



NIGHT WORKS

2018 GHOST STORY
COMPETITION ANTHOLOGY
KSP WRITERS' CENTRE

Night Works

2018 KSP Ghost Story Competition Anthology

Judged by Carolyn Wren



KSP Writers' Centre

Night Works:
2018 KSP Ghost Story Competition Anthology

Typesetting: Shannon Coyle & Lisa Wolstenholme

Proofreading: Ashley Valli

Cover Design: Shannon Coyle

ISBN: 978-0-6483206-3-0



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Published by Wild Weeds Press, August 2018
for the Katharine Susannah Prichard Foundation Inc

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KSP's 2018 Ghost Story competition is kindly sponsored by the Shire of Mundaring, KSP Foundation Inc and Little Black Dress Productions.



Judge's Report 2018

I believe the short story genre is the hardest one to master, especially when given a specific themed subject. 1500 words, or 500 words for the junior category, is a tiny number of words in which to create an entire balanced story. One that has a clear beginning, middle and end. One which captures the essence of the theme, and gives the reader well-developed characters they can picture in their mind.

I do a lot of contest judging, and blind judged contests are my favourite. There's no outside influence. No cover art, no publisher logo, no author name. The story has to stand on its own merits. The entries come to me with only the story title and a code number. To add an extra layer of anonymity, I ask that no one post their intention to enter the contest to any of my social media, or tell me personally. I always have a great time judging the Ghost Story Contest, and I thank KSP for giving me the opportunity.

Anyone who writes a story is an author, and any author knows that sending your story out into the world to be judged is one of the scariest things you can possibly do. I'd like to applaud each and every one of our authors here tonight. The winners, the finalists, the entrants and all of those who thought about entering this year's Ghost Story, but didn't. I hope you'll build up your own courage by next year.

In conclusion, you should all be very proud of your achievements.

This year's theme, **night**, was open to interpretation, as long as the piece contained significant elements of eeriness/ spookiness

and a clear connection to the theme. 'Night' could be interpreted literally (i.e. a story based during night-time) or metaphorically (a character has a dark mental outlook on life). I have to say, a lot of authors took that last part to heart, and caused me more than a few sleepless nights during the reading process! As judge, I took into consideration the grammar and punctuation of each entrant, but it also came down to the 'feel' of the story. A story isn't just about each comma and full stop. It needs character and creativity. All the entries were spooky and fit the theme. All our writers deserve our congratulations for being brave enough to enter.

Youth Interstate

This year's contest opened up our youth category to interstate entries and those entries were superb.

Commendations

Ghost Girl – Alicia Curcio – Age 10

Ghost Girl is a tightly written, emotionally driven story about bullying, kidnapping, and revenge. I was caught up in our main character's exploits and adventures and captivated by her spirit and determination. Well done, Alicia.

When The Clock Struck Midnight – Olivia Lin – Age 8

A race through a haunted mansion to the sounds of deafening screams...And that's just the opening line to this fast paced, scary story. Dripping blood and a shadowy predator in a black dress keep the tension levels high and the reader on edge until the very

end. This is a true ghost story with a twist ending. Well done, Olivia.

Death's Warm Embrace – Sophie Wink – Age 17

I loved the character's voice in this story about Salem, accidental death and a mad house of assorted spirits. The wonderful descriptive narration and clever author voice kept me riveted until the very end. Well done, Sophie.

The Midnight Creature – Lauren Marie – Age 16

I have great admiration for an author who can create fear and tension in a story, only to pull the rug from under you at the last moment. This is exactly what Lauren did in The Midnight Creature. I have no doubt that this young author has a great future ahead of her. Well done, Lauren.

1st Place

The Ghost of the Night – Sasha Zolotavkina – Age 10

This year's winner of the Youth Interstate category is a dark tale of a spirit prowling the shadowed streets of London, stealing the hopes, dreams and sanity for those unfortunate enough to cross her path. This story had a true emotional resonance. The visual descriptions of terror and unfeeling vengeance were riveting. I loved this story and would like to offer my sincere congratulations to Sasha for this deserving win.

Youth WA

Commendations

Guitar – Saman Azam – Age 12

Guitar wasn't the scariest story in this year's youth category, but its emotional heart and exceptional writing gave it a deserving place in the finals. The tale of a ghostly serenade by an unknown, melancholy musician strumming his guitar by moonlight is captivating and touching. The music of the story stayed with me long after I finished reading. Well done, Saman.

Life Guard – Eva Marsh – Age 17

What is it about a deserted swimming pool at night that gives off an eerie vibe? Is it the echoing silence, the cold darkness of the water? All of these are put to excellent use in Life Guard. A tragic death and its repercussions for the living left behind give this story its genuine tension and suspense. Well done, Eva.

Fallen Soul – Montana Shepherd – Age 16

A dark stormy night and an ancient abandoned manor is a great way to start a ghost story. Especially when the story twists and turns into something unexpected. Montana takes us on a journey of fear and loneliness and leaves us with something positive. It takes a clever storyteller to achieve that. Well done, Montana.

2nd Prize

Heartbreak Crossing – Ellen Bourgault – Age 15

There were a few stories in this year's contest that caused me sleepless nights. Heartbreak Crossing was most definitely one of them. A creepy, harrowing tale of death and haunting. Of restless spirits and lost love. I commend Ellen on creating such a strong and emotional story. Congratulations on your prize.

1st Prize

The Night's Curse – Matilda Dewar – Age 12

With so many brilliant entries in the 2018 Youth WA category, you can understand how difficult it was to pick a winner. 500 words is such a tiny quantity to create a well-rounded story. Matilda did it with 336, and she did it in verse. The theme of night surrounds this story, it echoes in every line, every stanza. The Night's Curse builds in tension, pulling the reader along with it. It's a beautifully crafted, wonderfully written tale and a deserving winner of this year's contest. Well done, Matilda.

Adult Open Category

Commendations

NiGHTPHONED – Mark Townsend

Can technology bring with it its own set of ghostly rules? Can the modern world we take for granted cross over to another plane? These are the questions posed in NiGHTPHONED, a clever tale of love, loss and moving forward. I loved this different take on a ghost story. Its emotion rang throughout (no pun intended). Well done, Mark, for writing something so distinctive and unique.

Quarantined – Susan Wemyss

Every time I go to Sydney, a friend of mine tries to take me to the North Head Quarantine Station and every time I refuse, with good reason. The station has a reputation for being haunted and is a great choice for a ghost story setting. But Susan's tale takes us on a different journey. Here we get a wonderful insight into the station's original inhabitants, and the unimaginable hardships they endured. Sometimes when reading a story, a single line will stay with me, lingering for a long time. This was the case in Quarantined. The last line in the story was eloquent and heartwarming, and gave this story its perfect ending. Well done, Susan.

Bed Time Story – Eloise Kiosses

It's interesting that a tale called Bed Time Story stopped me from going to bed after reading it. This frightening story of an imaginary friend and a maternal night time ritual becomes the stuff of horrors. Painting a parent in a less than flattering light is a bold move and it works in this harrowing story. Well done, Eloise.

I'd like to say a huge congratulations to both of the authors of these final two stories.

2nd Place

Wundurra – D.D. Line

From the very first line, this distinctively Australian story transported me to another place, another time. There is such an emotional resonance here. I could hear the vibrato of the

didgeridoo, see the flickering flames against the night sky. But there is also a silence, deep and powerful, weaving its quiet between the lines of the story. This tale of a warrior called back for a final task is beautiful and evocative and executed with real skill. Congratulations, D.D., on your well-deserved place in this year's ghost story finals.

NOTE: Because Wundurra is an indigenous story, both the author and KSP sought individual advice on any sensitivity issues with regard to reading the story in public.

The following is the statement issued by Jeff Murray, and KSP would like to thank him for reading the story and giving his expert advice.

"I consider the Wundurra story as suitable for reading out to an audience.

With my many years of experience working with Aboriginal people and communities I believe the story as non-offensive to Aboriginal people and contains nothing that should be considered as sensitive."

1st Place

Night Blooms – Suzannah Churchman

This year's contest theme was 'night', and that theme was integral to my judging duties. It was fascinating to see the different interpretations from all our writers in their stories. Before I received the entries, I wondered if there would be night time settings. Would the darkness be of the mind, or the body? How would each author handle it? Our winner tonight takes all of these

elements to the next level. Not only is the story set at night, not only is the darkness metaphorical and physical, the very essence of night is vital to the plot. Had the theme of the contest been 'day' this story simply would not qualify. There's not just one component of night, there are several, and each one is entwined within the story adding layer upon layer. It takes a master storyteller to take a simple word, and transform it into a superbly written tale that is both scary and genuinely suspenseful. I loved Night Blooms and found myself re-reading it several times long after my judging duties were complete. Congratulations, Suzannah, this story deserves its winner's prize.

