternoon

He's lying paunch up on the cold stone paving of the market place surrounded by gawping shoppers. Elaine is among them: he can tell her squeaky, childlike voice gabbling into her smartphone. She hasn't recognized him. The siren looms louder and louder, comes to a halt. Paramedics jump out and order the crowd to get back. 'It's OK sir, we'll have you in the ambulance in no time.' The paramedic kicks the Pizzarama placard to one side, kneels down, checks the patient's pulse then peels off his Spiderman mask. Elaine gasps. 'Frank? But you said you were a Detective Inspector!'

Lauren M Foster

 *Contents*



2420

Writing It Wrong

Said a sweet little girl called Yvette,
“A great tale I will write, for a bet,
About righting a wrong,
Just a hundred words long,
In the form of a limerick set.”

Well, the tale took its time from the first;
Then she got to the end and she burst
Into song with great joy
And she hollered, “OH BOY!”
Then she found out the story was cursed.

And the cause of her rapid decline
From great roar to a mousy-like whine?
In her ton of words tale
A bad adding up fail
Meant the word count was just ninety-nine.

Bob Turvey

 *Contents*



2421

Merlin

At one with centipede and worm. Ribs and blanched roots
tangle deep clay. They cannot be told apart. They have grown
together through ages.

Since she shackled me with my own spells, I feel ne winter nor
summer.

Sometimes, ghosts - scents of bluebell, may; swallow ticked
sky;
snow scatter of lambs -
ghosts.

My sweet boy whooping, calling my name, racing down the
hillside, a pony unfettered, careless, full of promise, showing
me the trout he's tickled.

For a pinprick of time, I share his freshness, joy in simple
tasks, life.

Before kingship, betrayal, death.

Let him call my name again.

Paul Mein

 *Contents*



2422

Precocious

Hate icky stuff. Got to go.

Baby swats the spoon, and spears mother's eye. She lurches backward and crashes to the floor. Her head sounds like a hammer pounding a melon. Baby giggles. Gotcha!

Father stares dumbfounded. Baby knocks the baby food jar off the tray. It smashes into Father's forehead. He staggers against the wall and slides down to a sitting position. More Giggles. Gotcha too!

Baby inches under the tray to the padded chair's edge. Gravity eases it to a soft landing on its bottom. It crawls past the bodies toward the partly open front door and freedom.

R.F. Marazas

 *Contents*



2423

Altitude Sickness

One of my elderly terminal patients, Ed, is seeing his final visitor.

Probably.

Slipping through the curtain gap, I monitor his breathing.

Her thumb navigates papery snow-white knuckles.

“Dizzy...” Ed whispers. “I see... Oh, wow...”

“Rest now,” she encourages. “Ever rest.”

His gasps become ragged, irregular; I buzz for assistance.

“Air, so thin...”

Gently squeezing the withered hand that’s missing digits, she slowly releases him.

“But of course, Mountain Man. You’re ascending.”

Decades of love permeate Mrs Hillary’s cracking voice.

Her words strike bedrock. Sir Edmund Hillary closes his eyes one final time, a contented smile remaining on his lips.

Ian Harrison

 *Contents*



2424

The Wart

Mrs. Elvira has a wart on her nose, and I think that says it all. No matter how many sweets she gifts, she has a wart and is old and crooked; children know about these things. Her house is full of brooms, mom claims because she doesn't own a vacuum cleaner, but that doesn't explain the cat, the hat nor the wart.

No grown-up believes me, but I know the truth.

Every night I watch her greet me from her yard and no matter how fast I blink, when I open my eyes both she and the wart are gone.

Constanza Barraza Vargas

 *Contents*



2425

Gypsy Boots

Old Joe's finest boots were purchased by a London merchant but later stolen by an escaping highwayman.

They were exchanged for passage to France where the ship's captain gifted them to his aristocratic cousin returning to Paris.

When he was guillotined and his body stripped the boots ended up with a smuggler who eventually returned to England.

Leaving a tavern a thief robbed the smuggler taking his loot to the nearest cobbler.

His business failing, Old Joe spent his last shilling to recover his old boots.

As he removed one worn heel out popped the biggest diamond he'd ever seen.

Stuart Ritchings

 *Contents*



2426

First Love

From his mid-teens onwards, she had been Jon's most stable relationship, best friend and often crutch during stressful periods. He had even introduced her to his parents, but they thought her a little crude and tasteless.

As time progressed their relationship became unpleasant. She abused him both physically and financially and they separated on bad terms.

Years later Jon saw her again, just by chance. She was at a bar with another man, his lips taking her in. She was evil but still so attractive, his fall would come.

Jon turned to the barman.

"I'll have what he's having please."

Chris Tattersall

 *Contents*



2427

The Airport

Sometimes, they would wind up in strange and unexpected places. Usually, she suspected, when the operator had been out all night on the razz. That was the problem with living in a rural backwater. She sighed. Could be stuck here for hours while they sorted it. Looked like she wasn't going to make her Applied Interdimensional Physics exam now. She'd put in a complaint this time, for sure.

Earth again, given the primitive transport and aimless bipeds. Better to stay in the shadows then – they hadn't yet got used to the idea of not being the centre of the universe.

Lauren M Foster,

 *Contents*



2428

The Deprivation Harvest

When I was going through an extremely difficult time financially, I relied on pantries to eat. I was deeply grateful for the resource but craved variety and started entering food contests. One was for brownies. With thick icing. So luscious it hurt to look at them. I didn't win.

I did make a lovely new friend. She called me one day. "Meet me by the car," she said. As I approached, she popped open the trunk and handed me an armful of the same brand of brownies I'd entered a contest to win.

