

[CampNaNo Newsletter #5]



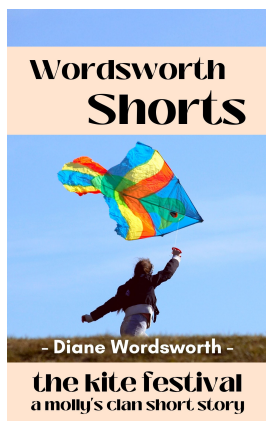
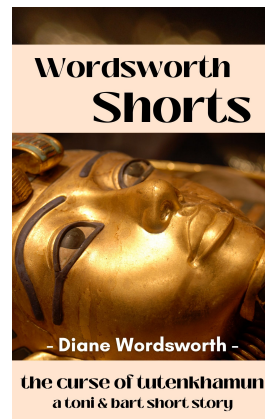
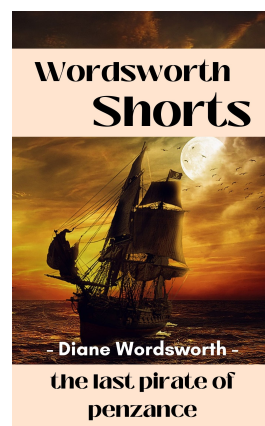
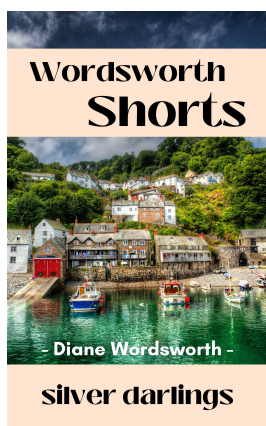
(Image courtesy of National Novel Writing Month)

This week's news

Hey {{ contact.FIRSTNAME | default : "there" }}. How are you?

This week I've been playing with covers for the short stories I'm writing for CampNaNo. Here's a sneak preview. Some of them you've seen already, the rest are new.





This last cover isn't really one of the short story covers, it's the cover of the anthology, from which I pinched the graphics for the actual short story.

If any of the stories still to be written run out at less than 1,200 words, then the cover will be changed to a Wordsworth Flash Fiction cover.

I often create the covers before I write the story, even if the cover might change if the story runs out shorter. It's much easier to write with an existing image in mind than search for one to suit a story that's already been written. Then again, the Penny and Guy story might be totally different to what the cover suggests here, in which case I'll have to make a new cover. For now, though, at least I know what Penny and Guy look like from the back... supposing, of course, that it stays as a story featuring two people. Maybe I'll write two versions...

I thought you might like to see the covers so you could let me know what you think. Do you love them, hate them, have mixed thoughts? Or are they "okay"?

Which one is your favourite? Which one is your least favourite?

You can reply to this email, or you can send one to:

diane@dianewordsworth.com

Look at me, eh! Finally working out how to master the layout of this blummin' thing! 😊

If the stories are suitable enough or topical enough, then they'll go off on their rounds. I like to submit to magazines still if I can, and competitions and anthologies, in the hope I'll get some constructive feedback. At least then if the market doesn't buy them, I can maybe make them better before publishing them myself.

Exciting news

Well, it is for us anyway.

One other thing that has been taking up a lot of our time just recently is house hunting. Yes, we're moving again.

We have found somewhere. It's currently all going through review, but all of the references have been obtained and it's in the hands of the agent now. We do have a rough completion date, but I'll confirm that as soon as we've had confirmation.

I was never really happy in the current house. It was a bit of a knee-jerk reaction when our previous landlords suddenly announced, in the middle of the pandemic, that they were selling up. We didn't want to buy it, so we had to find somewhere else instead.

I do like Finningley and being so close to both the airport and the Vulcan bomber. But I never really settled in the house.

So now we're moving to a 3-bedroom bungalow in a true village not far from the mother-in-law. We already have friends living there and the village is familiar to Ian, as it was part of his stomping ground growing up.

We can take the portable garden with us, but we're also going to become custodians of a couple of apple trees, a pear tree and some blackberry bushes, as well as some lovely roses, shrubs and some rather dinky topiary. There's probably more, we just haven't discovered it yet.