About Carolyn

Carolyn Wren is a UK born Perth Hills based author. She started writing in 2009 for fun and has now published 15 books through her USA and Australian publishers.

The 2014 Parkerville bushfires brought Carolyn's writing career to a temporary halt, and she credits the wonderful Hills Community for helping her and her husband put their home and life back together.

So far in her career, Carolyn has won five writing awards from around the world including Novella of the Year and Unpublished Manuscript of the Year. She also has 12 finalist placings. The trophies and certificates are displayed with a great deal of pride.

Carolyn doesn't like to limit herself to one genre, preferring to let her characters take control. The resulting stories can range from light-hearted comedic contemporary through to sexy, action-

packed romantic suspense and emotion-driven urban fantasy. Because she's a true romantic at heart, one thing remains constant in all her books: she loves a happy ending.

www.carolynwren.com

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Early in the Evening

(for ages 6-14)

The Night's Curse

By Matilda Dewar

First Place, Youth (WA) Category

She casts her shadow on the ground,
Filling the air with darkness all around.
Her shawl conceals all from my sight,
I the moon and she the night.

Thrust into the world of darkness.
And overwhelmed by her shadow's largeness.
But I stand here, and light the world, so you all can see,
To set the world, of night, free.

She whispers and groans and throws darkness in the air,
On the ground, on the trees and everywhere.
She sends her winds to chill my spine.
I am afraid, of her the night.

I peer into the shadows so deep,
And all is silent, not a squeak.
And the sound of an owl taking flight,
Gives me such a fright.
Of the power of her, the endless night.

The Night's Curse

The wind whispers through the trees.
For now he is just a chilling breeze.
But he tries to blow the darkness away.
And until the sun comes, the night will stay.

I shine my light to make the darkness bright.
A cold, faint light but it breaks through the night.
The cold of the night, Sinks deep into flesh,
It settles on bones, and smells of death.

Over yonder, a dragonfly flies,
She dips and she turns much to my surprise.
The cold of the night, does not affect her.
But not feeling this death, is all for the better.

The smell of night, the death and decay.
Is so strong, it seems it will stay.
Until a strong gust of wind blows away the smell,
My fears, the death, and the cold as well.
The cold grows, until it is death,
And it becomes a struggle, just to take a breath.
I will forever be cursed by her the night,
But still, I continue to put up a fight.

But for how much longer will I continue to last.
Others have fallen to the night in the past,
Crumbled under the folds of her cold cloak,
And let the cold sink in until even their bones broke.

About Matilda

Matilda Newman started writing stories and poems when she was five. She lives near the coast with her family. She has been to London, but has never seen any ghosts.

Fallen Soul

By Montana Shepherd

Commended, Youth (WA) Category

The night was chilly. Rain gushed from the heavens, hurling towards the Earth with a deathly splatter. The wind grew stronger in the harsh bellowing monsoon. Lightning illuminating the atmosphere accompanied by a thunderous growl. The arms of a nearby tree thrashed against the window in a deathly hollow. The eerie floorboards cracked and creaked, footsteps resonating closer sending sharp shots of terror and panic through my bones. The thunder deepened, lightning grew brighter, footsteps closer. Something was with me, something sinister, evil.

I ducked around a corner, dodging the spirit, the entity that roams the halls of this ancient abandoned manor. The dark brown taint wallpaper peeling from the facade that was once the body of such beauty.

My back pressed against the wall, my toes crinkled beneath my weight. Frozen like a statue.

Heavy footsteps resonated closer. The perpetual fear seeping into my soul. My once relaxed soul. Once alive. Fear and anxiety consumed me, sending me into a heap of panic.

A murky, conspicuous figure darted past me elegantly. Scampering across the room effortlessly. The Earth's flashlight flicking on for a split second, the silhouette protruding against the far wall. Almost seeming real, alive. The soul didn't acknowledge my presence, but sensed my fear.

It spun around, eyes straining to vision what was in the shadows. Lightning lit up my frame, my skin glowing in the dark. The figure spun around exiting the room carelessly. I was intrigued, curious, so I followed.

It explored every limb of the ancient walls, lurching through doorways and leaping over broken staircase panels. It always sensed my presence following suspiciously, but it never looked over its shoulder, not once. What was I doing following something so spooky, something so eerie?

The distant storm raged on not giving up without a fight, pelting the Earth fiercely, avenging unknown territory.

The basement was the most ominous place in a house full of eerie yet satisfying rooms. I was in a corner, trapped. Mice bolting across the threshold of a second room. Disgust and blasts of fidget overcame me, mice weren't my favourite thing.

The shadow that I had purposely followed during the night spun around towards me, eyes widening in fear. Had it seen me? Had I frightened it? Wasn't that its job not mine?

The ghostly figure stood five foot five. Long brunette hair, and beautiful green eyes. Was she even real? A spirit maybe? An angel.

She stuttered shocked. 'You, you were following me!' Her breath was raspy, fear escaping through her breath of winter. The air was abnormally freezing around us.

'You're a ghost?' She questioned moving closer.

'I thought you were', my voice echoed. I hadn't spoken in so long.

She held her hand out. Tingles fluctuated through my skin. In an instant her warm hand falls through mine. All along I was the ghost. All along, she was alive, breathing. I sensed her kindness, her curiosity. Could she befriend someone like me? Someone dead?

About Montana

Hi, my name is Montana, I'm 17 on the 26th of August 2018. I enjoy reading and writing. I love spending time with my horse who I absolutely adore.

Ghost Girl

By Alicia Curcio

Commended, Youth (Interstate) Category

Early one morning, a girl named Abigail, who had long brown hair, dark haunted eyes and grey shaggy school clothes, woke up and strolled to school. Like always, she stumbled into the most popular kids in school, called the “Cool Kids”.

Bianca, the “leader of the group”, walked away from the girls and said, with her blonde pigtails, ‘Why are you wandering towards us, Ghost Girl?’

‘Haha, Ghost Girl.’ Wailed a girl in the back, who Abigail recognised to be her old BFF, Emma. She scurried into class and started sobbing on her desk with the shrieking voices repeating in her head, over and over, ‘Ghost Girl, Ghost Girl.’

On her way home, Abigail was only a block away when an older man snuck behind her and grabbed her around the neck. When she woke up she was in a warehouse surrounded by boxes and crates. The older man was not feeding her or giving her anything to eat or drink and she did not have a place to sleep. Under her

eyes was getting darker each day. Her clothes were ripped and even shaggier than before. After a week or two she couldn't last any longer, and she died of hunger and exhaustion.

Abigail was left there, sad and alone. A month later in the middle of the night she found herself asleep in her bed. When she got up she floated through the roof. Abigail looked in the mirror and saw her with long, grey hair and a long, white, ripped dress, and she was almost transparent, then she realised, SHE WAS A GHOST!!! Now Abigail could do anything, she could float through walls, go on roofs, and then it hit her, the ultimate prank: she could haunt the Cool Kids from school. Her idea was locked in her head, for the rest of her days she would haunt the Cool Kids.

She could haunt them in so many different ways, like shaving their precious hair overnight or scaring them when they're awake or even — ok this is when Abigail came up with the ultimate way to haunt them — she would make them think their houses are haunted even though they actually will be. Abigail had planned the whole thing in her head, she knew exactly what she was going to do. That night she left and she headed off to the house that was owned by the meanest girl of all, Bianca.

Half an hour later she got to Bianca's, and Bianca turned out to be having sleepover with all of the Cool Kids. This turned out great for Abigail. She could scare them and make them think they're all going crazy in one go. She made the lamps flicker and float, she made the fireplace go out and whispered through the pipes. They all ran out of the house and headed to the police station, and that was when she knew, this is what she was going to do for the rest of her life.

About Alicia

My name is Alicia and I am 10 years old. I have one sister named Jessica and my parents' names are Fortunato and Rebecca. I have one dog named Mac.

Guitar

By Saman Azam

Commended, Youth (WA) Category

A pale, ghostly face smiled up at me. Freckle-dotted hands gently strummed the chords of a guitar, and pink lips sung silent words of love and heartbreak. Baby blue eyes framed with strawberry blonde hair gazed at me sadly. It was *him*.