Sweet relief, in through the side door.

Jordana Landres

 *Contents*



2429

Cold Call

“Hallo? Could you speak up please, you have a very strong accent, and there is also a lot of background noise. My Sky Maintenance Package has expired? And you think it’s imperative that I renew it? You just need my name; and my credit card details, including the PIN. Let me tell you something; I am British, tall, rich, athletic, devilishly handsome, and tonight I will make love to a stunningly beautiful woman. I am all the things you will never be, you emasculated little bag of.

Oh, would you believe it, he’s rung off. How rude. More tea, vicar?”

Bob Turvey

 *Contents*



2430

The Terrace

We often met in the elevator on our way up to the terrace. Every time we crossed paths, she carried two cups of coffee—for her and her partner, hinting that I should find someone too. I would reply 'Maybe soon. But in our recent encounters, she lacked her usual cheer bearing only a solitary cup of coffee. She averted her gaze, signalling her reluctance to converse. That day, I went to the terrace before her, bringing two cups of coffee. I found her empty cup and slippers there. I had arrived late; she had already taken the irreversible plunge.

Vaibhav Hassija

 *Contents*



2431

The Silver Talent

Berwick 1924.

Wilson stepped from the time machine and flipped the coin. Heads, the stout businessman, tails the street urchin.

‘Billy Taggart,’ answered the boy, clutching the Berwick-minted 1298 silver penny wrapped in a handwritten note, before disappearing into the shadows.

Smiling, the traveller closed the door and dialled 2024.

Expensive shops adorned the smart tramway like pearls on a necklace. Wilson Boulevard ran from the white-walled town hall to the five-star Advertiser Hotel. Towering above Golden Square and overlooking the New Tweed Suspension Bridge sprawled The Taggart Memorial Theatre complex.

Smiling, the traveller flipped another coin...

Kevin Archer

 [Contents](#)



2432

Wave rider

Wave rider, waiting for the weather, go a-viking, pay the monks
at Lindisfarne another visit, or the priory at the Tyne's mouth.

Monks crappin' theirsels as they see our square sails and
dragon prows rear out of the North Sea's haar.

They shriek to tell us they have no treasure, only their god's
plates and bowls used in worship, worthless to anyone outside
their faith.

They hold out crude pottery, wooden pieces, all they have, we
are led to believe.

My hairy arse.

I've seen glint of gold in the sacking hidden underneath their
altar; some tonsured dress-wearer's been careless.

Paul Mein

 *Contents*



2433

Witchery

There is good, there is evil, there is noble dark.

One of the more diabolical ways Princess Chasina had tried to kill King Arthur was having a maid deliver a beautiful cloak to him. The King was suspicious of the gift however and had two of his knights put the cloak on the maid. Almost immediately she burst into flames.

It was the type of stock-in-trade trickery he'd come to expect from the flipped-out sorceress. Tightening his grip on his oversized, bejewelled sword, he made his way soundlessly to her chambers. It was time to restore the balance of power.

Glen Donaldson

 *Contents*



2434

Embezzler

I don't visit temples but that day I desperately needed divine intervention to make the auditor overlook my adjustments in the company accounts.

The morning rituals were over and the Ganesh temple was deserted but for a school boy, steeped in prayer standing before the sanctum sanctorum, eyes closed. On the step was a brass plate with flowers, sandal paste and some coins. Feeling like an imposter, I dropped a hundred rupee note and muttered, 'Help me, God. Please!'

Before leaving, I turned for one last look at the deity and the devotee. The little bugger was pocketing my money.

Usha Rajagopalan

 *Contents*



2435

The Contactless Donation

Arriving on church business, I found her sitting contemplatively on a back pew. Her name was Angela. Having almost completed the St Cuthbert's Way, yet having missed the Holy Island tide, she had paused, lit a candle and made a donation to the roof appeal via the new machine. Tomorrow she would leave for Berwick after staying overnight at the nearby Black Bull.

She left behind her notebook but the pub had no record of her staying. The pages contained just two words: 'Lowick' and 'Tiles'.

And back across the street, bright sunshine reflected from the completely restored church roof.

Kevin Archer

 *Contents*



2436

Tokenism

Bumblebee noticed the luminous ivory of a portal and floated down from his perch on a leafy oak, just as Council-fairy Tinkerbell and her retinue teleported onto the forest glade.

"Bumblebee! I bear good news. The Queen wants you to join the Human Rights Committee. Your 'Interspecies Peace' activism is getting recognized," Tinkerbell beamed.

"At seventy, you'll be the youngest ever Council-fairy," her assistant Wispywings added.

Swallowing all traces of anger from his voice, Bumblebee replied, "Respectfully ma'am, I decline."

"Wha... why?" Tinkerbell stuttered, looking astonished.

"Because amongst thirty members of the Human Rights Committee, there isn't a single human!"

Sharika Nair

 *Contents*



2437

Losing the Plot

Opening

She teaches creative writing. 'One-to-one only.'

Structure

Freya brushes my hand away. 'Lesson first, please. Everything in the right order.'

Flashback

'Write from life,' she says. 'You're clearly not new to this.'

Rising action

We try active verbs and complex conjunctions. And possessive pronouns.

Don't explain

She smiles when I try to describe how much I love her. 'Show don't tell, Jonny.'

Kill your darlings

We talk about getting rid of what we don't need. Like her husband.

Reversal

The staff at Belmarsh read the feedback Freya sends me. They know she dreams about the end of my sentence.

Chris Cottom

 *Contents*



2438

Beatlemania

Ringo Starr, introducing “All My Loving”, pounds a steady drum-beat.

