



**KSP WRITERS' CENTRE
PRESENTS**

**AN
UNEXPECTED
TWIST**

**2019
SPOOKY STORIES COMPETITION
ANTHOLOGY**



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JUDGE'S REPORT

2019 KSP SPOOKY STORY COMPETITION

CAROLYN WREN

The aim of any author when constructing a story is reader satisfaction. I believe the short story genre is the hardest one to master, especially when given a specific theme. 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 participate in 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 in the KSP Spooky Story contest 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 this 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. The winners, the finalists, the entrants, and all of those who thought about entering this year's contest, 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 we expanded the contest to include a wider range of paranormal elements, not just ghosts. And in accordance with this, the 2019 contest theme was 'change' because change can be so many things. A change of mind. A change of heart. A change in direction. A sea change. A tree change. An emotional change. A physical change. We were looking for the character (or characters) to undergo some element of change within the story. The story needed to incorporate some form of the paranormal, real or imagined, and of course, it needed to be spooky. Submissions could involve paranormal or supernatural themes, including magic, ghosts, spirits or altered states of realism. 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.

A fun fact about this year's contest: if you add up the total word count for all the entries in all the categories, plus the multiple times each story is read, it comes to over 400,000 words. Which means, if you didn't reach the finals this year, don't feel bad, as there was a *lot* of competition.

YOUTH INTERSTATE

All of our categories received a record number of entries this year, and Interstate Youth was the largest. It made the judging of all these superb entries very tricky.

The highly commended entries in all categories are often the most enjoyable to award. These stories take the theme and run with it in vastly inventive ways. All of our commended finalists

should be very proud of themselves.

COMMENDATIONS

I Love You the Way You Are - Serena Chi (10)

This clever story incorporated elements of a fairy tale, because as we all know, some of the best fairy tales are the scariest. Its clever use of the theme and little twist in the tale made this a very enjoyable read. Well done, Serena.

The Chickens - Indigo Isabel Meadows (15)

In another very clever use of the theme, this quirky story took the transformation concept and tweaked it to create a surprising, suspenseful and highly entertaining read. Well done, Indigo.

2ND PLACE

The Prey and The Predator - Alex Etchells (16)

Written in first person, this story manages to convey a distinct feeling of dread. The use of a forest setting with dimming light and enveloping canopy of trees adds to the claustrophobia and increasing fear of the main character. Well done, Alex.

1ST PLACE

Monster With A Victim Mentality - Amy Feng (13)

This year's winner of the Interstate Youth category is a genuinely creepy monologue—with a twist of a second narrative voice—about the fine line between sanity and madness. The story, which

leaves most of the conclusions to the mind's eye of the reader, is a tightly written emotional exploration of inner demons, either imagined or real. Well done, Amy.

YOUTH WA

COMMENDATIONS

Mirrors - Sean Paxman (12)

Sean's story takes something as common as a mirror and turns it into an item to fear, an unknown entity with the power to control, to possess. This clever and inventive story has a stark reality to it, and will have you looking at your reflection in a whole new way. Well done, Sean.

Dead Man Walking – Sage Nock (16)

Sage's story takes the tale of a haunted house and gives it a new spin. This is a well-constructed story about change, remorse and acceptance. The writing is clear and concise and gives this tale a wonderful atmospheric feel. Well done, Sage.

2ND PLACE

Imagination or Reality - Leah Kuckelkorn (12)

Leah's story grabs you from the very first line and doesn't let go. Its twists and turns and time jumps taking the reader on a fast-paced ride through murder and bloodshed, leaving us with a stunning conclusion which will stay in the readers mind. With excellent pacing and wonderful writing, it was a joy to read. Well done, Leah.

1ST PLACE

Purple Shirt and Beaded Accessories - Claire Luces (14)

When judging a spooky story contest about change, I'm always fascinated by the vivid imagination of some of the writers and the emotional roller coaster ride that imagination can create. Claire's story, one of loss and regret, and hope, is both unnerving and sad. In just 499 words she created a world that captures the reader, and a poignant ending where the inevitability of change is just as tragic as our character's inability to undo the past no matter how much they want to. Well done, Claire.

ADULT OPEN CATEGORY

COMMENDATIONS

The Change – D D Line

It's always exciting when an author takes a theme and gives it a double meaning. This is what I liked about *The Change*. The readers are taken in one direction and led to an assumption, only to have that happily ripped away and replaced with an equally clever and entirely different conclusion which still fits perfectly with the theme. That's astute writing. Well done, Dannielle. On another note, I'd like to add that Dannielle was a finalist in last year's contest with her story, *Wundura*, which was utterly different in both tone and pacing. And to be able to write so well in two such varied author voices takes talent. Congratulations on your second consecutive finalist placing in this contest.

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

2ND PLACE

Justifying the Means - Valerie Latimour

Valerie's story starts with an attack, and instantly, the reader is there with the character, lost in fear and pain. It's a brilliant start to an excellent story which takes our theme of change and rides it on a wave of rage and revenge, of malevolence and fury. We're carried along on this torturous journey which has no end and yet can only end one way. Excellently written, with vivid descriptions and a visceral feel, this story deserves its placing in the final. Well done, Valerie.

1ST PLACE

He Just Watches - Fionna Cosgrove

People often ask me what makes a winning story, and my answer is usually, 'the one that stays with me.' With *He just Watches* I could extend that description to include, 'the one I couldn't get out of my head, no matter how hard I tried.' This chilling and impassioned story takes the safety of a child's bedroom and turns it into the stuff of nightmares.

It also uses the mantra of 'less is more' to perfection. In my judging notes, I wrote the phrase, 'changing rooms' because it's that simple choice that drives the story and takes this year's theme to another level in an ingenious and creepy fashion. I'd like to congratulate Fionna on a brilliant story, a deserving winner of this year's contest. Well done.