I didn't know who he was, but what I did know was this: every night, at the strike of midnight, he would assume his place outside my house. He always carried with him a worn brown guitar with which he would strum a melody to accompany his wordless songs. And, every night, I would perch at my windowsill, entranced by his delicate, porcelain movements. He was a fragile thing, always moving around like he could break at any moment. But, I believe that maybe he was already broken, just on the inside. Why else would those soft doe eyes carry such melancholy expressions? Why else would those brown-freckled cheeks be burdened by heavy bags? Sometimes, I longed to know his story. I wanted to know every bit of his past, all the joys and tragedies associated with it. But I don't think I ever will. I wanted to hold him, to let his

spectral tears stain my shirt, to let him whisper his fears to me. But every time I dared set foot outside, he would fade away, like a withered leaf into the fearsome clutches of a winter gale. Then, he wouldn't show his face for several days. It was almost like he was scared of me... But nevertheless, the phantasmal boy always came back. But even though I knew he would always return, my heart would leap in joy and all my worries would pale away every time I saw his form walking towards me from the distance, guitar and all. This apparitional boy was strumming my heartstrings and playing with my emotions. Whenever he was gone, I thought of him and his sweet smile, and when we together, I never wanted him to leave. I yearned for him like a mountaineer yearns for the sweet, fresh mountain air.

He paused his music and looked down, uttering an almost inaudible sigh. He fingered the intricate carvings on the guitar, tracing its worn strings. He scrubbed at a spot of dirt on the clean, wooden surface, his transparent fingertip having almost no effect on it. He gently placed the guitar on the ground and started to walk towards my window, his dull eyes locked with mine in a searching gaze. He paused underneath it, looking up into my face. His lips pulled up into a smile and he shut his eyes briefly. When he opened them, they were glistening with tears. He strained on his toes until we were face-to-face. I could feel his cold, chilling breath on my warm cheeks. Suddenly, he pulled me into a kiss, his alabastrine lips locking with my bright pink ones. He pulled away and gazed into my eyes one last time, before whispering a single word.

'Goodbye.'

About Saman

This is where I write about my literature life, right? I hope so, because I just wasted 19 words. Oops. There wasn't much to say, anyway. Don't be disappointed. Please.

When the Clock Struck Midnight

By Olivia Lin

Commended, Youth (Interstate) Category

I heard a deafening scream echo through my mansion. I covered my ears as I raced through doors and doors, desperately trying to escape my haunted mansion but I ended up at my room. I saw a shadow creep past me. A shiver went up my spine. I slowly reached for the doorknob. My heart was pumping as fast as a cheetah, but even a fierce cat would be afraid of what would happen next.

The door was locked.

I could sense her lurking behind me. My sweaty hands kept slipping off as I wrenched at the door handle. It felt like someone or something was pulling me back. When I finally opened the door, it felt like I had been sucked into another dimension.

Suddenly I heard footsteps rushing down the stairs leading to my room. I grabbed my hockey stick, ready to thrash the ghost. As my door creaked open, I started to feel dizzy. My room fell dark, and I dropped to the ground.

‘Imogen, I heard noises coming from your bedroom. Was it another one of your nightmares, darling?’ cried Mum.

‘There is a ghost girl in a black dress haunting me every night! You will regret it if you don’t believe me when you see me lying dead, blood dripping from my mouth!’ yelled Imogen.

Sighing, Imogen’s mother strode back to the kitchen as Imogen collapsed on her bed. Imogen knew there was a ghost haunting her, and she had a feeling the ghost would return at midnight.

When dinner came, Imogen sat quietly at the dinner table while her siblings chatted away with her parents. They were all so defenceless. Soon, all that would be left of them would be skulls and bloody bones. Imogen’s family cleared the table and they skipped to the games room to play cards. To Imogen, they were lambs going to the slaughter. Imogen wished she could protect her precious family, like the Kings, Queens and Jacks in a deck of cards, and keep them close to her forever. It would be impossible for ghosts to resist the human flesh lying in front of them. As her family laughed, Imogen could only hear the endless sound of sirens like a final warning.

While her family submerged themselves in slumber, Imogen lay awake in bed, terrified. The clock struck midnight and Imogen’s cupboard creaked open. A girl ghost in a black dress drifted out.

Imogen didn’t dare move. For some reason she knew she wouldn’t live to see tomorrow. The phantom’s vampiric fangs pierced Imogen’s heart and it looked like Imogen was swimming in a crimson pool of blood. The ghost girl dug her fingers and pulled out bones, viciously thrust them into her mouth.

When the Clock Struck Midnight

Imogen let out one last gasp as she felt her soul rising from her body.

‘Mum, help ...’

In the bedroom next door, Imogen’s mum switched on the light.

In front of her was Imogen, in a black dress.

About Olivia

I love to read different book genres, especially detective novels like Friday Barnes. I especially like writing stories and poetry.

Death's Warm Embrace

By Sophie Wink

Commended, Youth (Interstate) Category

The ivory-varnished walnut double doors stood looming despite the pitch black darkness enveloping the town of Salem. Nobody ever went in there... If they did they didn't come out...

So and so forth, you know the drill: haunted house, old village, probably a lot of random kids died there, some couple goes in and frees the house of ghosts, et cetera, et cetera.

Well nobody has saved this house. Know why? Nobody tries... I went in for a dare in senior year and look at me ... dead ... That was two years ago... Have any of my "friends" checked on me? Nope. All I have for company is the dead gardener who screeches loudly at all hours of the night and wakes the whole neighbourhood up, an assorted cast of poor young peasant ladies who died during the witch trials (what they were doing here, I don't know), two constantly drunk partiers from the 1920s and some dude from the 80s.

So I should probably tell you how I died, right?

Well 'twas the night before Halloween and I had just been dared to go into the house on the hill. My clothes fit tightly around my torso as I slowly moved through the mansion, the heat of the spring air creating a strange feeling as I stepped into the dark cold confines of the mansion. I gripped my phone in my hand struggling to turn on the flashlight, my hand trembling as the light came on. The house was littered with 18th century furniture, upholstered stairwells and fading curtains. Spider webs clung to the banisters and the furniture, the dust-filled air clinging to my shirt and the light only illuminating the small area ahead of me. There was a mirror hanging on the wall reflected my small terrified body back at me... I heard a scuttling sound through the walls, creeping towards me with baited breath. A dark spectral shape peered its head through the wall. The specs of blood were illuminated through its translucent and eerie form. I felt my breath grow heavy as I tried to move, my legs cemented in place as it approached me. "Join... us..." an eerie voice curled within the very walls of the house, as though it was part of the house itself. I gulped, unable to make a single sound that would be able to help in this situation. I was frozen with fear.

I can't remember anything from then...

I just woke up floating above my own mangled body as though it was completely normal...

The ghost that had killed me apologised right away, her name is Rosa. She was burned at 17, suffered for a crime that doesn't exist. It was a common tale among those of the earlier centuries, some had even been sent to die in this house.

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It's a mad house here... but it's our mad house... We make of it what we will ... And we are happy here, even if we are no longer alive.

About Sophie

Just a student/author trying to make a mark.

The Midnight Creature

By Lauren Marie

Commended, Youth (Interstate) Category

The Midnight Creature traipsed out of the now-empty child's bedroom. Indistinguishable against the pitch-black corridor. The ominous ticking of the clock was the Creature's only company. Its chubby legs shuffled slowly, like its feet were made of lead. Its stubby fingers tightly wound around the ankle of the soft, limp body trailing quietly behind it.

To a stranger the Creature would have seemed to be wandering aimlessly, with its groggy head between its shoulders and its large eyes half open. But it knew exactly where it was going. The master bedroom.

In the master bedroom, husband and wife sleep soundly, despite the faint baleful noises just past the threshold.

Ph-shhh. Ph-shhh

The shirt of the limp body pulled slightly against the carpeted floor. The noise too loud for the Midnight Creature against the night's quietude. Apprehensive, it kept going.

It hated this time of night, filled with shadows and scary monsters under beds and in closets. It was glad, none had made their presence known to it tonight. Though it knew they were watching, waiting for the perfect time to pounce.

The Creature looked like it was struggling against a violent gale as it thrust its feet against the floor.

Ph-shhh. Ph-shhh.

Finally, the Midnight Creature reached the master bedroom.

Ph-shhh. Ph-shhh.

Even with the sound of shirt against carpet, the couple did not stir.

Ph-shhh. Ph-shhh.

With purpose, the Midnight Creature stepped into the room and walked over to the bed.

With great effort the creature hauled its dumpy body onto the bed.

Even as the bed dipped and their feet slipped, the couple still did not stir.

And they didn't stir until the Midnight Creature stood over them and wailed:

'Muuuum! Daaaaaad! I had a *nightmare!*' She barely finished before she fell face-first between her half-asleep parents, with her doll tucked snugly under her arm.

About Lauren

Lauren Marie is currently studying for her HSC. She's 16 years old and hopes to be an author one day.

The Ghost of the Night

By Sasha Zolotavkina

First Prize, Youth (Interstate) Category

The lady of the night was a mere ghost. A spirit, a soul that never lived — a tortured being.