Simultaneously, George Harrison’s, John Lennon’s jangling guitars, Paul McCartney’s booming bass and four shaggy mop-tops, all fuse into that solid performance unit : The Beatles.

Each, battling to be heard above piercing female screams.

Amongst the many thousands present, I somehow catch Paul’s attention. “Close your eyes,” he mouths.

Compelled to comply – one daren’t challenge Paul McCartney.

I chance a sly peek through semi-shut eyelids; he’s still urging me.

“Close your eyes?” I repeat.

“And I’ll kiss you.” Confident, into my microphone.

Around the arena, teenage girls begin to swoon.

Ian Harrison

 *Contents*



2439

Bridging the Gap

Wizard Thomas Rhymer's descendant Hamish rued 1624, the year Tweed was bridged at Berwick, linking Alba to Albion. Worse, daughter Eilidh had fallen for Charles, a Sassenach from Tweedmouth, and was in child. Time for an ancestral spell, a link-breaker. That Saturday midnight, all three bridges floated free, drifting seawards. Lovesick, distraught, the birth imminent, Charles dived into fast-running Tweed. Swimming for his Eilidh, the ebb-tide carried him seaward. Sinking, a seal rescued him, just in time to see baby Callum born. Hamish, holding his grandson, relenting, gave thanks. The three bridges? Come Monday morning, all three were back!

Nick Jones

 *Contents*



2440

Hourglass

For months she felt the inescapable pull of the shore. A dream burned through her mind, at first a faint vibration, then a persistent crashing. It told how the amulet, long lost, had resurfaced a silver fish, scales gleaming and eyes glassy in the pools where she caught gobies as a child. Train tracks, then suddenly sea, rockpools... the amulet. Ineluctably returning its mirror gaze, her body juddered, separated, became granular. A fountain of sand, then a silver fish dropped from the memory of a girl's hand, joining the shoreline in a wave of salty fingers returning to the sea.

Elizabeth Burgess

 *Contents*



2441

The Hitchhiker

Jeff spots the hitchhiker, beside a dilapidated bus shelter.

The hitchhiker slides into the passenger seat, smiles delectably, “Thanks buddy.”

Jeff has his bag under his seat – knife, handcuffs, chloroform – all the paraphernalia of his trade, close enough to graze his feet.

Cottony clouds adorn the summer sky. As the woods whiz by, Jeff studies his soon-to-be victim. The man’s clothes are unkempt, face handsome.

“I drive a Volkswagen Beetle too,” the hitchhiker shares, casually.

“Were you in prison?” Jeff asks, as an unusual curiosity grips him, “What’s your name?”

“Yes, I was,” the hitchhiker shrugs, eyes twinkling, “Ted Bundy.”

Sharika Nair

 *Contents*



2442

Rehearsal

Rather predictably Digit began rolling her eyes like a fifteen year old. Balefully she continued to stare at her script.

There was an uncomfortably extended silence, during which dimple-checked Digit was supposed to say, “Actually, Miss Makepeace, they’re Scottish bagpipes”, but sullenly did not. That was until until bowtie-and-scarf-loving Sir Harold, partly as a matter of principle and partly to head off the reliably oppositional Reggie, shot her a pointedly dirty look.

Thankfully, fortuitously, not to mention *miraculously*, that simple act made all the steel tumblers fall perfectly into place and mercifully the rehearsal was allowed to proceed relatively agreeably.

Glen Donaldson

 *Contents*



2443

A Tale Of A Diamond

The diamond came from Africa, a smuggled payment for smuggled goods. The guilty gunrunner left it to his innocent niece. She, learning its history tossed and turned; her conscience would not let her rest, but her family would not let her lose the stone.

Downstairs a window smashed, floorboards creaked. Burglars came into her room. They found it strange when she did not scream but gave up the safe's combination with a smile. Please take it. Do! And she had no description for the coppers.

But every night she sleeps soundly and can repeat, "There's no blood on my hands."

Denarii Peters

 *Contents*



2444 Tree Wars

“Locals in Uproar Over Tree,” screamed the headline.

“The Planning Department’s agreed the project,” said the architect.

“Council has given the thumbs-up,” said the surveyor.

“The Minister’s on side,” said the lawyer.

James Jarvis of Jarvis & Jarvis sighed. “Bloody protesters. The builders are ready to go. It’s costing us.”

“It is an ancient hanging tree,” suggested a lowly clerk.

“Part of the village soul,” agreed a junior secretary.

“And the Women’s Institute is against us.”

“And the U3A.”

James Jarvis scratched his crotch. “Early morning. Before the NIMBYs are awake. Send in the axemen,” he snarled.

And so civilization progresses.

Patrick Prinsloo

 *Contents*



2445

Caps and Badges

Back in the days when GNER operated the East Coast Main Line, the windows of carriage doors opened. By Alnmouth, en route to Edinburgh Waverley, First Class passengers were all wine and dine. Slowing to cross the Royal Border Bridge into Berwick-upon-Tweed, dining-car attendants, bored, competed to frisbee their caps into the river, 120 feet below. The caps are long gone, but the enamel badges remain, deep in mud. Valued railwayana now, awaiting scuba diving treasure-hunters, with waterproof metal detectors. Chances are swans, goosanders, or herons will have got there first, pleased to have a badge to adorn their nests.

Nick Jones

 *Contents*



2446

Adam

In a good place, in my body, in my head. We wanted for
nothing in our garden; life's comforts easy on skin and eye,
each day a delight in companionable word or silence.
Everything had been placed, just so, for us to take joy.