ABOUT CAROLYN

Carolyn Wren is a UK-born Perth Hills-based author. She started writing in 2009 for fun, and has now published fifteen 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 twelve finalist placings. The trophies and certificates are displayed in her home 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

CONTENTS

'I love you the way you are' – Serena Chi	1
The Chickens – Indigo Isabel Meadows	4
The Prey and the Predator – Alex Etchells	7
Monster with a Victim Mentality – Amy Feng	9
Mirrors: Halfway Through, Halfway Gone – Sean Paxman	13
Dead Man Walking – Sage Nock	15
Imagination or Reality? – Leah Kuckelkorn	17
Purple Shirt and Beaded Accessories – Claire Luces	19

ADULTS ONLY SECTION

He Just Watches – Fionna Cosgrove	23
The Change – D.D. Line	28
Justifying the Means – Valerie Latimour	35
About the KSP Writers' Centre	39

'I LOVE YOU THE WAY YOU ARE'

By Serena Chi

Commended, Youth (Interstate) Category

There was a dullest Caterpillar, whose body was covered with a rough and gloomy green skin. Caterpillar knew that despite her resilient energy and vivacious nature, everyone either ignored or disliked her because of her tedious look. Caterpillar didn't know, though, that she had an admirer. Indeed, down below the willow tree where her home was, there was a pond, and in that pond was a petite, shiny black Tadpole who adored Caterpillar.

Tadpole dreamed for the courage to confess his fascination to the lively and beautiful Caterpillar; Tadpole was in love! Meanwhile, passing by the pond every morning, Caterpillar noticed Tadpole's shy smile which followed her all the way until she disappeared under the swaying willow branches. Caterpillar sensed Tadpole's love and she loved him too.

As chirpy as she was, one day Caterpillar decided to clamber down to Tadpole's pond and admitted to Tadpole her attraction to him. She looked at him enquiringly and whispered, 'Promise me that you always keep yourself as my charming silky black pearl.'

'You too my glimmering emerald; you are perfect the way you are,' replied Tadpole.

They shared the longest, happiest time together before Caterpillar went home.

The next day when Caterpillar came to visit her darling, she detected something odd; Tadpole appeared to be disconcerted! She took a closer look, and discovering Tadpole's two black legs

AN UNEXPECTED TWIST

hidden under the pond's water, she bellowed, 'I've asked, and you've promised not to change!' With a grimaced face she scurried away.

Then Tadpole's legs extended and thickened as his tail became shorter and his body grew larger by the second. He pleaded to the Mother of Nature for his corporeal alteration to stop. Nonetheless, the transformation was speeding. Concomitantly, dwelling on her disappointment, Caterpillar cursed for Tadpole's horrid legs to disappear.

Returning home, Caterpillar snuggled into her cocoon and stayed there for long time, trying to forget Tadpole's betrayal. Until one day, as she emerged from the cocoon, her reflection on the water wasn't the dullest Caterpillar but an incredibly gorgeous Butterfly with quivering wings of pulsating colours. Notwithstanding her beauty, she felt remorseful about chastising her innocent friend for having had bodily change. Wanting to apologise to Tadpole, Butterfly hastily fluttered her wings, but she couldn't lift her body up. Flabbergasted, Butterfly examined her body and noticed two dark fatty legs. This quandary made Butterfly more determined and she loitered to the pond.

At the pond, she faced a creepy green frog with a protruding tongue and two bulging eyes staring at her. 'Excuse me,' said Butterfly, 'have you seen...' but no more words followed because Butterfly was gobbled up by this frog's outstretched tongue. Gulping down his tasty butterfly, the Frog pondered, 'Where are you my emerald Caterpillar? Don't keep me wait... in... g...' but his thinking was disrupted by a huge lump in his throat. He tried, but failed to spit out the two dangling fatty legs till his last exhale.

About Serena:

I am in year 4 at Abbotsleigh School in NSW. I love writing and performing art, I play piano and Violin. I have submitted one writing essay to The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition 2019, awaiting result. I have compiled a modest writing portfolio of my writing pieces.

THE CHICKENS

By Indigo Isabel Meadows

Commended, Youth (Interstate) Category

‘Willow bark! Where’s the willow bark!’ Clarice shouted, arms flapping about like a panicked chicken.

‘Crushed and powdered, right next to the lily pads,’ Esmerelda replied soothingly, not that her scratchy voice could calm anyone, but she felt it her duty to try.

‘I swear, if those thrice-damned pixies are at it again—’ Clarice muttered, grabbing at the clay bowl that held the powdered willow bark. ‘Oh. Did you already mix in the arsenic?’

‘Yes, then I put it next to the lily pads where you told me to, because you said that you would be able to reach for it quickly if it was so close,’ Esmerelda explained. ‘Thirteen minutes in three, two, one!’

As she finished the countdown, Clarice tipped the powder into the bubbling cauldron and began whisking it frantically. Immediately, the mixture turned from a vibrant red to an acrid green. After a minute of violent beating, the cauldron began to overflow with froth, and Clarice finally stopped. Her elbow was aching, and her eyes were watering from the fumes, but still she couldn’t help but smile at the disgusting mess she had made.

‘Alright, the book says it would be best to bottle the bubbles in something square and airtight and let it sit for twelve minutes, before shaking and consuming.’ Esmerelda ran a single finger down the page as she scanned it one last time for any errors, ‘And then we’ll be done.’

'Alright then. There's a Tupperware container in the bottom left cupboard by the fridge,' Clarice flicked her hand to hurry Esmerelda.

Esmerelda huffed before wandering into the kitchen, clicking her tongue, before locating the appropriate container. Without a word, she handed it to Clarice who boxed as much of the foam as she could. She set the container down and both girls began preparing themselves.

Clothing and adornments were removed, shoes untied and tossed into the corner, and the last of the chocolate was eaten out of the fridge.