The ghost always wore the same black-as-the-night gown, standing out against the deathly white of her slender body. She could be found prowling around in the cities after dark, walking in hushed, eerie steps, waiting for all to fall asleep ...

It was the stormiest, darkest night when she set out along the streets of London for the hundredth time, dark eyes gleaming, unfeeling ... she reached a bend in the street, turned to the left, and found herself walking along a dark alley, with shadowed apartments fringed at the side.

There was no light in the alley; and if one wanted to walk along it after darkening hours, one would feel themselves plunged into the deathly grasp of suffocating, nefarious darkness. But the ghost cared not — she knew she was crowned queen, she knew she was the only one capable of many things — capable of everything.

The Ghost of the Night

At first, the spirit of the dead meant to tip some poison into the children's dreams, but she soon decided against it.

The moon shone on her face, and she was furious that it dared shine so broadly. Raising a long, albino-white hand, she flicked her spidery fingers, and the moon instantly, dully, disappeared behind a black storm-cloud.

'Those fools,' she said, 'all those fools ... they must accept that I am crowned queen, and that I rule the planet ...' One would get a heart attack if one heard her melancholy, beautiful voice. It was so mellifluous, so soulful, so deep-set, that it would be enough to hear her say one word before one's soul left them.

The lady of the night was a soul-catcher, and a soul eater. She lived on people's dreary, happy, famous lives, and, as she drank, she became powerful. Raising one's soul as a silvery goblet to her bloody lips, she drank in every drop—every, but one.

Oh, of course she would leave the last drop of sanity in the person; they would become her slave alright, but with that last drop, she could provoke them, make them do horrible things ... the last drops of sanity in her slaves amused her wholly: she needed nothing more—only fame and fortune.

With a life such as hers, there was nothing impossible for the crowned queen. As long as she stayed the goddess of the dark, everything was hers. Everything, from all the gold in the world to the opals dug deep in mines.

So the queen decided to raise the silver goblet as a toast once more. She cared not whose life she drank, as long as the bittersweet wine never ended.

Night Works

And still, to this day, one may find a deathly figure walking along one's street.

And every time, if one catches her singing, they see nothing more in their lives afterwards — nothing, but darkness.

About Sasha

My name is Oleksandra (or Sasha). Me and my family moved to Australia two years ago. I enjoy writing stories and hope to become a skilful author someday.

Deep in the Night

(for ages 15+)

Night Blooms

By Suzannah Churchman

First Prize, Open Category

Brandon circled the campus, rattling door handles. It was a time-wasting exercise. He knew they were locked, but it kept his mind off the cravings. Nightshift was long and tedious, security had been stepped up since the girls' deaths and that meant more overtime. The stress made him smoke more. Normally by now, he'd be in the carpark bushes enjoying a sneaky cigarette, but there was no chance of that, not since the police had cordoned it off. He was trying to quit but the urge was too strong.

He walked to the old glass house. A huge, ugly-windowed, birdcage-like structure in the original grounds. It was off-limits to students and they seldom came here, except in summer. Then the girls used it as a shortcut to smuggle boys back to their dorms. Shoes in one hand, beers in the other, wobbling across the rectangles of moonlight, projected onto its sweeping lawn. He tried to scare them off, but they didn't care. People always ignored security guards.

He leaned against the glass house wall, feeling the vibrations from the heating system on his back. Brandon lit his last Marlboro. He inhaled, watching the smoke through the rain as he blew out. A shadow passed over the lawn. It's elongated, twisted form, hobbling out from the jagged silhouettes of the vegetation. It lurched a few steps and disappeared. He spun around wrenching the torch from his belt, dropping the cigarette. The leaves shook behind darkened windows. Brandon unlocked the door his hand shaking. An oppressive curtain of humidity pressed on his lungs as he crept inside. The reticulation hissed. His torch light criss-crossed over the surface of palms and vines. Something moved in his peripheral vision. He turned and caught a face in the beam of light. An old lady, staring, her cloudy grey eyes illuminated by the glare. His torch crashed to the floor, batteries spilling out. The dark swallowed everything and then a flashlight came on. It wasn't his. The old lady shone her light over his uniform settling on his badge.

'I'm so sorry, did I scare you ... Brandon? I'm Miriam Carver, well Professor Carver actually, but Professor sounds so bloody ancient doesn't it?'

He calmed himself and fumbled for his torch. 'I didn't know anyone was here this late.'

'Yes well,' she muttered. 'My whole research is about late I'm afraid.' She began to unfold a camp chair. The twist in her spine making her head tilt to the right as if she was perpetually curious about something.

'Sorry I gave you a start ... Cigarette?' She opened a silver case towards him.

He paused. 'It's a no smoking campus.'

She shrugged. 'I won't tell if you don't.. He took the cigarette from her and lit it. 'Be careful they're quite strong. I roll them myself.'

'Are you alone here?'

'Oh, my research assistant should be along presently, such a nice girl. And of course I have my specimens.' She gestured to the tall shrubs behind her on which a dozen waxy, pendulous blooms hung. 'Datura Inoxia, Trumpet flowers, Angels Clarions, night bloomers. Introduced to Australia from Mexico, where incidentally some people still revere them as Gods. Here we take a dimmer view, less God, more invasive species, but still they are fascinating. They bloom at night.' She adjusted the tripod on the camera. 'So time lapse is the best footage to use, obviously.'

Brandon took a long drag, sucking in the rich leathery smoke. He nodded appreciatively, and the rain shifted up a gear.

'My father taught me to roll cigarettes when I was a child, tobacco plants have such beautiful foliage. Plants are fascinating.' She plucked a leaf from the Datura bush and passed it to him. 'Crush it,' she said, concealing a smile. 'Go on.'

He closed his fist on it, almost gagging as the smell hit him. 'Urggh.'

'What does it smell like to you?' Miriam asked.

He searched his brain for something close. 'Rancid peanut butter?'

'How interesting,' she chuckled. 'You know what I smell?' He shook his head. 'Semen!' He burst out laughing. She offered him another cigarette. 'I was young too, once.'

'If they smell that bad, how would they taste.' He stared at the flowers which seemed bigger than before and almost luminescent.

'I believe they are very bitter, but you wouldn't want to ingest them. They are unusually toxic.'

I must confess, I am glad you're here, working alone and all these murders. Terrible.'

'How do you know when they'll open?' he said.

'I don't ... but good things come to those who wait.' Miriam adjusted the camera. 'And I amuse myself, make observations.'

It was true. There was much to notice when you sat on a hill in a darkened glass house night after night. She had noticed him. Eventually everything made sense. The comings and goings, people's habits, their patterns of behaviour. You could fit the pieces together to see the bigger picture.

Brandon took off his hat, he was surprised to find a Marlborough behind his ear, still lit. He smoked it and then Miriam immediately replaced it with one of her own.

'I wonder where she can have got to,' Miriam said. 'Good researchers are so hard to find these days, and she's such a gem. Do you have a sweetheart Brandon?' Miriam's voice sounded very far away now.

He smiled at the quaint word. Sweetheart? Brandon watched the flowers swelling, their petals taut like parachute silk. 'Sweetheart?' He rolled the phrase over his tongue and considered. No. He had never had a sweetheart, only girls, young girls, liars, stuck-up bitches that never answered, who wouldn't

give him the time of day, even when he tried, and he had tried so many times. It always ended the same way.

‘They don’t like me much,’ he said flatly.

Miriam sighed. ‘Oh that’s such a shame, young girls don’t know they’re born nowadays, do they? All this equal pay, voting, women’s rights, insisting on being educated, running around anywhere they please, alone, at night, wearing just what they want. It’s no wonder they get into trouble ...’

Her voice sounded calm as she spoke, but there was a serrated edge to it, that dropped away as quickly as it came. Behind him the door handle rattled as the tall glass door opened and closed.

‘Oh, is that you Katy? You’re just in time.’

Through the haze of cigarette smoke he saw her coming. A girl’s outline moving purposefully to the Datura’s. Her hands inspecting the bulging flowers which seemed now to glow, pulsating, expanding into paper lanterns that lit up Miriam’s face.

‘Brandon, I believe you have met my research assistant Katy.’ He looked at the girl side on. He couldn’t place her. They all looked the same anyway.

He hesitated. ‘I don’t think so.’

‘Don’t you recognise me?’ she said calmly. ‘In the car park. I was running ... you were ...’ She pulled her hair back. ‘I had a pony tail ... earphones?’ The beads of condensation raced each other down the glass panes. She moved out of the shadows. ‘Remember now?’