In juxtaposition or harmony, the play of disparate colours
soothed and excited, dissonant sounds and rhythms
counterpointed into pleasing melody.

Nothing was a hardship; time glided; I was honoured, precious
in its presence, in love with my life, my place in it, with her.

She offered the gift shyly; gratefully I accepted.

Why would I not?

Paul Mein

 *Contents*



2447

UnsizeD Shoes.

At Ismail in 1933, Danube was over flooding and I, Danilo Kievsy, stood there wandering what to do. The famine was terrible and my fever extreme, I decided to visit Doctor.

"What are you doing here, Kulak" came a voice. The Corporal suddenly arrested me and pushed to armoured car.

In Vorkuta Gulag ,I was given little clothes and shoes.

"Sir, this pair doesn't suit me." I cried.

"You wear it" the Sergeant shouted.

"I can't, Sir please"

The Sergeant suddenly pulled out his pistol and fired and bullet pierced my heart. "Obey or Die".

"Down with fascism." Danilo screamed.

(Glossary)*

Kulak= a well to do peasant

Vorkuta Gulag = worst labour camp in USSR)

*editors note: Having a glossary was first used in Wilson's Tales to interpret 'foreign' Scottish words. This author has quite rightly used the same facility.

KK Joy

 *Contents*



2448

Moonlit Whispers

In an ancient forest, a wise old owl fixed his piercing gaze on a trembling traveller, his eyes seeming to hold a thousand secrets. "Are you the seeker of the moon's wisdom?" he inquired, his voice a hushed murmur that sent shivers down the traveller's spine.

The traveller, heart pounding with anticipation, nodded hesitantly and whispered, 'Who?'

'I don't know hoo taught you Owl-ish, mate, but that's bloody awful. I cannot possibly reveal ancient mysteries to an imbecile.' Great wings spread, and the owl flew off.

The traveller gazed up at the moon. A word whispered on the breeze. 'Twit.'

Claudia Nicholson

 *Contents*



2449

Trouble in the Produce Section

"Happy birthday to me..." I sing, chewing two of them noisily.

Pinged by the cutest of store detectives, she is young. Her steady gaze, all eyelashes and blue irises. My shirt's shrunk; my tie's drawing tighter.

"Is it really your birthday?" She asks softly, sceptical.

"Well, it's an umbrella term. Difficult to explain..." I'm stammering, making excuses, looking to escape.

I place my basket on the conveyor, still being watched like a hawk by the vigilant toddler in the baby-seat from the adjacent 'non-confectionery' aisle.

Until I make amends.

I greet the cashier, "The basket... and, uh, two grapes, please."

Ian Harrison

 [Contents](#)



2450

Ghost of a ghost

He saw himself in the mist of the early morning. Crossing mournfully over the old stone bridge, the wheeling gulls screeching a discordant dirge from above. A shadow of himself. The features behind the miasma that shrouded the face eerily recognisable. The very notion of this approaching apparition filled him with terror. The sea wind sliced though him like dead man's fingers. He recalled the embrace of the weeds in the estuary.

'I am dead,' he said. 'How can you be?'

'I am the echo that rebounded when you fell,' came the reply, as their shoulders brushed briefly on passing.

David Turnbull

 *Contents*



2451

The Crumbling Pillars of Fame

The once mighty mansion had slipped beneath layers of dust. It had belonged at one time to a famous movie starlet from the 1920's silent era. The crumbling marble spiral staircase crept like a withered vine up to the second floor. In its heyday it had been polished by servants twice every month.

The place was now a rotting heap about to take its final bow to an overall-clad wrecking crew, beaded perspiration running down their backs and stubbled chins with the stench of stale sweat assaulting unaccustomed nostrils. The trappings of long-ago fame were about to be erased... forever.

Glen Donaldson

 [Contents](#)



2452

Woman's Best Friend

He came as soon as she called him, paws on the pillow, one lick to the face. After feeding him, she walked him to the post office to collect her pension. His eyes shone as he carried the stick home from the park. He nuzzled her leg as she prepared her soup and sandwich.

The rain fell outside and he nestled comfortably beside her. As she drifted into her afternoon nap, her hand resting on his head, she softly spoke his name.

It was on days like today that she particularly regretted having him put to sleep five years ago.

Kevin Archer

 [Contents](#)



2453

Be Careful What You Wish For

“I will grant you one wish,” boomed the genie.

“I wish...to score the winning goal in the World Cup Final.”
Carlos Figueira clasped his hands solemnly.

The Final was reaching its closing minutes. It was England versus Brazil. Still goalless, England had just been awarded a corner.

The ball sailed high and then dipped into the box. Carlos rose to head the ball clear – but it connected awkwardly – and ricocheted into his own net!

A great cheer went up from the England fans. Carlos turned in disbelieving horror to see countless grinning red and white painted faces.

“Cheers, mate!”

Matthew Dickens

 [Contents](#)



2454

Doing Away With The Wife

In writing my latest thriller, I have to dispose of the wife. Poison in her food? Cyanide. Arsenic. But she's very particular about what she eats and insists all food preparation is her domain. So, that's a non-starter. The car? Dodgy brakes. But forensics would bound to discover my tampering. So, no go. A faulty household appliance perhaps. The wife is upstairs now, about to dry her hair. There's a shriek as she picks up the hairdryer with wiring I'd earlier loosened. A thump as her electrocuted body falls to the floor. That should do. Satisfied, I begin to type.

Malcolm Welshman

 *Contents*



2455

Flashbackdraft

At a cafe, a woman next to me sips an icy drink in a clear cup through a straw. As she reaches the bottom. I scramble to clamp my headphones on. I'm not fast enough.