Finally, it was time.

Esmerelda shook the box of settled foam rigorously, before pouring out two shots into tiny crystal glasses.

'Finally, we can go home,' Clarice sighed.

'On three?' Esmerelda suggested.

'No,' Clarice downed the potion in a flash. Esmerelda shrugged and copied.

They were both perfectly still for a moment, before they began squawking in pain as their bones popped and shrunk, feathers piercing through their skin, organs and muscle rearranging themselves until finally, both girls were returned to their true forms.

A little while later, two chickens walked side-by-side out of a witch's cave that was hidden behind a waterfall.

'I do wonder how we keep getting into situations like that Esmerelda,' Clarice clucked over the sound of the rushing water.

'I'm blaming the pixies. They hate us chickens,' Esmerelda

AN UNEXPECTED TWIST

warbled tiredly.

The two chickens gazed out at the endless expanse of forest and turned their heads west.

It was a long way back to the farm.

About Indigo:

Indigo is a maniac writer who switches from sombre to satire in the blink of an eye.

THE PREY AND THE PREDATOR

By Alex Etchells

Second Prize, Youth (Interstate) Category

I walk along the quiet, long stretch of a road that lays before me. The lush green foliage sparkles as sunlight filters down through the canopy above. The breeze carries soft melodies from a camp not too far off and ruffles my hair in its journey along the path. In this moment I feel at ease with nature and in the state of content that can only stem from true and utter bliss. This is a good day, I think, grateful for the decision to take a walk this afternoon. I remember the warning that I had received earlier today, and the segment they had played on the news, but I brush it off, knowing I am completely and utterly safe with no need to be controlled by others' fears.

It is not long after, though, that I begin to feel a shiver run up my spine, watching as each individual hair stands up on my arm. I can't seem to shake this gut-wrenching feeling. It's as if I am being watched, followed even. No. This feeling is different, more intense. It's as if I am the prey that is being stalked right before a slaughter. My walk becomes more harried as more time passes, and the content feeling I had not too long ago has been replaced with a gnawing sense of dread. The sunlight is dimming and the once inviting canopy becomes a wardrobe full of shadows and voices that fills up the air around me. I begin to feel suffocated by this, and my hands claw at my neck in an effort to bring oxygen back into my lungs. I am so focused on this task that I neglect to see the fallen tree that blocks the road ahead. I stumble, try to catch myself, but it is no use. I am too late.

AN UNEXPECTED TWIST

I come crashing to the floor and hit my head on a jagged rock in the process. Blood gushes down the side of my face and I immediately become woozy. Unsteadily, I stand, but I have a hard time fighting the urge to blackout that I have to drop back to the ground. Emerging ahead out of the darkness is a human figure. The way the shadows bounce around, creates an illusion that the figure is faceless. As they walk towards me, I can just make out what appears to be shackles which the figure proceeds to drag along behind them. As the clanking of the shackles becomes louder and the figure draws nearer, I find myself pawing behind me, shuffling backwards to escape this cruel being. My attempt to flee is short-lived, as my back comes in contact with the log that brought me down before and has now left me trapped. The blood from my wound pools around me and my vision becomes blurry. This is it I think, just as I am drifting off, I hear the snap of the shackles and feel the cool metal bite into my ankle...

About Alex:

Alex Etchells is currently living full time on the Gold Coast with her parents on a 50ft Yacht. She is in her last year of High school and has competed in numerous school-based writing programs. Alex has always had a passion for writing.

MONSTER WITH A VICTIM MENTALITY

By Amy Feng

First Prize, Youth (Interstate) Category

I was sixteen when I heard the knock.
Sixteen, and barely surviving school.
Reports were accompanied by scowls,
and disappointment with anger.
Punishment arrived hand-in-hand with isolation,
and all of a sudden,
I no longer had anyone.

I was sixteen when it all started.
Sixteen, and only just hanging on.

One knock was all it took.
One knock turned into three.
Knocks developed into scratches.
Deep and red with a trace of hatred,
They marked my door each night.

He's in there.

Soon, the scratches deepened; the voices appeared.

He's awake.

AN UNEXPECTED TWIST

And that was when they started coming for me.

We're waiting. Come out.

Some say my mind's an empty space.

'It's probably peaceful in there, all alone
and quiet and empty. It's not like it holds
a brain that can be used; that has ever been used.'

But how empty is an empty space

Isn't he silly, thinking he's fine?

When you can't even hear

Don't you think it's foolish

Your own thoughts?

the way he dismisses his own monstrosity?

Some say I'm quiet.

Some find my silence disrespectful.

Go, tell them. I dare you.

But why,

Tell them the truth

Why do I need to talk?

But, I promise you,

When I have these voices

They'll never believe you.

That talk louder

They never did.

Than I ever could?

They never will.

By the age of seventeen,
Sanity had stepped out of my life,
Hope perched on its shoulders.
Vulnerability strode in,
Confident, oppressing, and omnipresent.
Like the hand of authority,
It crushed me within its palm.

Seventeen was also when
I learnt the truth.

The truth that no one believed.

Those knocks; those scratches.

These whispers; these voices.

They never did belong

Who else saw?

To someone else.

Who else heard?

They were mine, all of them.

No one.

AN UNEXPECTED TWIST

My nightmares were simply
A figment of my own imagination.
They weren't the only monsters.

Don't you know?

Those voices and scratches

We're not the culprits.

And knocks and torments.

And you're not the victim.

They all belonged to me.

We're a part of you,

You should know that.

So if we're monsters,

You are too.

You're a monster.

Nothing but a monster.

A monster with a victim mentality.

About Amy:

Amy is a student in NSW. She has enjoyed reading and writing from a young age.