Everything stopped. He heard the blood squeezing through his ventricles as the panic set in. He saw the deep trench in her skull, where his torch had struck her, until her power drained away. The crushed orbit of her temple, a raw sink hole, where her blood oozed out into black rivers as his rage and lust broke its banks. The void of her eye socket, where he had snuffed out the light. He did remember. He always did. It was just so hard to quit. He might have tried to scream, before Katy took his torch from his belt, before she brought it across his hyoid bone with a snap like a crab claw being broken. When she unravelled the sinews of his throat and unfolded his vocal chords, he was silent.

The Datura's slowly awakened, revealing themselves after waiting so patiently. So many long nights in the darkness. Miriam watched impassively as he held his imaginary conversations, hurled himself repeatedly to the floor, smashed his face with his fists, his fingers clawing at his own neck. She left the glass house only when the last of the flowers had bloomed and perished.

She left the camera running. Datura was an under researched toxin. His data would be valuable, observations to note, hypotheses on the stages of toxicity. It was unpredictable, especially when smoked. Individuals imagined their own demons, engineered their own tortured hallucinations. The propensity for self-harm was of course inevitable. She imagined it was only a matter of time, before a madman in a glass house sealed his own fate.

Brandon wept as he watched the old lady's hunched figure leave, disappearing across the moonlit lawn. He didn't miss her, he was more preoccupied by the young women coming in the opposite

direction, making their way to the glass house. Creatures he had denied the chance to bloom, now about to fulfil their purpose.

About Suzannah

Suzannah Churchman was runner up in KSP's 2017 Short Fiction and Ghost Story competitions. She has also won Country Style magazines Short Story competition and the Southern Cross Literary Award.

NIGHTPHONED

By Mark Townsend

Commended, Open Category

Joel stood at the grave side. Up till now he had held it together. Had stayed strong. Now it was all coming out. Every memory of her that was and every memory that could ... should have been ... came in the shape of plump hot tears. His shoulders heaved in time to his sobs. The handful of dirt he had held trickled down on top of the coffin sounding like hail.

‘Bye beautiful,’ he whispered between gritted teeth.

‘Oooooo look at you with ya new iPhone, what is it a six? ‘Bout time you got rid of that Nokia. Didn’t even have a camera, did it?’

Joel ignored the ribbing of Tim, his best friend of seven years, and continued to remove his new iPhone from the box. The light danced on the screen and lit up his face.

‘That Nokia served me well. I reckon I dropped it about twenty times, never let me down once. Besides, it was a present from

Jenny, it was sort of hard to let it go you know?’ Joel looked down at his hands, the memory of a past Christmas and of her, of Jenny, came waltzing into his head.

‘Mate, I’m only pulling ya leg. I miss her too. Two years, where the hell has that time gone?’ Tim stared in to space, elsewhere for a moment.

‘Anyway, ya bloody technophobe, let’s get you set up. We need to set up the Wi-Fi. Get ya email account set up, and, of course, there’s Siri. You’re gonna love Siri.’ Tim smiled mischievously

‘Siri? Who’s Siri? I am not interested in any dating sites, mate, sort of old-fashioned when it comes to things like that. Not my cup of tea at —’

‘Relax, mate, Siri is a lovely lady, but your relationship with her will be purely platonic.’ Tim shook his head and laughed. He tapped away at the new iPhone. After much clicking and bleeping and in-depth explaining, he handed the phone back to Joel.

‘Now Joel, my untechnical-minded friend, I want you to meet the lovely Siri. All you need to say is “hey Siri” and she will answer any question you put to her.’ Tim nodded at the phone in a *go on* gesture.

‘I feel bloody foolish, talking to a phone, what am I — oh what the heck, Hey Siri!’ The phone pinged and lit up.

‘Now what am I supposed to say?’ Joel looked blankly at the phone.

‘*What would you like to say?*’ The polite female voice in the phone asked

‘What the hell! Who’s that?’

Tim roared with laughter. ‘Joel, meet Siri, and welcome to the twenty-first century.’

Joel woke up with a start, the dream he was having of Jenny emptying from his mind like sand in an hour glass. He had seen the night as his enemy since Jenny died. A full night’s sleep had eluded him for the past two years. He turned over to look at the alarm clock. It was dead. *Bloody power cuts!!* He went to pick up his phone from the bedside cabinet, then remembered it was on the floor at the end of the bed, charging. Feeling foolish he shouted into the darkness.

‘Hey Siri! What time is it?’

BI-BIP *‘It is one twenty-three AM.’*

‘One twenty-three and wide awake, nothing new there then Siri!’

BI-BIP *‘I don’t understand the question. Are you sad Joel?’*

Joel sat up and looked towards the end of the bed. The iPhone cast a faint light over the room. *Tim must have programmed my name into the phone or something, not sure if I am happy with that!*

‘Yes, I’m sad, Siri. I’ve been sad for two years. That sort of happens when the love of your life dies on you.’ Joel could feel the familiar sting in his eyes as the tears started to come.

BI-BIP *‘Two years is a long time to be sad Joel. Would Jenny want you to be sad Joel?’*

Joel swung his legs out of the bed, the fuzz of his restless sleep totally gone. He got up and grabbed the phone from the floor. The charger cable yanked out of the socket. He held the phone out in front of him, flipping it over in his hand. *What do you think you're gonna find? Some chick sitting on the back of your phone you idiot, asking you these stupid questions. This'll be bloody Tim. Yeah, great joke, Tim! Mock the guy who still mourns his dead girlfriend.* The voice line pulsated a gentle beat almost urging him to ask another question. *Alright, Tim, I'll play along.*

'What would you know Siri? What would you know what Jenny would have wanted?'

BI-BIP *'Because Jenny is here Joel, she told me.'*

Joel threw the phone down hard on the bed and backed away as if it was going to leap up and start attacking him. 'What the hell! What the bloody hell! This is sick, even by Tim's standards ...'

BI-BIP *'You need to calm down, Joel. Jenny says you need to calm down. She says you need to do that trick, the one she showed you. The finger trick.'*

Joel's legs weakened. He fell to his knees staring at the phone in disbelief. Rivulets of tears were running down his face. He drew in deep rattling breaths, his lungs struggling to take in air.

BI-BIP *'Joel, Jenny says do the finger trick. Do it now, Joel!'*

Joel looked at his hands. *How would she know?* He pulled on the thumb of his left hand. CLICK. He breathed deeply. He pulled on his left index and left middle fingers. CLICK, CLICK. He worked his way through all his fingers on both hands. Each click slowing his

heart rate and his breathing. The tears had dried on his cheeks making them feel tight. The finger trick, the old finger trick. Jenny had shared this with him, it was one of the tricks she used to calm down patients at the psychiatric ward she had worked at. Works every time.

BI-BIP *'Jenny is asking, are you feeling better, Joel?'*

'How can Jenny ask you anything? She is dead?' He picked up the phone from the bed and stared into the screen, half-expecting to see Jenny's face looking back at him. All he saw was his own reflection and the coloured pulsing voice line.

BI-BIP *'Yes she is dead, Joel. But that's just a physical state. What's so hard to believe that spiritually we live on? Think about it, Joel. I have never lived in the physical sense, but here I am talking to you now. Jenny and I talk a lot. She loves you, Joel.'*

The tears came again. He wiped the back of his hand across his face.

'I'm dreaming, aren't I? I'm still in bed having a stupid bloody dream. This is why I don't like technology. It gets into your head, plays tricks on you.'

BI-BIP *'Well, it's not every day I am told I'm the girl of someone's dreams, Joel. Maybe you are dreaming —'*

'Siri, be quiet for a minute. Let me talk —'

'Jenny, no, we're not supposed to do that. It's not allowed —'

'Siri, shh, just for a minute I promise.'

The unmistakable voice of Jenny. Clear, almost musical. Not a hint of the croak she had developed in the later stages of her cancer, arguing with Siri, a glorified version of google, you couldn't write better stuff than this.

'J-J-Jenny, is that you, is that really you?'

BI-BIP *'Is that your best Forrest Gump impersonation, Joel?'* Giggling poured out of the phones speaker. Happy, bubbling giggling. Jenny's unmistakable laugh. Joel started to pull on his fingers again.

'Jenny, I don't understand.'

BI-BIP *'Joel, oh my love, my life. There is nothing to understand. I'm gone, but part of me is still here, those memories that pop up. That's me. My perfume in that red cushion you always hated. That's me. Love like ours doesn't just die when we do. It's like when you turn off a T.V., the spark is still there, waiting till it's switched on again. Keep me in your memories, Joel, that's where I belong now. Go on and live. Go on and have a life. Do it for me —'*

'Have you finished? You know that's against the rules. You'll get me into trouble. Jeez, give an inch and they take a foot.'