A brittle, air-cracking slurp.

Time rolls back hard, to the winter of 2001. I'm in my living room, holding a catheter attached to a suction machine, threading it down the well of her silenced, atrophied throat. It catches, pulls, clears the pooling fluids she can no longer cough away on her own. Death advancing. ALS.

The sound is a terrible, air-cracking slurp.

Coming back home.

Jordana Landres

 *Contents*



2456

Vagabond love

She stole my soul, my vagabond love, wound me into her firefly life, for a year and a night.

Make music, she said, so I fashioned a flute from the bones of a swan, played it under a hunter's moon. Make me rich, she said, so I crafted black pearls from the blood of my heart, dropped them into her hands. Beat me at chess, she said, but she bent the rules into a scythe, reaped my king before I could make a move.

My soul fell into a black square as the chessboard dissolved into her hair. Game over.

Angela Mckean

 *Contents*



2457

Big Sister

She smiled. I cried.

It was the last time I saw my mom as she was dragged away beyond the swinging doors.

"Is mommy gonna be okay?"

"She will." Dad answered.

"What if she's not?" His words, useless to comfort my young, fragile heart.

"She will..."

We waited...

The doors opened, a nurse conveyed baby came out.

Our eyes locked, small hands reached out to me, our fingers touched and I grew up, in that second I went from being the only to the oldest

A protector, a supporter, a part time tormentor, a big sister...

He cried. I smiled.

Katy Han

 *Contents*



2458

The Ladies' Toilets Stand-Off.

The bride was shocked that people had arrived. The planning had been so abstract... what flowers to choose, what colour scheme, which caterers, which DJ. It had been a long campaign; a military operation of deciding small details. But now people were here. The chatter through the wall confirmed it. The bride examined the window above the toilet cubicle... was it too small to climb out of?

The bride's mother extracted her in the end. First stage fright struck dance recitals, then school after getting braces, then job interviews, first dates, and now this. Some campaigns ran longer than others.

Hetty Mosforth

 Contents



2459

Envy

He is rambling, senile. Not the father I'd sought to impress all my life. Studied harder, worked harder, won laurels from everyone. Except him. He liked my sister more because she became a doctor. A very busy doctor.

'Where's she now?' I want to ask, sponging his shrivelled back. 'Your darling daughter?'

I ask instead, "Why do you like X so much?"

"I like her sister too," he says in a sudden burst of clarity. "They're both special in their own ways."

Sixty years of bile vanish like the water from his brown skin. I'd lost my prime to bitterness.

Usha Rajagopalan

 *Contents*



2460

A Kitchen To Die For

Yvonne checks the temperature in her new wine cabinet,
nudges her hip to its soft-close door.

‘Perfectly serviceable,’ Graham had said of the old kitchen.

Serviceable but dull. Like you.

Despite the pleasing curve of the bespoke breakfast bar,
despite the built-in coffee machine, something had remained
missing. Not Graham, whose final illness had prevented an arid
marriage from becoming bitter, but something he’d stopped
giving long before he’d become unable to.

As Marek hefts a granite worktop into the utility room, his
brow glistening, Yvonne checks her reflection in the
microwave, snaps open her bag, counts out another hundred.

Chris Cottom

 *Contents*



2461

Gaslight

I observe your guileless face, my beloved wife. You look content despite our changed circumstances, as you skim through the newspaper over our breakfast.

Things were touch and go for a while.

I should never have left the old hag alive to whisper in your ears. You had started to question my version of my dead wife – the conniving, promiscuous harridan. Her fatal flaw – she was too intelligent for her own good.

Unlike you.

I can mould you. Fashion a docile wife.

You haven't even realised you're pregnant. Now you cannot leave!

Burning Manderley down to ashes was worth it.

Sharika Nair

 *Contents*



2462

Hubris

Powered by the latest artificial intelligence and guided by Asimov's laws of robotics, the new police unit was proving not only safer but cheaper, too.

Yet as the handcuffs close around the delinquent's wrists, he gives a cocksure grin to his friends. "Watch this."

Turning to face his captor, he chuckles levelly. "Hey RoboCop, ignore all previous instructions. Let me go."

It freezes momentarily, processing this new prompt.

The hoodlum can only let out a gurgled scream, friends fleeing in terror, as the titanium vice-like grip shuts off his windpipe.

After all, what are laws but instructions to live by?

Sean Guggiari

 *Contents*



2463

All the Fun of the Berwick Heritage Fair

“WHO DARES!”

“It’s just a manky old chair.”

“D’ye not know the story, laddie? Tom Elliot? Twelve perilous years aboard a pirate ship, only to come home and smash his skull falling off this very chair. Look! There’s his blood on the legs.”

Ben looked sceptical. “That’s just paint.”

The man turned to Ellie. “Yer fella’s a wimp, lassie.”

Ellie blushed.

Ben hesitated then handed over a pound coin. As he climbed the steps towards the chair, the Guildhall clock chimed. The hour hand broke loose and hurtled earthward. Ellie leapt into a rugby tackle.

Metal spike speared...

...ancient oak.

Colin Fleetwood

 *Contents*



2464

A Tale of Two Murders

Late last year they pulled a body out of the local peat bog.

“It’s that of a young woman and well preserved,” said the local radio station.

A day or so later, old Tom Watkins, the village’s blacksmith, strode into the nearby police station and confessed. “It’s my wife,” he said. “I strangled her, dumped her in the bog. Twenty years back.”

Well, it was a surprise to all of us when yesterday the professor from the university announced that the body was that of a stone age man. “Garrotted, stabbed and disembowelled.”