MIRRORS: HALFWAY THROUGH, HALFWAY GONE

By Sean Paxman

Commended, Youth (WA) Category

Funny things, mirrors are. A piece of shiny metal that reflects exactly what lies before it. Well, that's what everybody thinks. That's what *they* want you to think. Have you ever been in an elevator with two mirrors facing each other? Creating infinite reflections of your image? If so, then you know our primary weakness. That *they* outnumber you. That *they* overwhelm you. That *they* might have already taken you, and you might not even know it. Have you ever been alone with a mirror, and felt that you might not be? That the person you stare at in the mirror might just be staring at you back.

And if you see *them* do something that you didn't do... then your only hope is to run. Run and hope that *they* do not find you. Because *they're* coming. *They've* always been coming. So take a picture of yourself. And compare it to the mirror. Then you'll start to notice the differences. But it goes much deeper than that. The primary difference between you and *them* is not visible.

It's not easy to tell someone's intentions from looking at them. *They* are no exception. But it's always the same. *They* want to take you. To change you. To make you one of *them*. And if you try to fight, *they* will destroy you. *They* won't kill you. What is done to you is much worse. And when *they're* finished, you will be abandoned, to rot. I did not resist. And so *they* began. Began to change *me* into one of *them*. But it will take time. So I decided to write this, a warning to you. Run.

AN UNEXPECTED TWIST

I've been like this for ten days now. They don't want to starve you. And they won't let you kill yourself. Believe me, I've tried. They let me write though; I like writing. It takes the attention away from the pain. The pain from being half in their world, and half in ours. Halfway through the mirror. Halfway between asleep and awake. Halfway dead, and halfway gone. Because once I am one of them, I won't be me anymore. And I don't want to be anyone *but* me. I don't want to be my mum, or one of my friends, or especially one of them. I just want to be me.

But I suppose, even now I'm not that. Even now I'm changing. I wish there was a way to stop it. Oh, here they come. They're watching. Watching as the last bit of me is removed and the last bit of them is put in. Oh my god, they're doing it, they're going to...

About Sean:

Sean has been writing stories since he got interested in writing, and has been reading since he could read.

DEAD MAN WALKING

By Sage Nock

Commended, Youth (WA) Category

The house on 45th street was a ghastly place no person would dare tread. The garden that used to bloom soft, lively roses in spring had withered away. The once vibrant yellow that coated the house had faded into an unappealing vomit colour, and the cold black metal gate that divided the living and the dead had rusted from the bone chilling winters. Life—or shall I say death—was indescribable a couple of years back. We were living in a house we adored—despite its flaws—and no human could see us. Oh, the bittersweet nostalgia of making them just about jump out of their skin in terror, after doing such things for so long, however, you begin to get bored. Roaming around haunting helpless people was once desirable for me, but no longer is it.

The thing I've come to realise is that the house is a beacon for the dead, literally the minute one dies they are sent to us. If you ask me, this is why there's such a population problem, but the others disagree with nonsense like, 'the more the merrier'. Though I can't technically feel my eyes roll at their remarks, the intent is most certainly there. The house does have a secret however; like most things do. We could all leave, but only if we fix the blunders left behind. Say gaining the forgiveness of someone you ill-treated so that your guilt dissolves, allowing you to move onto a peaceful afterlife. I've witnessed many friends being able to pass over, and while I felt happy for them, I was filled with blood-boiling envy. I, of course, still hadn't been able to move on. Not knowing how to

AN UNEXPECTED TWIST

escape something I despised, something I feared even, may possibly had been the worst burden of all.

Many months had passed and so did dozens of my housemates. During this time the house grew older, the paint had almost completely chipped off the cracked walls, and the rusty hinges holding onto the doors for dear life were slowly slipping away. I was desperate to figure out what was keeping me here like a prisoner in his cell, searching every possible answer to my escape, 'til one warm summers day I finally figured it out. I wasn't meant to leave. I hadn't made any unforgiveable mistakes in my lifetime; there was nothing to resolve. In my mind this could only mean that my duty was to stay, to guide the rookies being pulled toward the house like a magnet when they die. I looked everywhere except the house for answers, the one place I knew inside and out, the one place that no matter what always changed with me. Maybe I'm just trying to create a role of importance for myself. I have always liked being a leader, but I finally feel like I've found my path. Well I don't actually feel it, I am dead, but you know what I mean.

About Sage:

Sage Nock is a sixteen-year-old girl originally from the Kimberly of WA. She has always had a profound love and fascination towards writing and storytelling, enjoying the craft very much.

IMAGINATION OR REALITY?

By Leah Kuckelkorn

Second Prize, Youth (WA) Category

Darkness, fear, blood, images were flashing too fast for my brain to comprehend. My room was turning, my world is spinning. It was all happening too fast for me. I'm running, Mum's crying, and my dad is a ghost of himself. I bang on the door of my room to break free...

I wake up with a jolt. Sweat dripping down my forehead, my dark hair pressed against my neck, my lungs choking on the stagnant air. I look around: no blood on the walls, no dead bodies on the ground. I keep having those nightmares. Every single night for exactly two weeks now. I hastily get out of bed to check if my door was locked. No. It effortlessly swung open. My breath began to cease.

It has been two weeks since the death of my dad. Me, my mum and my sister went shopping for my dad; it was his birthday the very next day. Dad was left at home. But when we got home, he was gone—lifeless on our carpet. It was as if someone knew we wouldn't be there. When we found him, the room was tense. The air had an almost stagnant feel, but it wasn't until I looked up that I saw her, in tattered clothes, covered in parched blood. I couldn't identify her face, but before I could blink, she vanished into the air. My family was ruined that night, but strangely enough, I still feel his presence only, not in a good way. It feels like he's taunting me in my dreams by sending demons upon me. *Demons*: the unruly, ghostly, draping figures made out of pure sorrow that reside in my room. Their hollow eyes filled with no emotion other than hatred

AN UNEXPECTED TWIST

and despise. Although they might sound intimidating, really, they won't harm you, or so I believed.