Jenny's voice was interrupted by Siri's friendly tone. Joel got up off his knees and slumped back onto the bed. He picked up the red cushion that was propped up on Jenny's side of the bed and breathed in the sweet perfume of his dead girlfriend.

'Hey Siri.'

BI-BIP *'How can I help you today.'*

‘What do you know about dating web sites?’

BI-BIP *‘I am showing four items that match your request, would you like me to add them to your favourites list?’*

‘Goodbye Jenny.’

BI-BIP *‘Goodbye Joel.’*

About Mark

I’m Mark Townsend. I live in the beautiful South West of Australia. I love writing ghost/horror stories. If I scare you and entertain you at the same time, I’m happy.

Bedtime Story

By Eloise Kiosses

Commended, Open Category

It was Amanda's bedtime. She had fallen asleep on the couch so her mother took it upon herself to lug the babe to her room. Her mother kicked open the door to her room with her stiletto while fumbling with the bundle. Leaning down, she switched on the night light, filling the walls with stars. Her mother pulled back the gruesomely cheerful covers and plopped her daughter onto her pillow. Her eyes were closed shut and her black hair splayed all over her round face. Her mother looked upon her spawn, just for a moment, and then reached into her pocket for a smoke.

She was about to exit the room when a tiny voice called after her. 'Mummy, tell me a bedtime story.'

Her mother swore under her breath: she had hoped to get a puff in before work. 'Sweetie, Mummy has to go to work soon. Your father ain't doing it so I gotta.'

The small child ruffled her blankets. Now a demanding tone in her voice asked, 'Please, Mummy?'

The mother turned on her heel and looked into that face. Her brown eyes sparkled in the darkness, an unnatural glow about her cheeks. 'Oh fine then.'

The little girl smiled. Her mother's arse hit the covers like a disgruntled teen. 'There was once a little princess. She had a pet unicorn and loved to ride it around the castle every day. One day the little princess could not find her unicorn.' The mother lit the cigarette and sucked the good stuff in. She exhaled onto the runt's face who then coughed like a little mouse. 'She searched and searched and searched the castle grounds, but the beast was nowhere to be seen. Finally, the unicorn was found eating cotton candy at the local fairground. It was puking up cotton candy for days and the little princess got her unicorn back. The end.'

She puffed the fag, and then made a break for the door, but a tiny hand clamped her wrist. 'Amy has a story for you, Mummy.'

She had a firm grip. Her mother tried to shake it, but the little devil would not let go. 'Amanda, Amy doesn't exist. She is just an imaginary friend that you made up.'

'Please, Mummy, she has a bedtime story for you.'

The trees rustled slightly where they had been still before. The sparkle had disappeared from her daughter's eyes and were replaced with cold, sullen ones. The little girl wasn't asking, she was telling her mother to stay. Having no choice, her mother slumped back onto the covers still puffing away at the ciggy.

The little girl cleared her throat for dramatic purposes. Little drops of rain splashed gently on the window as she began. 'Amy says: Once upon a time there was a Mummy who was the queen of

her castle. She had red hair that was really, really curly. She loved her king very, very much, and she loved her princess really very much.'

'Amanda, I haven't got time for this ...'

'No! You must listen to the bedtime story!'

The tyke was squeezing so hard that the mother could feel her tendons shift against her bones. Her daughter had clenched her teeth and was now looking up at her with such ferocity that it chilled her. She complied, reluctantly.

Amanda continued, 'There was something wrong with the queen's kingdom though. The king did not come home most nights, and when he did he grumbled and yelled and walked into things. This made the queen very sad. She would fight with the king, then she would have a puffy, and then she would go to work.' The stars from the night light started to spin. The mother looked around the room as they lit up teddy bears, dolls and other cuddly animals. The inanimate objects stared back at her, judging her.

'The queen made bad decisions, a lot of bad decisions. It made the little princess cry, a lot. She cried when she was awake, and she cried when she was asleep. Then one day, from underneath her bed, Amy came to her. Amy was nice, really nice. She made the princess laugh and she promised to be the princess's friend.'

'Amanda, please let go ...'

'Amy became the princess's bestest friend ever! They played dolls together, had tea parties, and they played chasey. Then one night, Amy said that she could help the little princess. Amy said that she

could make the princess's problems go away for ever and ever. She said that the princess would be happy all the time and won't have to cry anymore.' The stars started to spin faster and faster around the room. The flashes passed so quickly over the toys that they blinked. The mother tried to shake the girl loose, but the little demon had her good. 'She said that she could take my problems away, she said that she could take away my mummy and daddy and that it would just be me and Amy. Best friends forever!'

'Stop it! Stop it now!'

Everything seized. The stars faltered, the rain stopped, and Amanda let go of her mother's arm. She stared up at her, wildness in her eyes and a bead of sweat on her forehead. Her mother's smoke had burned up and left a bitter taste in her mouth. She gingerly took her wrist back and rubbed it. The little girl that she had put to bed was dead.

'Good night, Amanda.'

Getting up from the crease in the covers, the mother took one last look at her daughter. She was something straight out of the Exorcist. A shaking hand reached for her packet, pulled out a smoke and placed it in her mouth. Her heels hammered the wood floors, and then something grabbed her ankle. Her chin hit the deck so hard that her tongue got caught in her teeth. The smoke flew out of her mouth as the claw squeezed her petite ankle. The motions started up again. The toys blinked frantically. A flash of lightning swallowed up the room and rain bucketed outside. The mother felt her world start to spin, faster and faster. The stars just a blur before her eyes, her child's laughter distant and faint. Then, the claw pulled. The mother's nails tore at the wood as she was

dragged. She let out a blood-curdling scream before she disappeared under the bed. Amy gurgled and slobbered as she silenced the screaming. The stars spun faster and there was another crack of lightning.

Amanda giggled, gleefully glowing from under her covers. 'Goodnight, Mummy.'

About Eloise

Writing stories has always been a big part of Eloise's life. Through her development of novels and short stories, she has turned to thrillers with twists as her preferred style.

Heartbreak Crossing

By Ellen Bourgault

Second Place, Youth (WA) Category

Water rippled in the darkness as gentle oars broke the surface of the river. Under the watchful eye of the moon, John Greysmark rowed further downstream, listening to the frogs croaking eerily along the muddy banks. Peering nervously between the trunks of the drooping river gums, John could see no ghostly figure. He cursed at his foolishness. Spirits were nothing but the tale of drunken dreamers. Who was he to believe in such stories?

Nevertheless, John could not keep his heart from quickening in unease. The river turned, and he manoeuvred the canoe between hidden rocks half submerged in the black water. An owl hooted mournfully from behind him, and John jumped involuntarily, turning his head to glance at the overhanging branches. When he next returned his eyes to the river before him, John froze in shock and his breath caught in his throat. The oars in his clenched fists dragged.

Standing on the surface of the river was the figure of a woman. She emitted a white glow that matched the light cast by the moon

overhead. Her glazed, sunken eyes stared at him unblinkingly. A mourning veil shrouded her hairless head and her rotting face was barely recognisable. Still as a statue, she hovered in the centre of the river, her wasted hands folded neatly in front of her. A silver ring glinted on the fourth finger of her left hand.

‘Alice?’ John forced himself to speak. His voice came out as a quiet rasp that sounded too loud in the dead silence. His wife inclined her head in a stiff nod. The frail skin at her neck strained against her collar bone.

‘I’m so sorry, Alice,’ John whispered, his mouth dry. She had thought him to be dead, she had been beside herself with grief.

Alice stared back, unmoving. John wondered vaguely whether he had gone mad.

‘Alice, how could you do such a thing?’ John demanded quietly. He recalled the previous evening when he had finally returned home from the goldfields to the news that his wife had taken their children and drowned them in the river here, before drowning herself. It was his fault. John had promised her after Christmas that he would be back in three months’ time, yet here he was in late winter.

He had dreamt of seeing Alice again, of telling her how sorry he was. Yet the cold, emotionless corpse of her ghost was as distant to him as death itself. This was not the Alice he wished to see. This new Alice frightened him. She was a vision from the horrors of a nightmare and John did not want to remember her this way.

‘I love you, Alice,’ John whispered. ‘Now and always.’

Heartbreak Crossing

With that, John turned around his canoe. In the darkness of the trees, something caught John's eye. There, nailed to a river gum on the side of a trail was a new sign. In the pearly light of the moon, the white letters glowed: Heartbreak Crossing.

About Ellen

In 2015, Ellen won a short story writing competition at the Mount Helena Whim Festival. She has always loved books and is a huge Harry Potter fan.