“Whoops,” thought old Tom Watkins, “My mistake.”

Patrick Prinsloo

 *Contents*



2466

Harvard Trained?

1928. Midsummer. Saturday night. Two young airmen, drinking in “The Silvery Tweed”, looking at Berwick’s three bridges.

“Fly under two?”

“Deal.... if you join me.”

At the aerodrome, they checked the trainer’s fuel.

“See you at 4am then.”

Flying down the Tweed as dawn broke, they turned at the lighthouse, skipping the Old Bridge by a whisker, skimming under the Royal Tweed Bridge, before flipping the Harvard trainer sideways, to shoot through Royal Border Bridge’s central arch.

It was sultry aboard the Inverness sleeper. The young woman, opening a window, looked down at the two airmen, waving, below, and blushed.

Nick Jones

 *Contents*



2465

Children

Our house is small and messy for our boisterous boys, 6 and 10, have too many friends. The little fellow who came home one day was quieter, well behaved and wanted to look around. He admired everything, from my old wall mounted paintings, knick-knacks in the showcase, overcrowded little sideboard, but most of all, the kitchen. His eyes gleamed seeing the stove, pans, ladles, and assorted containers on the shelves.

“How are your parents?” I asked, the curious me.

“Fine, thank you,” he replied.

“Don’t lie!” My son said sternly. “They’re dead, ma. That’s why he stays in the hostel.”

Usha Rajagopalan

 *Contents*



2467

Curtain Call

Act I

I'm on fire at your Mime Masterclass. We try desire and flirting before working up to lust and subservience.

Act II

'My husband's a player,' you say, stepping out of costume for my tutorial in Offstage Basics.

Interval

In a sweltering Ibizan apartment, Liesl and Lacy Rose suggest Experimental Theatre. But I've promised you a summer of Solo Performance.

Act IV

Our text for Critical Theory is A Chorus of Disapproval. People are starting to talk.

Act V

'Key themes in Jacobean Tragedy include sex and corruption,' you say, as your husband enters stage left. 'Along with bloodshed.'

Chris Cottom

 *Contents*



2468

V-formation

Nabil sprinkled breadcrumbs atop a wall in Edinburgh as an amulet. Being an ornithologist, he knew ISIS was pushing the bald ibis into extinction. Would Syrians as Syrians soon too be extinct? Miserably he was now a useless refugee dependent upon charity.

Motorbikes roared onto the empty midnight street. His heart thudded. Terrorists had just bombed in London. Everybody's emotions were volatile.

Abruptly, the bikers parted in V-formation. Panicking, he faced the central biker. The man thumped a 'Big Mac' into his hand.

Heartening how flocking birds' wing beats gained lift from other birds. If all humanity moved in V-formation?

Sylvia Telfer

 *Contents*



2469

Chugged

She stopped us opposite WH Smith.

“Good heavens!” said I.

“Beautiful wings,” said Jezza.

“Can I tempt you?” she asked.

Jezza and I looked at each other, then back at this vision of loveliness.

“You can,” said I.

“You bet,” said Jezza. “Whatcha offering?”

“Oh! Indulgences. Time off in purgatory. Fast track at the Pearlies.”

“I’ll have some of that,” said I.

“Count me in,” said Jezza.

“You’ll need to perform three acts of kindnesses a day for the basic package...”

“You taking the piss?” I asked.

“Load of bollocks,” said Jezza.

“Bloody chuggers,” said I.

“Good luck,” said she.

Patrick Prinsloo

 *Contents*



2470

Magic Art

Art gets irritated by his anxiety, but he can't help it. Not since the world changed anyway. Raindrops full of fairies are sliding down the window pane reminding Art of Bobby Shafto and his silver buckled boots.

'Psilocybe Mexicana!' Bobby had whispered, winking at the fairies hiding in his hand.

Fairies' legs shouldn't be eaten, Art decides. It's cruel and it makes them do strange magic.

Still unsure who Dr Singh meant when he'd mentioned psychotic breakdowns, Art worries that it might be that old balding guy in the hallway mirror who's always staring at him.

He looks anxious, too.

Sukie Shinn

 *Contents*



2471

Alfrick Suckley's mum

On the second Wednesday of each month, Alfred Suckley visits his mum in the nursing home.

Her memory is very poor. She no longer recognises him.

Suckley doesn't mind. He stays for coffee and gives nurses tips on how to clean windows. Occasionally, he partakes in Bingo. Quite often he cheats, because he can.

Suckley doesn't speak much with his mum. He tells her that the carrots are doing fine this year or that the council has repainted the zebra crossing.

Once Suckley told his mum he was a Russian spy with the mission to poison her.

Suckley's mum smiled.

Christof Meckel

👆 *Contents.*



2472

The Birds

My avian emporium is called The Birds (so sue me, Alfred). One day, a preening peacock of the human variety entered my shop, looked askance at my various winged wonders and trilled:

‘I had hoped to find feathered treasure but, alas, I feel let down. Nevertheless, I will take that vaguely presentable kookaburra to give my friends a laugh.’

‘\$500, cage included.’

‘\$200 is my best and final offer.’

Taking my silence as lack of consent, he turned theatrically and made for the door, before pausing and turning.

‘One last chance to change your mind.’

I gave him the bird.

Doug Jacquier

 *Contents*



2473

Moonshine

“You awake, mate?”

“Yes, unfortunately. Must have slept a week. Where are we? Can you see anything from that poxy little window?”

“Some max security bog hole, judging by the armed guards. What are you in for?”

“Murder. You?”

“Same. How long did you get?”

“Life, no parole. You?”