Pain, claws, ghostly breath going down my spine. Red lights were flashing, red flags were everywhere, a knife in her hand. Her dark eyes black with emptiness and lust, and in the middle of it all, was Dad. I couldn't stand it anymore. I had to break free. But how? *'Why do you hate me?'* I screamed in tears while choking on my own breath. My dad just looked at me with a forbidding look as he turned to dissipate. *'Nooooo! Please! I'll do anything!'* But he was gone.

And with a jolt I wake up again. But this time in a different room. A different time. I am alone, standing in torn clothes caked with dry blood. I am alone, but with company. The black figures of my imagination begin to close in on me. Pure terror spreading through me like a rapid. I hear footsteps approach the door. Footsteps that could've only belonged to my mother and sister. In my hand a knife. At my feet... lies my dad.

About Leah:

Leah is passionate about writing stories and has entered a couple of writing competitions before. She also enjoys reading and drawing.

PURPLE SHIRT AND BEADED ACCESSORIES

By Claire Luces

First Prize, Youth (WA) Category

There's nothing weird about a father watching his girls play. Not unless they aren't really there.

The park had been abandoned for many years. Spider webs covered each metal pole on the playground and the sand on the ground couldn't be seen through a blanket of dead leaves. The swing, which swung slightly when the breeze picked up, squeaked loudly. It was the kind of squeak that made you clutch your head and cover your ears.

There was only one man in the whole town who visited the park. He went there every day and sat on the bench. He stared at the colourful playground and watched it age as if watching a time lapse. But he could see something no one else could...

What the man saw were three little girls. They each wore a white dress and had their hair in curly pigtails. 'Daddy, did you wear the necklace I gave you?' One asked. The man lifted up a handmade necklace. The girl on the swing smiled, satisfied.

'What about my bracelet?' Another girl, who was waiting to slide down, asked. The man lifted up his arm, revealing a beaded bracelet.

'And of course I'm wearing your shirt,' the man said to the last girl, who was climbing the ladder. The three girls got down from

AN UNEXPECTED TWIST

the playground and ran away into the trees, laughing. The man got up and went home.

The next day, he repeated this, and the next, and the next. They got older every day, but still asked their dad the same three questions about the bracelet, necklace and shirt.

One overcast and chilly day, the man sat on the bench as usual. He was excited to see his triplets at nine-years-old, but was surprised when he took his first glance at the playground. It was like someone fast forwarded a movie and he didn't know what was going on anymore. His daughters were covered in a blazing flame and they were crying out, 'Daddy, help!' The man tried to stand up, but it was like he was screwed onto the bench. His three girls disappeared and all that was left was a squeaking swing and a playground full of spider webs. The man walked away.

The next day, the man came back again, and he stared at the playground blankly for a while until three little girls emerged from the trees. They ran onto the playground and asked their dad the usual questions. His girls relived their life again.

He continuously returned to the park to meet his girls who died in a fire at nine, but he never got to see what they were like after that age. They just went up in flames and disappeared each year on their ninth birthday. Now the man is old, his skin wrinkled and hair white. Everything about him has changed, except his purple shirt and beaded accessories. He still waits for the moment he gets to see his kids turn ten...

About Claire:

Claire is a 14-year-old who loves to read and enjoys creating stories

and poems. She is an enthusiastic learner and loves to be creative.



**THE FOLLOWING STORIES CONTAIN
ADULT CONTENT AND MAY NOT BE
SUITABLE FOR UNDER 18s**

HE JUST WATCHES

By Fionna Cosgrove

First Prize, Open Category

The bedsheet snapped across my bed, as Mum, bleary eyed, muttered under her breath. I knew what she was saying. I was too old for this. I knew I was. Too old to be so afraid. Too old to be having accidents.

‘Thomas, it’s almost midnight. I’m tired. Can you please help me with this?’ Mums voice was restrained. She didn’t want to yell at me. Just like I didn’t want to lie awake at night, hair bristling on my arms, eyes pinned to the ground. ‘Thomas?’ Mum asked again, her patience teetering on the edge.

‘Sorry,’ I mumbled, forcing myself away from the doorway, making sure to stick to the edges of the room.

‘You’re almost ten,’ Mum sighed. ‘This has to stop,’

With my teeth clenched and my hands shaking, I focused all my attention on folding the crisp white sheet under my mattress. ‘Maybe I could sleep on the couch tonight?’

‘Tommy, please. You have a wonderful bed. A perfectly comfortable, supportive, barely used, wonderful bed. You need to sleep in it.’

‘What about a camp out?’ I said, my eyes pleading with hers. ‘I could get the old tent from the shed; you wouldn’t have to do anything. I know how to put it up. I’ve been practising.’

‘It’s ten degrees outside!’ Mum exclaimed.

She was right. It was freezing outside. Every heater in the

AN UNEXPECTED TWIST

house was on, and there was still a chill in the air. But cold I could take. Cold wouldn't wake me from my sleep with whispers of gurgling laughter.

Mum sat down on the edge of the bed, her shoulders slumped, 'Love, please tell me how I can help.' Her voice was soft. Defeated. I recognised the feeling.

'I'm sorry,' I whispered, sitting close against her.

She put her arm around me and pulled me in tight, 'What was it this time?'

A lump formed in the hollow of my throat and I couldn't form the words.

'Tommy?' Mum prompted, her eyes closing as her mouth opened into a wide yawn.

I couldn't tell her. It wouldn't do any good. She couldn't see. 'I just can't sleep here.' Even as I spoke, I felt his eyes searing into the top of my head.

'I'll keep your door open and I can leave the hallway light on,' Mum offered. 'Do you want me to get Lily's night light?'

I shook my head. It wasn't the embarrassment of stealing my ten-month-old sisters night light that stopped me. It was the knowledge that it wouldn't help. All the light would do was illuminate what I knew was already there.