And – more importantly – we will hopefully be sharing an office again (if all the furniture fits). If we can't share, at least we'll be next to each other rather than at different ends of the house and on different floors.

Newsletter archive

I've been busy setting up a newsletter archive for anyone who missed an earlier newsletter or story and wants to complete the set. Let me know if you'd like a newsletter in particular, and I'll send you a link.

Again, you can reply to this email, or you can send one to: diane@dianewordsworth.com

Next time

There will be a final wrap-up newsletter next week for CampNaNo, and then we'll go back to once a month.

Here's this month's free short story



**Wordsworth
Shorts**

- Diane Wordsworth -

**martha's favourite
doll**

I wrote this short story from a prompt that People's Friend then fiction editor shared on her blog. I sent it off to Shirley and she asked me to rewrite it, which I did, and then she decided that she didn't want it after all. So I published it myself.

Martha's Favourite Doll

Vicky Masters hurried on her way to work, splashing in puddles whilst battling with her umbrella. March winds had

very quickly given way to April showers, and everyone knew it.

She dashed through the shortcut in the square, a flash of something in her peripheral vision, but not really registering anything other than the occasional raindrops sneaking down the back of her neck.

Vicky shivered when she reached the foyer and shook her brolly through the open door towards the outside.

“Halloo!” she called to the cheery receptionist as she breezed past. And when Vicky reached her desk up three flights of stairs, she finally removed her sodden raincoat, hanging it on the hat stand four of them shared in the open plan office. The rain had soaked through to the inside of her coat a little. She added her dripping umbrella to the others already collecting in a redundant waste-paper bin.

“Nasty weather,” she muttered to her colleague opposite before ducking behind the half-screen between them.

As Vicky fired up her computer, she gazed out of the rain-streaked window that overlooked the square she’d recently cut through – one of the few oases of green in this part of the town centre.

The ladies chatted amiably as they worked, and Vicky opened up her Facebook – being social media manager, this was one of her perks and she used it to full advantage to catch up on her friends’ gossip and news. She didn’t really abuse the facility, she was too busy, but she did take advantage for just a few minutes every now and then.

“Oh!” she said as she stopped scrolling down her newsfeed. Her colleague quickly peeked over the screen but, deciding there was nothing to see here, she bobbed down again, out of sight, and continued her telephone conversation.

As Vicky scrolled down, a shared post on one of the local pages had caught her eye:

Have you seen this doll?

Below was a picture of a rather old but nevertheless bonny and looked-after doll that reminded her of Hamble from the old television series she used to watch as a child, *Play School*, a little-girl doll with brown curly hair and fixed features. Vicky had never really been into little-girl dolls at the time, preferring the new-fangled baby-dolls that you could feed, whose eyes blinked and who wet themselves.

My daughter’s favourite doll has gone missing, continued the post. And we’re distraught. We’ve had her for years and she goes everywhere with us.

Hmm, mused Vicky to herself. Strange to lose it if they took it everywhere with them. If Vicky still had her precious doll, or if her granddaughter had it, it would be in a safe place and not easily lost. Still, she thought. Each to their own.

The post went on for a little more, but it was the final sentence that finally hooked Vicky:

**** Last seen in or around the Tesco Express, opposite Jubilee Square. ****

Vicky glanced again through the dirty window. Jubilee Square opposite the Tesco Express was *her* square, the one she'd taken a shortcut through only a few minutes earlier.

Forcing herself to concentrate, Vicky closed her eyes and focused. *Something* tugged at her memory.

She jumped up from her desk, grabbed the still-damp raincoat, and quickly headed back to the square. At least it had stopped raining now.

Sure enough, as she reached the wooden bench – soaking wet now, so not a soul was sitting on it – she saw the litter bin beside it. And poking out of the top was the doll's head – the flash of *something* she'd seen from the corner of her eye.

"How odd," she murmured, lifting it out of the bin gingerly for fear of it being very dirty by now. The old doll was wrapped in a crocheted doll's blanket, which at least had protected most of the doll from the other rubbish in the bin, *and* much of the rain. She was still in a sorry state, though. Vicky carefully peeled the dirty, sodden blanket away from the doll and dropped it back into the bin.