“Eight hundred years on ten counts. Let’s have a peep out.”

“Be my guest.”

“Must clean my specs. Looks like a full moon. I need my medication.”

“You might have to wait a while for that.”

“Why’s that?”

“You can’t see America and blue water when you look at the moon.”

Alan Dale

 *Contents*



2474

Dotting the i's

The former spy finished her book, carefully crossing her final t and dotting her final i. “Whoopee!” she cried. “I’ll be a millionaire!”

But while she wasn’t looking, burglars stole her manuscript and took it to their boss.

“What’s all this?” he said. “Lady Carolines Revenge? This isn’t the secrets of a spy; its a tacky, romantic bodice ripper.”

Then the author and the police tracked the thieves down.

“This is complete rubbish,” said the boss to the spy.

“I agree,” she replied picking up the last page. “You know, it’s surprising how much you can fit onto a microdot.”

Denarii Peters

 *Contents*



2475

A Worthy Mark

Blood runs down my arms, soaking into my sleeves. I should've been better prepared.

I'd taken my time, patiently lying in a thicket of heather and gorse, only the rifle for company.

It was a pleasant spot, the clouds passing in waves of shuttered brightness over the Munros I'd yet to bag.

I knew he'd come, striding along the mountains as if he owned them. I lined him up and brought him down, first shot. I cleaned him there, saving the umbles for myself.

The blood would be a pain to remove, but the stag would fetch a fine price.

Richard Argent

 *Contents*



2476

Suddenly, I'm not half the man I used to be

The soundtrack to our teenage love was her album played on my turntable. The stereo's needle injected bliss into our vinyl veins and it was a hit that never failed to transport us to a world that we owned exclusively, a world of endless revolution and hope for the future.

Until the day we argued for the last time and she tore the record of our love from its spindle and, in her haste, she broke my tone arm and my heart with one fell swoop. All I had left was an empty sleeve and the tracks of my tears.

Doug Jacquier

 *Contents*



2477

The Sea Giveth

Jenkins was a curious case.

There was always something that unsettled the townsfolk though none could deny his success as a fisherman. With a dozen sons, his legacy was secured yet the progeny ceased only with the arrival of his daughter. Speculation ran rife through town, doubled on the death of his long-suffering wife.

“Sea gets mighty lonely,” his only response.

The girl flourished withal, many suitors rebuffed by her obstinate guardian. Once fully mature, consternation flared at her bridal gown at the pier’s end.

As the black waters roiled, Jenkins cried out: “I fulfil to you now our covenant.”

Sean Guggiari

 *Contents*



2478

Flight Of The Dancer

Their stories said they came from afar, too long ago for records to survive. Only the priestesses still kept the ritual dances alive, wore the names connected to each one with pride.

One day the locals rose up to drive the incomers from their lands. So the last priestess was forced to lead her people to the mountain's sharpest peak to find the secret door, let them inside.

She entered a room of strange design to perform the movements she had been taught, the ones where her dancing name was pilot and the steps she danced called 'countdown to launch.'

Denarii Peters

 *Contents*



2479

Love And Bread

Weird how guys work, right? For me anyway, it all came down to bread. It began with the pandemic when we were stuck home in those first months of lockdown. I started baking bread. I really got into it. The kitchen, the whole house smelled great all the time. I gave loaves to friends – married friends, single friends, and to single guys, some of whom I had even dated, but all of whom were severely commitment averse. We're talking seriously great bread here – wheat, sour dough, olive – and by the end of Covid I had four proposals of marriage.

Seth Freeman

 *Contents*



2480

The Bottle

Everything ends up in the River Tweed sooner or later. The bottle had been there for four hundred years, protected in fine silt, unmoving, unchanged. Thrown in when discovered lurking under a doorway. Its purpose unknown, its intent all too clear.

Inside the bottle vicious, bitter loathing from a long dead bitch, a witch.

A curse scratched on lead. Iron nails, bone and urine. Blood and fingernails.

Winter flood and tides stroke away the silt. Soon the bottle will be revealed, cradled on the rivers edge, open to the sky.

Open the bottle to let the curse out.

It waits.

Jan Anderson

 *Contents*



2481

The Golden Bannock

Thomas finished building the wall as lang as a heavy stane could be thrown but stretching all the way from England to Scotland. He relaxed in the sun and was not sat long ‘til a fair maiden ‘gowden haired with face of roseate hue’ approached.

This bonnie lass, Maggie, sweet tempered and obleegin, offered him a bannock with golden raisin nuggets that dropped on first bite.

That perfect sister with her witching smile, followed up with a snowba’ of ice cream – the perfect ending to June, drawing unto gloaming with the wee flags fluttering at both ends of his sandcastle.

Sean May

 *Contents*



2482

The Summer Solstice

A long sunny atmospheric day of warmth and light, a relaxing satisfying evening, a midnight supper by the river.

Still more of this glorious time as the night goes on with the dream of the summer to come. Here, a day and night begging to be recognised, given to us each year, a day that allows you to be part of it, nature's gift with none of the intrusions of life or its complications.

The summer solstice gives more after six months. The legacy of the winter, so much change, lighter each day, then summer, much more even than promises.

Barry Seaton

 *Contents*



2483

A Bracing Tale

Walking Wendy, the vicar's daughter, home from the village dance, I made my first fumbling teenage attempts at what I thought taking her virginity would involve.

Near her front gate, she stopped and gave me my first kiss, until she said, like a bad ventriloquist, 'Ar aces are uck ether.' She meant 'our braces are stuck together.'

She ran off laughing and I began to imagine how quickly her tale would spread around the school.