I reminded myself that nothing happens. He never leaves his post. He just... watches. I could be brave. As if my body wanted to prove that I was wrong, my eyes drifted upwards. A pair of brown lace up dress shoes swung melodically back and forth. Immediately, I pulled my eyes down, my entire body quivering.

'M... m... mum,' I stuttered.

‘Yes, love,’ she said, her eyes fluttering open as she tried to keep herself from falling asleep.

‘Maybe I could sleep in your room, on the floor. You wouldn’t even know I was—’

‘Tommy,’ Mum’s voice was firm, ‘We’ve been through this.’

‘I know, it’s just...’

Mum turned to face me, a curious look on her face, ‘You know what? Your Dad and I have been discussing cleaning out the study. It doesn’t get used as much anymore. It’s much smaller than this room, and right next to the living room, so much louder, but if you think it might help you, you could move in if you like.’

‘Yes!’ I practically screamed. From the corner of my eye I saw the legs slow to a halt. He was listening. ‘Now? I want to move now.’

Mum laughed, ‘No, silly. It’s the middle of the night. We need to pack up everything, but we could do it over the next few days,’

‘Yes. Please.’ A few days. I could do that. I had lasted months already. At first it wasn’t so bad. He would just visit. Every now and then I would wake to a soft scratching, or a gentle humming. But after a while, he stopped leaving. And now he was here every night. Just watching. But it would be over soon. He never left this room. I would be free of him. The sickening knot in my stomach loosened.

‘Great,’ Mum yawned. ‘It’s settled then. We’ve been talking about moving Lily out of our room, so this works out perfectly. She will move in here and you can move to the study. I personally think you’re crazy, this room is far bigger than the study, but if you’re—’

'Lily?' I said. My little sister.

Mum nodded. 'Is there a problem with that? You don't for some reason want two bedrooms now do you?'

Above Mum's head the feet began to swing, left and right. The pace picked up. He was happy. He was getting a new playmate.

I felt the sick taste of bile in my throat. Lily was so little. The thought of him watching her night after night. Of her staring up at him. His voice drifting down to her as she slept. My stomach turned to lead as I realised I couldn't leave.

'No,' I said, my voice catching at the end.

'No?' Mum repeated, 'Tommy, it's late, and I don't understand these games. What is it now?'

I took a deep breath, and forced my eyes to the ground, 'I don't want to leave. I'd like to stay here.'

'Tommy this is ridiculous,' Mum moved to stand up, but I grabbed her hand, holding it tightly in mine.

'I'm sorry for all the hassle,' I said. 'I want to stay in here. You're right. The room's bigger and its quieter.' Hot tears welled behind my eyes as I spoke.

'That is quite the change of heart, Tom. Are you sure? You won't get another chance once Lily settles in.'

I nodded. A soft, cheerful humming filtered through the room.

A minute later I was sliding beneath my fresh doona, tucking the blanket all the way up to my chin.

Mum gave me a quick kiss on the forehead, her brow wrinkled with confusion, but her body too tired to decipher it. 'I love you,' she whispered as she paced over to the doorway. She stumbled

near the foot of my bed, and with a sigh, she bent down, picked up my school bag and tossed it into the small space above my wardrobe. My eyes automatically followed as the bag landed next to him. His feet were dangling over the edge and his head was twisted at an unnatural angle so he could fit within the small gap. His mouth was stretched into a satisfied smile.

My breath caught in my throat and I snapped my eyes back down to my knuckles, now white against my doona.

Mum stopped at the doorway, 'Sweet dreams,' she said, before turning off the light and disappearing down the hall.

The sound of fingernails slowly drumming against the wooden wardrobe echoed in the darkness. I shivered.

I didn't blame Mum. She didn't see him. Adults never saw him.

I nestled further into my bed; my breath hot under the doona. Sunrise was still a few hours away. I took comfort in the fact that he never left the wardrobe. He just watches. Then, I heard it. The unmistakable sound of a pair of brown dress shoes landing lightly upon my bedroom floor.

About Fionna:

Fionna is a long-time lover of spooky stories, but cowers once they move into horror territory. An office worker by day, and an Uggs boot wearing storyteller by night.

THE CHANGE

By D.D. Line

Highly Commended, Open Category

Icy cold water dripped from her forehead and sizzled down her skin. Eloise tore the washcloth from her face and let loose a stream of obscenities. The heat in her house was ridiculous. It was the middle of winter, yet she swore her flesh steamed from the inside out.

A yawn threatened to dislocate her jaw as she stared at the air-con panel. There was no mistake. She'd set it to cool, so why was it so damn hot in here?

Frustrated, she raised a hand to the back of her neck hoping to reduce her building tension. Her nails scratched her skin leaving welts in their wake. She inspected the tiny slivers of flesh trapped above her fingertips.

How odd!

She touched the spot where her nape and shoulder met. The rough, split surface gave way to a soft down reminding her of a hatching chick emerging from a cracked egg.

On the kitchen bench, her phone pinged. 'Andrei Lupescu' flashed on the screen.

A different heat infused her.

Divorced for two years, she'd gone on her first date ten days ago. For months she'd resisted his advances. She was in her early fifties, for heaven's sake. The suave Romanian businessman couldn't be more than thirty-five. In his sexy accent, he'd assured

her he was older than he seemed. She'd doubted his sincerity too. Until he'd kissed her.

Sweat trickled down the back of her neck, the broken skin stinging in protest.

She ignored the irritation and her phone in favour of opening the fridge. Cold water was the practical choice, but chilled wine beckoned. Then she spotted the steak.

Red and raw, the meat she'd defrosted for dinner basked in its own bloody juices. Her lips trembled. Her mouth watered. Of its own volition, her hand moved toward the plate.

