

## October 2025 News



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Hello friends! Thank you for still being here.

Welcome to the October newsletter.

Did you know that the last newsletter was sent out in January?! I knew it had been a while, but I didn't realise it was that long. Gosh, what a lazy thing (←polite version) I've been.

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### what I've been up to...

Since January? Quite a lot! In fact, I can hardly remember it all now.

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### health news...

At the beginning of March I had surgery to remove my gall bladder. I didn't want them to take it, and it had taken the surgeon two years to talk me into it. But he assured me that if I didn't have it removed, my next pancreatic flare-up could kill me. Especially at my age...

MY age!

So I let him have it, and the operation wiped me out for the next six weeks. I'd lost 8lb on the 16:8 diet previous to the op, and afterwards I piled it all back on again.

We both had Covid in July, which also wiped us both out for a fortnight in the end. We're okay again now, but we do still wonder if we have Long Covid every so often.

More recently I had major dental surgery...well, I had a filling and then an emergency extraction, but the tooth was scheduled to come out anyway. Even so...

And the Dermatology department at Rotherham are still trying to work out (a) what's causing my full body rash, and (b) what to do about it. I'm attending 8 weeks of light therapy treatment and I'm having what they call a punch or core biopsy on my thigh.

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### **we've been away...**

A few times, in fact. We're loving the campervan and being able to just drop everything and go, if we want to.

Our big holiday this year, however, was a 3-week tour of the NC500 in Scotland. We were there just in time to miss the midges and the weather was very kind to us. We had 2 days of rain, but the rest of the time it was fine and dry.



We also visited Croyde in North Devon in May, where we met my sister, so we could scatter our parents' ashes.



### **publishing news...**

I haven't been quiet on the publishing front, despite being busy with other things.

Since January, I've published:

- *Words Worth Reading: Issue TWO*
- *Happy Valentine* (Wordsworth Flash Fiction #12)
- *The Weather Can Be Murder* (Wordsworth Short #37)
- *Ash Wednesday* (Wordsworth Flash Fiction #13)
- *Words Worth Reading: Issue THREE*
- *The Mucky Duck* (Wordsworth Flash Fiction #14)
- *The Egg Thief* (Wordsworth Short #38)
- *Elvis is Missing* (Wordsworth Short #39)
- *Words Worth Reading: Issue FOUR*
- *The Battle of Stubbins Bridge* (Wordsworth Flash Fiction #15)
- *The Ace of Swords* (Tarot Tales #3)
- *Ten Very Short Stories: Wordsworth Flash Fiction 1 - 10*
- *Mavis Braithwaite Strikes Again* (Wordsworth Short #40)
- *Killer Queen* (Wordsworth Short #41)
- *The Ace of Pentacles* (Tarot Tales #4)
- *Ten Short Stories: Wordsworth Shorts 31 - 40*
- *The Four Aces* (Four Short Tarot Tales)

Phew! That's quite a lot, and considerably more than many other writers I know. Some of those stories were published while we were away too. I should stop beating myself up when I feel I've been unproductive.

At the time of writing, there are 2 more publications pending:

- *Words Worth Reading: Issue FIVE* (due out on Monday 6 October)
- *Bonfire Surprise* (Wordsworth Short #42) (due out on

Monday 20 October)

A link to the pdfs for all issues of *Words Worth Reading* is FREE for subscribers and can be found below. (At the time of writing, Issue TWO is missing, but it will be up there very soon.)

I'm still working out how to recreate the newsletters online, preferably in pdf form, so the archive is consistent and up to date. Again, bear with me, it will be done as soon as I can suss it.

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### **social media shake-up...**

Last time I wrote, I'd been reconsidering my social media presence.

Both LinkedIn and Twitter/X have now gone, although there's still a pinned post at the top of my Twitter/X for people who have followed links in older books.

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### **the great novella challenge...**

In November 2024 I enrolled on a great novella challenge.

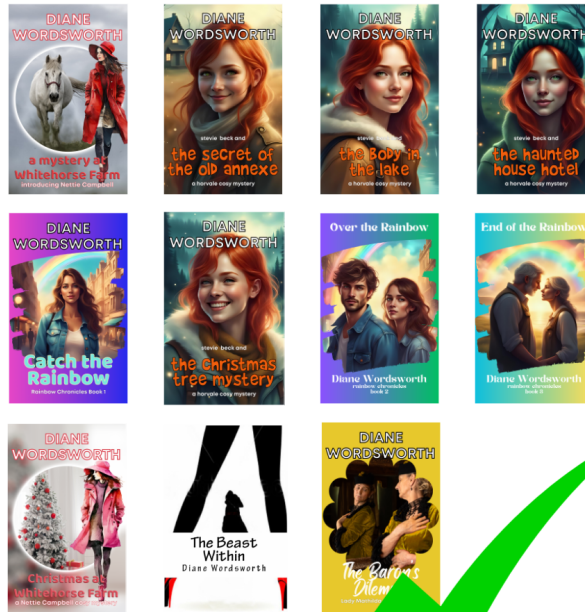
The challenge was to write a novella a month for a year. Word-count was 15,000 to 30,000 words, and we had to submit it to Dean Wesley Smith at WMG Publishing on the last day of each month.

I'm pleased to say that at the time of writing I've just submitted Book 11. It's been a long, hard slog. But I only almost missed the once, when Dean gave me a week-long stay of execution after a friend suddenly passed away.