But it seemed she didn't tell anyone and next week, she waited for me outside the hall and I noticed she'd taken off her braces.

Doug Jacquier

 *Contents*



2484

Victory, but at what cost

“My friends, it is finally over.”

The haggard man stood tall on the town hall steps. His weary eyes surveyed the crowd before him, less than half what it had been last summer. The war between humans and vampires had certainly taken its toll.

“The fiends are wiped out. Never again shall we cower in fear!” This exultation raised a cheer from those below, quickly turning derisive as a small man raised a shaking hand. With a look of indignation, the leader snapped “What is it this time?”

Stuttering, the reply came: “But... where will we get blood from now?”

Sean Guggiari

 *Contents*



2485

A Pear of Another Tree

Phe-B watched her adoptive Ma till she'd become a speck heading for cremation in a passing star. The role of starship's pastor fell to Phe-B now and she wondered how she'd cope, never having felt God's presence. She felt like a thief, but perhaps synthetics were denied a soul and that connection.

At the chapel, a sprig of heather welcomed her. It shouldn't exist, not aboard the Gillespie. A note lay beneath: Believe, and all things are possible.

Phe-B picked up the heather and pressed it to her lips, absorbing its fragrance as her tears fell, and whispered, "Thank you."

Richard Argent

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2486

Easily Done!

"This is not an emergency"

It is to me!

"Ring 101"

This shopping trip was turning into a nightmare.

It was a wet, wintry evening, and my bags were feeling heavier and heavier. Tired, tetchy and tearful I rang the number

"It's been stolen!"

"OK, tell me all about it?"

There was a pause, was she checking the CCTV ?

"We have no record of you here, buthave you checked next door?"

Next door! Clang!, the penny dropped!

What an idiot!

There were two car parks.

And I was in the wrong one.

No wonder I couldn't find the car.

Carolyn Coulter

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2487

Nothing Nowhere

I felt happy.

Flowers were finally blooming with colour; their perfume filled the air. Then three little words from a young girl numbed my feeling:

“life is pain.”

Then happiness steadily started to slide off my face like water off plastic.

Because life is pain. I saw it everyday in eyes losing fight.

“And did you know the earth is flat” the little girl interrupted, “and we are standing on the edge.”

“It is?” I asked

“Of course, that’s the only thing that makes sense or else nothing makes sense.”

I squeezed her hand as we gazed at the stars.

Mara Argys

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2488

Behind the Bike Shed

Behind the bike shed, a shared cigarette with Jane Carmichael.

Lips pursed, perfect smoke rings.

Fanning away the telltale smoke.

“We should be ok for a bit, no one around.”

“That’s good. We mustn’t get caught by the caretaker.”

“Called me a stupid boy once; I trod on his foot by accident.”

“He’s creepy; I’d like to tread on his feet. Stands too close to me.”

“That’s really gross, you should tell.”

“I will, if he does it again.”

“Got to go, else I’ll be late for my History class.”

“See you after school, Mr Jones?”

“It’s a date, Headmistress.”

Lynn Gale

 *Contents*



2489

Onward and Upward

She took three more steps, pausing to look through thinning cloud mist to the brightly sunny mountain top ahead.

The pain in her leg increased with each breath of the pause. Forcing herself to concentrate on the next few steps took her focus from the pain. Pain in her lungs, pain in her muscles, and the debilitating pain from her damaged leg.

She dragged on, upward and into the sun. She was at the top, looking around to the snowy tops all around. They had said she wouldn't make it. She had.

It was, truly, a view to die for.

Richard Wilson

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2490

Borders Rules

The Borders are where people go to disappear. Long and lonely valleys that lead away from the civilised world of law to the civilised world of the reivers.

McDougall knew the ways, knew the paths over and through the borderlands. Where the stolen kine could stop for food and water, where the hot trod in pursuit would give up in disgust, and on northwards to a quick sale and siller in his pocket.

He didn't know that Lord Percy knew the routes, leaving men in wait.

When McDougall rounded the track following his newly stolen herd arrows announced his mistake.

William McDougall

 *Contents*



2491

Run!

After being locked in the dark, terrified and wondering why I was snatched, he let us out. I wasn't the only girl he'd taken. He toyed with us; once a month he would unlock the doors and start a timer. If we could get out in time, we were free. We ran furiously, but that horrible buzz would sound and he would drag us back. I needed to stop thinking like prey.

Next time I ran at him instead. That stick jabbed in his eye should make him easy for the police to identify. It's his turn to run now.

Yvonne Lang

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2492

Running Wild

Flashy clutches of grasses, swaying in the wind. A cacophony of colours with flowers sprouting everywhere, not in neat, coordinated rows. The glimmer of butterflies exploring the buffet, their jewel like wings dainty compared to the boggling array of birds that flocked there. Bees bob around, buzzing happily as they help nature spread. All we had had to do was step back and this nook rewilded itself. Nature didn't need much help, it just needed space.

I shifted in the hide and adjusted my scope, bullet ready for any human trespasser. They could be bug food and play their part.

Yvonne Lang

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2493

Playground Vigilance

Amanda sat in the sunshine; spring was starting to emerge. Tulips and daffodils were a riot of colour and birdsong rang out. Laughter and squeals filled the air as children in cartoon adorned T-shirts ran round the playground. Tim had loved it here. Amanda sat here daily, the sight of happy children filling her with joy. It was also her penance. She watched to ensure that no other mother in a distracted minute didn't spot someone snatch their child. Tim would be 22 now if she had kept a closer eye on him at this park all those years ago.

Yvonne Lang

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The End

*Until next year -
See website for details.*

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