She had a long, hard look at the doll, deciding that yes, this was indeed the one advertised as lost on Facebook. She was wearing a hand-knitted outfit in a very old-fashioned shade of mustard. Vicky remembered her own mother knitting in a very similar colour.

Smiling at the strange looks she received from passers-by, Vicky returned to her office and perched the doll on the windowsill close enough to the ancient blow-air wall heater to dry her off without melting her. Then she contacted the lady who had lost the doll.

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Joanne Peters was delighted to hear from Vicky. The two women met at a coffee shop where Vicky handed over the doll.

"Oh, thank you so much," gushed Joanne. "I thought it might be a longshot posting it on Facebook, but I was desperate to find her." The doll clearly meant a lot to the family. "I've been beside myself, worried sick. She's been with me – us – for such a long time, and Martha, that's my daughter, really does take her everywhere.

"Tell me, where did you find her?"

Joanne paid for the drinks while Vicky related her tale.

"And, to be honest," confessed Vicky, "I don't know why I didn't notice her before, although I have to admit she looked quite creepy peeping out through the top of that bin."

"I expect you were just in a hurry to get into work and out of the rain," said Joanne. "I thought Martha may have lost her around that area. I remembered seeing her playing with the doll, or carrying her. And when I asked her, she agreed she

remembered having it then too.”

They parted company – Joanne hugging the beloved doll – and agreed to make friends on Facebook and keep in touch.

Back at the office, Vicky was very pleased with her good deed for the day, but couldn’t see her and Joanne really keeping in touch for long. If at all...

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When she went to collect her daughter Martha from the junior school, Joanne could hardly contain her excitement. She left her windscreen wipers with the fan on to demist the glass. The doll was sat on the back seat where Martha would see her when she clambered in next to her little brother on the car booster-seat, who smirked at her when he saw his sister’s face drop.

“Oh,” said Martha, flatly. “You found it then.”

“Yes! Isn’t it fantastic? I put an ad on Facebook this morning and by lunchtime a complete stranger had been in touch.”

Timmy was still grinning at his sister, who poked her tongue out at him.

Joanne then proceeded to rattle off the story to her daughter, who didn’t manage to get a word in until they reached home.

And then she plucked up her courage and dropped her bombshell.

“Mum, you do know I don’t actually like the doll, don’t you?”

There were a few beats of silence as Joanne unstrapped Timmy.

“Mum?”

“That’s rubbish, darling. Of course you like her. She’s your favourite doll.”

“She’s my *only* doll. All of my friends have Barbie dolls now.”

“But only last week you were playing quite happily with this one –”

Martha rolled her eyes as she jumped down from the back seat of the car. “Mum, last week was *ages* ago. I’ll be eight *next* week, and that’s *ages* away as well.”

“Well, / like her,” said Joanne, as stubborn as her daughter.

“Then *you* have her,” said Martha sweetly. “She’s yours anyway.”

And a smiling Martha followed a sulky Joanne and a jubilant Timmy into the house for tea.

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A week later, Vicky Masters happened to bump into Joanne and her family on their weekend visit to the big supermarket on the outskirts of town.

“Hi there,” she said. “How’re you?”

The two women exchanged pleasantries, and Joanne

introduced her to the children. But Vicky couldn't help but notice that there was someone missing. "I thought the doll went everywhere with you," she laughed.

Joanne laughed too, and explained how wrong she'd been. "The cheeky monkey even put her in the bin, she hated her so much. But it's fine. *My* beloved doll is in pride of place on a small armchair back home in *my* bedroom now, not Martha's."

When they all arrived at the Barbie doll section, Martha looked up at her mother with a questioning look on her face.

"We're buying you your birthday present," said Joanne. "You said you wanted a Barbie doll. Just like your friends."

"Oh, that was *ages* ago," giggled Martha. "All of my friends have Monster High dolls now -"

"Oh, okay," said her mum. "And which Monster High doll did you have in mind?"

"A Monster High Zomby Gaga," she replied quickly. Too quickly. "*Please.*"

"You've given it plenty of thought, I see!" laughed Vicky. "I think your mum should buy one quickly before you change your mind again."

And so, Monster High Zomby Gaga accompanied the family everywhere they went from that moment forward... for a while... And sometimes Vicky Masters joined them too.

THE END

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## **Diane Wordsworth**

Doncaster, England

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