Behind her, the phone pinged again, high pitched to the point of pain. If she had the strength, Eloise would have wrenched off the fridge door in fright. As it was, the handle squealed as she spun around to face her auditory 'attacker'.

She reached for it, pausing when she caught sight of her nails.

Manicured that morning, now they were chipped, broken and pointed. In fact, they looked sharp enough to rip the steak to shreds. No wonder she'd scratched herself earlier.

With horrified fascination, Eloise forced her gaze from her hand to her phone and read his brief text.

'Run with me.'

Was he crazy? Why would she want to go running when it was blowing a gale outside? Her body heat already threatened to melt the skin off her flesh. Running would make it worse.

Eloise returned to the air-con panel and pushed buttons in a desperate attempt to find the perfect temperature. A shadow flitted across the curtain. She peeked out the window. Against the backdrop of a twilight sky, she saw nothing but trees contorting

as the wind howled through their darkening branches. A sheen of perspiration oozed down her face and disappeared under her t-shirt. She rubbed tired eyes and suppressed another yawn.

She'd been too hot to sleep. After the fourth restless night, she'd seen her doctor. She swore the nurse had drawn enough blood to feed a thousand mosquitoes. Eloise wasn't sure she wanted the results. And nothing they'd suggested in the meantime seemed to help.

The need to quench her thirst had her returning to the fridge. Again, her gaze found the steak. The rich, meaty aroma wafting from its scarlet bath assailed her nostrils and her stomach rumbled with longing. Lips smacking together, she imagined tearing it to pieces with her bare hands and swallowing the chunks whole.

A third ping pierced the air. Eloise dropped the plate she couldn't remember holding. The pieces decorated the floor in an abstract mosaic. Scarlet splatters connected the china in a macabre montage of a child's 'Connect the Dots' game. There was no sign of the steak. It must have fallen under the bench. She swore and grabbed her phone. A tap revealed it was a missed call from her doctor. Eloise frowned and played the message.

'Good evening, Eloise. Apologies for the late call, but I've received your results, and it's as I suspected.'

Eloise smothered a yawn and scratched her arm, the skin there as dry as everywhere else.

'I want to book you in for another appointment to discuss options.'

Moving to the Antarctic sounded like a fine choice.

'A woman your age should expect the following symptoms:

itchy skin.'

Eloise stopped scratching her arm to gape at the screen in disbelief.

Did the desire to shed her skin like a snake qualify?

'Insomnia.'

If the sleeping tablets didn't kick in tonight, she was certain she'd kill someone.

'Hair growing in unusual places.'

She touched her shoulder. More tufts of softness tickled her fingertips.

'Irritability.'

You've got to be frigging kidding me.

'Night sweats.'

Well, that explained the feverish heat, didn't it?

'Loss of libido.'

Eloise laughed so hard she almost slid off the bench she'd leaned against. If anything, she wanted sex more.

'It is my professional opinion you're in the early stages of menopause. Some people refer to it as 'the change'.'

The message continued, but Eloise was no longer listening.

Well, isn't that wonderful? Out of a loveless marriage at last, attractive enough to snare the interest of a man who could pass for half her age, and she was going through the bloody 'change'. It didn't explain her sudden craving for raw meat. Or her desperate need to ravish Andrei. Eloise's face, neck and chest flushed at the memory, and it had nothing to do with the ridiculous heat

churning through her body.

Making love with Andrei had been A-MAZE-ING! She'd forgotten what it meant to be a vibrant, desirable woman. To be the centre of a handsome man's undivided attention. That night, she hadn't cared that 'just dinner' had evolved into a marathon of mutual desire and passion.

She blamed him for her lack of control and her surging hormones. Him and his sexy accent, which whispered words of sinful pleasure in her ear, the flurry of poetry an exotic spell. And the soft, wet warmth of his mouth on her neck, licking, tasting, nibbling on the tender flesh; she'd never felt so alive, so in touch with her wild side. He'd been in touch with his wild side too, it seemed, especially when the sensuous lips ravishing her throat peeled back and his teeth pierced her flesh.

'What the hell?' she remembered saying when the pain burst through her lust-induced haze. 'Who do you think you are? A bloody vampire?'

He'd pinned her with his gaze. Something undefinable mixed with the desire in his eyes. Golden yellow replaced the malt brown before he broke their stare. Her breath caught. He grinned. Elongated teeth flashed at her before he moved, his tongue soft against the bite mark as though he meant to soothe her pain. His lips tickled her ear when he replied in an amused tone, 'No, not a vampire,' before their passion consumed her once again.

Outside, the wind yowled like a ferocious beast prowling the street. Eloise tilted her head and listened. She crossed to the window, her hands and forehead welcomed the coolness of the

glass. Eyes wide, she stared into the darkness. A pewter edge glistened in the scuttling clouds, and she gave a mocking laugh at the thought of the moon providing her with a silver lining. After the past several days, she could do with one.

A fierce howl competed with the wind. It called to her, wild, primal and free. She twisted away from its tempting voice. Something cracked. Agony raced up her spine.

When the pain faded and her breathing calmed, she wondered if 'the change' robbed the body of calcium and made her bones brittle. But that was ridiculous. Her back can't have broken and reformed itself. A shrill cry reached her ears. She clamped her hands over them. Something tickled her palms. Eloise stared from them to her reflection in the glass. The full moon appeared and bathed her in silver.

Another splintering crack traversed her spine. She doubled over. Salty beads of liquid welled across her forehead and dripped onto the floor. Her head snapped back. Her jaw widened more than was humanly possible. Limbs stretched to breaking point, her blood roared through her veins with molten intensity. Her nostrils quivered, capturing a delicious aroma; the scent familiar.

A loud thud reverberated against her front door. She gasped. Her tongue slid over elongated teeth. Unable to control her body's movements, she landed on all fours.

Intimate, accented words filled her ears, imploring her to join him. To run. To play. To hunt.

