

“I loved ghost stories, creaky staircases, stormy nights. If it guaranteed nightmares I read it by flashlight, after midnight.”

That’s a quote from suspense author, Lisa Gardner, speaking about her own writing. And it captures the 2023 Spooky Stories theme of After Midnight.

We wanted authors to create tales about that scary time in the depth of night, the crossover between one day the next. Tales that wouldn’t have the same impact, if set in the middle of the day.

And, I’m happy to say the theme proved very popular, with a record number of 325 submissions.

When KSP first suggested a Spooky Story contest in 2016 and asked me to judge, no one had any idea how many people would enter. That first year we received around 30 in total, including 4 in the Youth category. We ended up giving *all* the youth entries a prize as they were all so good. In 2023 we had over 200 Youth entries, so you can see how the contest has grown.

The idea, both then and now, was for the contest to be fun, and challenging. That’s why we set a theme and a maximum word count. Every year the poor KSP coordinator gets emails asking if the stories can please be longer. Every year she says no, because we don’t want to make things *too* easy for our entrants.

The contest is open to all writers, unpublished and published. Only the story itself must be unpublished at the time of entry. To further ensure a level playing field, the entries are judged without any author names visible. We give writers formatting rules to follow and those are important. But this is a story contest, not a punctuation contest. Every writer, no matter how experienced, hits the wrong key sometimes, and as the judge, I’ll never penalize anyone for a missing comma or the occasional misspelt word.

Congratulations to all the entrants, the long listers – there were 133 of you – The short listers included in this anthology, the finalists and winners. As always, your writing talent inspires me. To those who didn’t make it into this year’s book, please don’t give up on your stories. We had so many entries this year it was impossible to find a place for them all. But there are other contests out there, and I encourage you all to enter them.

I love judging this contest, and reading the stories, and I thank KSP for giving me the opportunity to scare myself silly once again. Because, as writer, Matt Groening once said. *“Let’s face it. All the good stuff happens after midnight.”*

Carolyn Wren
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2023 Finalists and Winners

Youth Interstate

Shortlisted

Molly Hoogland – The Taker

This is a great story, full of vivid descriptions, A delicious descent into madness that pulls the reader along for the ride. Molly, your talent is obvious. If this is just a sample of the stories living in your mind, please keep writing them down. Well done.

Alice Rees - See No Evil, Speak No Evil...Hear No Evil

Alice's story grabs us on the first line, and throws us into darkness and fear. This is a fast-paced story, with a great use of the theme and a clear concise ending. Well done, Alice, I may never look at a crow the same way again.

Eloise Brown - 12 Chimes From the Clock of Horror

This story made me smile, because of the wonderful way it swings from poor terror to a twist ending. With its clever descriptions of the horrors of the night, it fits the theme and kept me on the edge of my seat. It's a great story, well done, Eloise.

Yiru Li – Death's Revenge

This story is beautifully written with a strong link to the After Midnight theme. Each paragraph comes with a vivid description of night, of haunting. Each line gets us closer to a feeling of dread. It's a great story. Well done, Yuri.

Ruby Fitzgerald - Midnight Encounters

Ruby's story interestingly combines last year's contest theme of 'Best Friend' with this year's theme 'After Midnight', and the two work very well together. It's a well told story involving midnight snacks and unexpectant friendship. I'd love to see this story expanded so the reader can find out more out the mysterious Elizabeth. Well done, Ruby.

Youth Interstate Winner

Mia Groom (writing as M) - Host To A Haunting

This year's winning entry is written with an almost musical rhythm that's close to poetry. From the very first line it lures the reader in with a cool, calm quality hiding a much deeper meaning, that of an invasion. I love the way this story is structured. The sheer talent of this author is unmistakable. To M. Your story is brilliant. The world needs more of your writing. Well done and congratulations on your win.

Youth WA

Shire of Mundaring Prize

Sarah Major – The Midnight Monster

I do love a story that takes me surprise. One that leads me on a path only to move the path right at the end. I loved your story, the excitement, the wonderful descriptions. It's really well written, well done, Sarah.

Commended

Rayanne Jamal – Lost and Found

There's a fantastic spookiness to this story. Its classic scary story writing where the reader goes from fear to relief and back to fear again. It fits the theme and it's very well written. Well done, Rayanne.

2nd Place

Kai Qi Chong - His Smile

What it is about a smile that can be so friendly, comforting, reassuring, and yet terrifying at the same time. This is the theme of Kai's story and it's brilliantly told. There's a real emotion here, as scary characters come to life, in more ways than one. I love your story, Kai. Congratulations.

Youth WA Winner

Mandy Baiden – Inert

This year's winning story proves that even the most innocent of settings can become a terror filled nightmare. Our lead character goes from boredom to horror in 500 words and the reader is right there beside her. I loved the mirror filled rooms, jumping shadows, the terrifying touch of cold, cold hands, and the vivid ending. Well done, Mandy, for winning this year's award with your wonderful story.

Adult Category

Shire of Mundaring Prize

Jane L. Ferro – Monolithic

Jane's story talks about darkness, and not just a midnight darkness, this one comes from the depths of a black cave. Monolithic has a wonderfully lyric rhythm which takes us from past to present, offering tantalising hints that leads to its conclusion. It's a great story, filled with atmosphere and I loved reading it. Well done, Jane.

Commended

Daniel Hu - Late Night Snack

First and foremost, I'd love to see this story as a full-length book, a series of books and a TV show, because it would work fantastically as all of those things. This story creates a complete world, in less than 1200 words. It's action packed, it made me laugh, it made me hungry and I loved it. Well done Daniel.

Emily Rose Robertson – The Ticking

Emotions feature strongly in this story. Sadness, loneliness, exhilaration...we're taken on a ride which circles ever back. The After Midnight theme is very powerful here. And what makes the story even

impressive is, it's been done in only 477 words. Well done, Emily. This is a wonderful story and I hope to hear more of your writing in the future.

2nd Prize

Angel Greene – Black Satin

The KSP Spooky Story competition is also named for its sponsor, Little Black Dress Productions. Because of this, we receive several submissions every year featuring a little black dress. This is the first year one of those double themed entries has reached the finals, and it deserves its placing. Told with an intriguing edge of mystery, the main characters are bound together, and the reader is not exactly sure who will come out the winner. It's a fascinating and well told story, one I enjoyed very much. Well done, Angel.

Adult Winner

Scott-Patrick Mitchell – Deceased Estate

Classic scary storytellers know it's a distortion of the ordinary that we fear the most. A perfectly normal situation transforming into our worst nightmare. Is it because it's all too easy to picture ourselves in that exact place and time? Wondering what we'd do if the person in the story was us? Our winning tale this year is a masterclass of world building within the ordinary. The After Midnight theme is important here, it's imperative here. We wait for it, anticipate it. It drives the story forward and that's just one of the reasons why it's this year's winner. Congratulations, Scott Patrick. Our worthy winner.