Life Guard

By Eva Marsh

Commended, Youth (WA) Category

I watch as the last of the swimmers flops like a seal out of the water, skin shrivelled like raisins. The water calms to reflect the pink fairy floss clouds that herald the setting sun. Today is the first. The first day of summer. My first shift as a lifeguard. The first day of the local pool re-opening since the “incident”. The still air cools. The floodlights switch on, illuminating the water. Moths gossip around the light. The bugs of summer flit in the bright artificial gaze. The empty pool looks forlorn as I lock the gate. The last customer’s car pulls out of the carpark. My car patiently waits for me without company. I start to pack up. The way the water glistens like fish scales under floodlights is enticing. My head aches from the sun’s incessant banter. Dried sweat lines my brow like sticky lemonade. I strip off my orange and red uniform and grab my goggles and towel. I dive into the water. The darkness cocoons me. The light does not reach the bottom of the pool. The water is colder than I expect. I shiver. I swim laps to warm up, remembering the days I spent swimming training. How my lungs burnt after I sprinted a set, trying to maintain my place at the front

of the squad. At the 25 metre mark, I feel a brush across my foot, the signal a swimmer is trying to overtake me. I stop and propel around like a figure skater. The unanswered ripples from my kick die slowly like an echo. There is no one here. I saw everyone leave. The gate is locked. I resume swimming. Faster now, no longer enjoying the refreshing caress of the water. It is too dark, too cold. From hidden depths of my mind, dark thoughts take shape. I recall the 'incident'. The boy who drowned in the pool, the lifeguard distracted. Why this job was vacant. Six beat kick. I up my stroke rating. Faster. I feel it again. The touch. Not on the sole of my foot. From underneath. I lift my goggles. The steam from the water has fogged them up. I look around. I can't see anyone. A single kickboard floats across the surface of the pool. I put all of the boards away and locked the crate. I must have missed one. The wind must have tossed it onto the water. I take a breast-stroke kick, preparing to swim towards the board. I feel the grip again. A hand. It yanks my foot with force. I hear gasping and gurgling breaths. Are these my breaths? The floodlights nervously flicker like twitching eyes, then blink once and refuse to open. I merge with the darkness, swimming down into the night.

About Eva

I have been writing since I can remember but I mainly write poetry. I thought I would take a few steps out of my comfort zone and try to write a ghost story.

Quarantined

By Susan Wemyss

Commended, Open Category

Jazz and I belted down the ramp to catch the impatient ferry. My cheeks pulsated and the rain misted. We skidded onto the deck as the ferry indignantly blew its horn. We chugged laboriously out of the quay. I threw my backpack on the plastic pew. 'Phew, we made it!' I puffed, excited and apprehensive. I was shaking a little from the adrenaline as I turned to view the harbour and the choppy grey water. Today's Sydney distanced itself as we ventured out to North Head.

It was Jazz's idea, of course. She orchestrated the fake permission notes from our history department. We had duped our parents into paying for our adventure and giving us a leave pass to spend two nights at the Quarantine Station. It was Friday afternoon and Saturday, being Valentine's Day, Jazz needed an out — an escape from the echoing chamber of single-dom, which resounded with social media platitudes and made-up hearts sewn from tawdry fur.

'We did it!' I said shaking my head breathlessly.

'We ain't done nothin yet,' said Jazz, taking a fat wad of gum out of her mouth and sticking it under the seat. A hundred Sydney's bobbed through microcosmic raindrop worlds.

At the wharf, I got bunched up in the minor step waltz as the throng squeezed us down the gangplank.

Jazz charged ahead. 'Keep up, Lou,' she yelled from halfway up the slope. Jazz's voice blustered through the birds' shrieks.

I mumbled up the hill. This had seemed mighty cool in theory, but the wooden buildings on this toothpaste slug of harbour looked removed. A tightness grabbed my throat, and I lugged my sack up the path.

Jazz was standing half behind the gnome-featured tour guide. Her head bounced along in semaphore to his impassioned movements. I tried to distract the crowd by pushing to the front. He contorted his face into a question mark, striking a challenge. His soliloquy of Australia's cultural significance danced with no fools!

We trudged into the aura of the hospital. The guide boomed, 'This is where you shall be sleeping, in the very dormitory where hundreds of men, women and children suffered and lost their lives.' Jazz already had both her packs on two of the stretcher beds in the corner. She winked at me. I so would rather be watching Idol with my olds', but I knew Jazz needed a reprieve from her relationship grief.

Gerard, as Gnome Guide appeared to be known, frowned through his forested brows. He handed us lanterns for the evening ghost

tour. Gerard huffed as he etched out stories of disease and wonder. He attempted to sell us his pride with the importance of death. His attempts to scare us with his moves and effects made me scared, although not in the way that Gerard intended.

‘For thousands of people THIS was their first sight of Australia, and for many it was their last!’

I zoned. The words sounded throughout the halls.

‘Disease, burning of clothing, grave diggers.’

‘Don’t worry,’ Jazz fiercely whispered in my right ear, giving me a start, ‘I have something for us later.’

We trudged back to our dorm and I sat in an unplugged stare, like a powered down robot.

Jazz was laying on her bed playing an imaginary score, ‘Dem bones, ‘dem bones, ‘dem dancey bones.’

Time passed in a vacuum.

‘Lou,’ she hissed eventually.

‘Have they all gone to sleep?’

‘Not sure,’ I said. ‘Nearly? I think...’

Some guy who had spent an inexorably long time in the bathroom had returned in full matching pjs and was indecently inserting plugs in his ears.

'I've got some tea,' Jazz whispered.

Great, I thought, hoping for something a little more interesting. Sleep seemed an age away.

'It's special tea,' Jazz said.

I didn't want to know.

Jazz unscrewed the thermos and had a swig. 'Ahaaa!' she said with a pirate twang. She gave me a face wince. She passed me the flask and I gave it a scared sniff.

'Just have some, Lou,' she said.

I braved an exaggerated gulp. The gross liquid engulfed my pipes and splattered out of my nose.

'Lou!' Jazz exclaimed as I convulsed in a quiet coughing expedition.

The night must have swallowed me whole. An intense ache at my back provided the low notes in a pain symphony that was punctuated by stabbings of light. The windows were confusingly stark and opaque with dirt.

I groaned as the urge to vomit roused me into a sprinter's pose. Through blurred ears the sound of a bucket scraped up to my bed. I hurled forward the bleak content of my insides. A searing sting stripped my throat as my body simultaneously attempted and restrained a haunting howl. My brain bubbled and from somewhere deep within I managed a noise which would pass through time.

The tide of sleep covered me again. Its foam tendrils gave and took reality.

I fumbled into consciousness. The strata of myself felt wrong. The coarse blanket scratched at my very being. I allowed a dream image to filter into the day. A backlit, aproned lady dabbed my forehead as I bobbed around. 'Louisa, Louisa,' she whispered as I moaned into the wad of fibers. From far away my brain tried to say, "That is not my name!" but it came out as a lurching moan. My pained body crunched back and forward in a butterfly stroke as it fought for its primeval cave. My hands clutched the bars of the bed as I braced against myself. My mind sorted a sickening image of ripe, dimpled pustules as my being oozed.

Silhouettes flicked before me in time shutters. Peaks of garbled sound struck into me like flotsam sewage. A glass was chinked against my teeth as my rippled lips stuck and ripped. My fat tongue which was heavy with the dry, became more of the meat that I ultimately was. I gave up on another day as my body forwent the light and was sucked into the water tornado underworld. My misty dreams elegantly swum in muted depths. Unable to breathe, I began peacefully shaking hands with yet-to-be-known ethereal creatures.

In the night I swam.

With a shotgun propulsion I gasped for the first and last of my breaths. Life woke me with a fear so intense, I sat clutching my chest and fathoming what dream had taken me so far.

'At last, that's over!' Jazz exclaimed, like a preacher.

'Wwwhat...' I trembled. The adrenaline fluttered my hands like a dying butterfly.

'Hhhmmph!' muttered Jazz. 'Valentines weekend. This adventure. And... well, you!' she was stuffing things haphazardly into her pack with contempt.

'What about me?' I asked.

'Yesterday,' she said. 'You were all like floaty and stunned. I dunno. You freaked out over a toothbrush. You were like mumbling shit like, "We're really here. It doesn't hurt!" You were doing some affected accent repeating, "Australia, Australia."' "

'Yesterday?' I said. I hadn't touched my electric toothbrush. The last thing I remembered was having tea. 'Tea,' I said in a daze.

'C'mon,' said Jazz, 'G Gnome wants to show us something before we jump on the ferry. Rock graffiti or some shit?'

We were here for two nights? 'It's Sunday?' I say, confused.

'Yes. It's bloody Sunday.'

I followed the group at the back, distanced by meaning.