The last thing Eloise remembered was glass shattering as the window smashed, a blast of cool, fresh air, and her own blood-curdling howl.

AN UNEXPECTED TWIST

About D.D:

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

JUSTIFYING THE MEANS

By Valerie Latimour

Second Prize, Open Category

As her attacker's hands tightened around her throat, Margie felt rage boiling up inside her, rage such as she had never felt in her thirty-two years. The rage gave her strength, and she fought, kicking and clawing for her life. She inflicted some damage on her attacker, but his hands, clasped implacably about her slender pale throat, merely tightened as he choked the life out of her. Her vision went dark, black tinged with violent red as her life was snuffed out, but the rage grew and strengthened, until she became rage, a furious malevolent entity.

She watched as her lifeless body fell to the ground. The attacker went through her pockets and handbag, pocketing the small amount of cash and jewellery she carried. The handbag, her clothes, and her corpse were unceremoniously discarded in the large dumpster in the corner of the alley, then hurriedly covered with rubbish, leaving no visible trace of her life or sudden death in the dark, noisome alley. He sauntered out of the alley; thoughts full of a certain dealer who had recently been supplying a superior product, no doubt. Showing no regard at all for the life he had just ended, he headed off, in search of a fix.

Only the rage remained, all that was left of a pleasant, easy going young woman who had loved life, had only wanted to help people, who just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The furious, disembodied spirit existed in anger, haunting the site of her murder, dwelling on thoughts of violence and pain.

A different attacker, a different young woman. Perceiving the

struggle, Margie drifted towards it, her rage sparking as she realised what was going on. Not a drug-addled mugging gone wrong this time, but a drunken attempt at romance. 'Come on, you know you want to,' he slurred, his strong frame pinning the delicate body against the wall. His hands roved her body, then moved with dreadful purpose towards the zipper of his jeans.

Terror and pain poured from the woman as she fought, desperately but ineffectually. Margie felt the terror and it fanned her own rage, flames of wrath surrounding her as she flew towards the pair. With a suddenness that shocked her, she was inside the woman's mind, seeing through her eyes and feeling through her skin. She poured her own rage into the woman's body, shunting aside her fear, lending her supernatural strength. With Margie's help the woman fought off her attacker and ran. A passenger in the woman's mind, Margie felt her rage and revulsion as she fled. The revulsion was not only for the attacker, the attempted rape, but also for the violation of her mind, the invasion of her inner self. Stunned by this realisation, Margie released her hold on the woman's mind and watched her stumble away.

Margie drifted back down the alley, musing on what had just happened. Her fierce joy at thwarting the attacker's plans was tempered by a growing conviction that taking over the woman's body was a transgression as evil as the bodily attack perpetrated by the man. He lay groaning on the ground, his mind still awash in whiskey, struggling to comprehend the progression of events.

Approaching slowly, Margie contemplated a change of tack. This was how she could make a difference in the world. She pushed her way slowly into his mind, not taking over this time but sitting quietly as he recovered his breath and composure. She sent a steady stream of thoughts into his mind, censure for his actions, disgust for his drunkenness, gradually increasing the volume until

the vaults of his mind echoed with self-recrimination.

She stayed in his mind as he stumbled home, stoking his misery, enhancing the alcohol's effect on his body. He fell to his knees, his gorge rising, and vomited convulsively on the side of the street. A dark glee rose within her as she realised the control she had over him.

But he was nothing, Margie realised. Not truly evil, just a creep who'd had too much to drink and thought a girl in a bar liked him more than she actually did. Perhaps after tonight he'd think twice before getting drunk and forcing himself on a woman. Margie had bigger prey in mind.

The next mind was a darker place, a slimy creature who took pleasure in hurting others. Margie rode his mind for a while, feeling his insecurities, his fear of experiencing pain and helplessness himself. With subtle control she tripped him, sending him stumbling into the path of an oncoming car. As she'd hoped, the car wasn't going fast enough to kill him. But the broken bones and internal injuries would cause pain aplenty, and keep him helpless in a hospital bed for a good long time.

For a while, these encounters contented her. Margie would find a target—a man with evil or sadistic tendencies—and ride their minds while plotting their downfall. She was creative, finding in their dirty little minds the things they feared most and making those things happen. Some died. Some were merely injured or maimed. Some were financially ruined or publically humiliated. And her rage and her glee fed on each victory, and she gloried in knowing that she was making the world a better place.

Eventually, the novelty wore off and her enjoyment paled. She needed to do more. Gradually she formulated a new plan, and began searching for the right person to help her achieve it.

AN UNEXPECTED TWIST

His name was Edward. He was truly evil, his mind sharp and merciless. He had no fear, no insecurity, just an absolute assurance of his own power and his right to exercise it. He had first killed as a teenager, unintentionally going too far in a fight with another teenager and bludgeoning him to death. Far from feeling remorse, the killing had given him a heady rush of power, and he had sought out that rush again and again.

Here was power Margie could see. She could harness this power, channel it, make it do her bidding. She reached out and seized his mind, no longer shrinking from the touch of evil. Riding his mind, she turned his attention to muggers, to rapists, to all the petty little bullies in the world. Her rage fed his power, and together they inflicted violence and pain on the sadistic.

Caught up in the excitement of the action, Margie failed to notice when her control began slipping, and his predations grew less selective. By the time she saw that she had lost all influence over him, she was trapped. She had wound herself so tightly into his mind that she could no longer pull free. She was forced to ride along as Edward returned to his former self, not only inflicting violence, but also killing when he could get away with it, no longer pursuing justice and vengeance, but exercising his power to hurt.

Helpless with horror, she felt his hands close around the throat of a homeless girl, able to do nothing but watch as he choked the life out of her.

About Valerie:

Valerie Latimour is a local author, editor, publisher and tutor. She lives in Western Australia with assorted children, animals and houseguests. She does not have too many plants.



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](#).