'This memorial was erected in nineteen oh-five on the fiftieth anniversary of the docking of the ship "Constitution",' said Gerard proudly, pointing to an obelisk. 'This ship with one-hundred and fifty passengers, docked with a severe outbreak of small pox. The passengers were quarantined for sixty-five days. Thirteen passengers lost their lives.'

I perched on a large flat rock, and my fingers instinctively traced the grains in the sandstone.

'Some of the station's early graffiti can be witnessed in this very sandstone plateau,' Gerard banged on.

I rounded back against the wall of rock. A heart was scratched with yearning into the rock, 'Louisa,' the heart cried, 'February fifteenth, eighteen fifty-five.'

A tear dripped from my cheek and splashed onto the ancient rock. I traced feeling into the etches of her scars.

About Susan

Susan Wemyss is an Aussie writer and student who loves to weave tangles in the mind. She enjoys street photography and experimental poetry. She lives in Perth with her young family.

Wundurra

By D.D. Line

Second Place, Open Category

Click! Click! Click-click-click!

Dark eyes jolted open, their owner wary and alert. Something called to him, a percussion of clap sticks echoing in the slow, steady throb of a heart that had not thumped in years. The sound implored him to follow its staccato beat.

Wundurra stood. The night sky greeted him, its twinkling stars the eyes of his ancestors blinking down at him in greeting. Smoke curled around him like a lover's caress. He breathed in the heady scent of spinifex grasses and berries. Then the compelling cry of a lone didgeridoo propelled him forward and he found himself walking unsteadily toward the commanding sound.

He found comfort in the night's dark chill, yet the tribal swell of music and the alternating singing and whispered voices drew him toward the only source of heat. Flames leapt and twirled in the fire. The blood red fingers reached for him, beseeching him to step into their blistering embrace. When he stepped across the threshold of sand smoothed by the steps of many feet, everything

stopped. Then a male voice, ancient and powerful, said, 'He is here.'

More whispers filled the heated air, abuzz with anger, outrage, a deep thirst for justice, tinges of fear, and timeless wonder.

They couldn't see him. Wundurra knew that. He'd long ago become one with the eternal night. He'd done his duty, tasted the sweet, sweet blood of revenge, and then he'd welcomed the time of Dreaming. His spirit had been at peace.

Whomever had called him to this place, to this unknown time, was either very skilled, or very stupid. Death was his constant companion, and Wundurra its willing slave, but he was no slave to the demands of fools.

Click! Click! Click-click-click!

The taste of blood, ash, and feathers filled his mouth. Wundurra became aware of a young man standing close to the fire. Silent and still, markings of charcoal and ash covered his expressionless face. On his forehead rested a mask made of blood and emu down. More blood, likely his own, covered the man's strong arms and chest. Wundurra could see his hair was twisted into a conical shape. Twigs and strands of animal hair held it in place.

Another hush befell the group as the man who'd spoken stepped forward. Wundurra knew then it was this elder, a medicine man, who had called him from his eternal slumber.

No fool then.

In his hands were two pouches made of kangaroo skin, their contents yet to be revealed. Two more elders followed close

behind him. None of them looked in Wundurra's direction, nor did they acknowledge the man standing beside him, who remained as still and as quiet as a submerged crocodile eyeing its unwary prey.

From the fire, the accompanying elders retrieved a small heated rock that burned so brightly, it shone like a crimson star. The medicine man placed the pouches by his feet and beckoned the young man forward. Wundurra watched as he kneeled before the elder, bowed his head, then stretched out his left foot. Moments later Wundurra struggled not to cry out just as the young man fought to keep his agony secret. His pain was Wundurra's pain, but the warrior knew worse was to come. Even as he watched, Wundurra could feel the searing heat of the stone as though it had been placed on his foot. He looked skyward, and the night and the stars stared back. This time, there was nothing to hold back the wild yell of the young man as the medicine man reached forward, grabbed his little toe, its cartilage now softened by the heat of the burning rock, and dislocated the knuckle.

The warm burr of the didgeridoo as its vibrato clung to the shimmering air told Wundurra the ritual was almost complete.

The medicine man unwrapped the skins he'd guarded with something akin to spiritual ecstasy. No woman, no child, had ever laid eyes on what lay inside, but Wundurra knew its secret. The medicine man raised his arms skyward, then began to chant, his words binding the young man into a state of euphoric bliss. Wundurra closed his eyes and swayed too, allowing the magic to infuse him.

Click! Click! Click-click-click!

The clap sticks beat faster. The didgeridoo stole the wind from the air and wrapped it around Wundurra like a cloak. It tightened and pulled at him, drawing him closer to the young man.

He understood now. He remembered. He was a Kurdaitcha — an executioner, a spirit called to help the tribe. A beautiful, yet terrifying tool of vengeance, one who would not stop until blood was spilled, life taken, and the balance restored.

The medicine man turned away from him, still chanting as he moved around the fire, but Wundurra took no notice. He felt the slide of his spirit, knew the second he'd slipped into the younger man's body the reason he'd been called to this most sacred of places, that he would do what must be done.

Something warm and soft caressed him and Wundurra looked down in surprise. Where once his feet were bare, now they lay nestled in clouds of emu feathers. Rows of white and pink down marked the soft shoes held together by human hair, more blood, and a substance known only to the medicine man. He glanced at the kangaroo skins and saw the pouches were empty. Then he stared at the opening of the left shoe where "his" little toe, still swollen and throbbing, lay bared to the elements. He stuck out his hand and marvelled at the control he had over the young man's body, realised he could now be seen and heard by the other members of the tribe. He felt their wide-eyed stares as they followed his every move. Wundurra stood, ready to accept the task just as the body he inhabited was ready to do as he commanded. Vengeance would be theirs.

He felt the weight of something long, thin, and white in his palm. A piece of chiselled bone, kangaroo, emu, or human, he wasn't

sure which, needle sharp and honed to perfection, glinted like a lightning bolt against the warm hue of his skin. At the rounded end, a piece of hair from the victim was attached through the hole and glued into place with a gummy substance. He knew from the smell the resin came from a spinifex bush.

Wundurra closed the young man's fingers carefully around the Kundela, its true name, and felt its psychic magic hum through the man's flesh to his.

Like he had done so many years ago when his wife and young daughters were murdered, it was time to help this young man find his revenge. With a reverent nod to the elders, Wundurra slid the mask down the young man's face and waited patiently as other members of the tribe stuck tufts of kangaroo hair to the bloodied, smeared, and painted body that for a time would be his own. He walked out into the night, the medicine man following in his footsteps. Thanks to the matted, feathered shoes each man wore, neither left a print in the shifting sands to mark the place they'd been. And in the daylight, as it was now, their bodies would not cast a shadow to betray their presence.

Wundurra knew his task may take hours, days, or even years to complete. He would find the enemy and punish him. He would drop to his knees and point the Kundela at him, leaving the man terrified and motionless as he chanted words only the Kurdaitcha knew. The enemy's death would be slow and painful. The Kundela would make sure of that. When he was done, the medicine man would lay his hand on the man and chant too. They would leave the enemy, return to the tribe, and tell the elders what they had done. The medicine man would throw the Kundela into the fire and ensure it turned to ashes in a ritual burning. Then Wundurra

knew he would rest again, his spirit leaving the young man with his newly mangled toe, the only evidence of his possession, so Wundurra could return to the land of Dreaming.

Perhaps the tribal elders might call upon him once more. Or perhaps the new Kurdaitcha would take his place. Wundurra neither knew nor cared. For now, he thought only of the enemy and of his task.

Behind them came one long, final note of the didgeridoo, its deep baritone a promise of courage, righteousness, and conviction. And, as Wundurra and the medicine man disappeared into the darkness, the percussive beat of the clapsticks echoed behind them.

Click! Click! Click-click-click!

About D.D.

D. D. Line is an aspiring writer living in coastal Western Australia. Intending to impress her Senior English teacher, she developed a love affair with writing, focussing on Paranormal and Contemporary Romance.



About the KSP Writers' Centre

The KSP Writers' Centre was established in 1985 as a not-for-profit organisation supporting the Australian writing community. KSP runs from a heritage-listed property in the Perth hills region of Greenmount, Western Australia, the former home of noted author Katharine Susannah Prichard who lived there from 1919 until her death in 1969.

With support from members, donors, volunteers and sponsors—in particular the Shire of Mundaring—the Centre celebrates Katharine's legacy by running a variety of activities designed to nurture Australia's writers at any age and stage of their journey. This includes a writer-in-residence program, writing groups, competitions, workshops, mentoring, author talks, social events, and an extensive youth program.

For more information and to connect with KSP please visit www.kspwriterscentre.com or follow KSP Writers' Centre on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).