I was writing a pastiche on the afterlife for Book 10 at the time, but when I sat down to continue, my heart just wasn't in it. So I did a quick change and wrote Part 1 of *The Beast Within* instead, which is the next full-length novel to feature Marcie Craig.

There's only one book left to write, and I may go back to the pastiche or I may write something else. I haven't decided yet.

# the great novella challenge



12 novellas in 12 months

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## Patreon

In September, I started a new Patreon.

There is and will be free content on there for all, but I currently have just the one level of paid membership, which is general feel-good support for just £1 a month. I don't know how much that will be in dollars because they add tax and admin fees on. But for UK members, it's £1.

At the moment, all paid content is available at this level. But in the new year, that level may only include the free content and Fiction Friday short story which, 4 weeks later, will be available on the website but only for one week.

The second tier, when it kicks in, will be for £3 a month, which is the lowest Patreon will allow for certain content. For this, members will get all the free content, everything in tier 1, plus articles on writing, works in progress, and behind the scenes or nuts and bolts features and articles. It will also include the revived writing ideas I used to share each month, plus access to the bookazine.

The third tier will be for around £5. For this, subscribers will get all the free content, everything in tiers 1 and 2, plus non-fiction books, as I write them, in serialised form.

The newsletter and the blog will both stay as they are, with a story in every issue and access to the newsletter archive and bookazine. But I may work on a new lead magnet that will be exclusive to newsletter new sign-ups. Of course, once that's ready, it will also be made available to existing newsletter subscribers too.

Let me know your thoughts, if you have any.

Link to the Patreon is below.

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### **that's it for now...**

That's all for now. Until next time...

*Diane*

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### **links...**

Don't forget, you can read my (week) daily blog [here](#), access the full newsletter archive to date [here](#), and *Words Worth Reading* magazine [here](#). Follow me on Patreon [here](#). And all of my books can be bought [here](#).

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### **here's your next story...**

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Georgia Lennard didn't have time to collect another fare. She had to get back to school to collect the kids. It was apparently the most scariest night of the year and she was taking them out. She flicked on the off-duty sign in her taxi and hightailed it in the general direction of the school.

The back streets were relatively empty at this time of day, being more likely to come alive with the less than salubrious night-life this quarter was famously known for. It wasn't a district you came to of an evening unless you were a gentleman or lady of

the night. It wasn't really a district you'd choose to come to during the day either, to be frank. Georgia hated having to come here for customers, but it was a short-cut to everywhere else and if it saved time, then it saved money for Georgia.

She drummed her fingers on her steering wheel in time to the music on the car radio as the streetlights started to come on, and she thought ahead to the evening's shenanigans. It was Halloween. The kids loved Halloween. Once they'd had their tea, they were going out trick-or-treating. Georgia hoped that the weather would hold for them.

As she rounded a corner between a couple of industrial units that towered over the streets, Georgia slammed her foot on the brake. What was that in the middle of the road? She let the engine tick over as she wondered first if it was a pile of clothes and then if it was a sack of discarded kittens. It was the thought of kittens that made her choose to go and investigate further.

Georgia opened the door just as a fine drizzle started to fall. Pulling up the collar on her jacket, she carefully picked her way across the slippery cobbles. A shiver ran down her spine. She glanced around. *Creepy*, she thought.

Looking down at the pile of clothes she shivered again. It wasn't moving, so that meant it wasn't a sack of kittens... unless they'd all already died. She thought about examining the pile but shuddered at the thought. Did she really want to see a load of dead kittens? No, she didn't. But she squatted down anyway and used one of her long fingernails to move the material to one side.

A clown's face suddenly grinned at her, causing her to topple backwards with surprise and land on the wet ground. She was quick to get back up again and she stared at the face, feeling the backside of her jeans at the same time. When she saw that it was only a mask, she felt silly and looked around to see if anyone had seen her. There was no one there. Just Georgia, her taxi and the clown. What a strange thing to leave lying around.

She crept up to the pile of fabric once more and shone the torch on her mobile phone at it. Then she laughed. An embarrassed laugh.

"It's a puppet!" she said out loud. "A clown puppet." She looked at her surroundings again, to make sure that there really wasn't anyone else there, then she bent over and carefully picked the puppet up.

It was about the size of a child and it had strings attached to its head, hands and feet. She held onto the wooden slats and wiggled them around a bit, but she couldn't get the puppet to



move for her. Running her fingers over it she realised it was all in one piece. *If the kids can work out how to use it, what a great thing for them to take out with them this evening,* thought Georgia.

She gave it a shake, lifting it completely clear of the ground, made sure there was nothing underneath it, and she stowed it on the back seat of her taxi. Then she climbed back into the front of the cab, hit the accelerator, and sped off towards the school. By now it was quite dark and her headlights sliced through the rain.

At a set of traffic lights, Georgia peered over her shoulder and jumped again. The clown was grinning right at her in the rear-view mirror. She shook herself. *Stop being daft!*

And then she felt one of her tyres blow out as the taxi skidded into the kerb.

"Dammit," she muttered, getting back out of the taxi. She didn't have time to wait for the AA. It would be quicker for her to change the wheel herself. It did make her even later, though. And the rain soaked right through her denim jacket.

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When they all eventually piled into the house, Connor and Abbie dashed upstairs to change out of their school uniforms. Georgia left her denim jacket hanging on the balustrade and rubbed at her hair and face with a towel. Then she put their tea on (fish fingers, beans and chips) and arranged the puppet on the worktop where the kids would see it when they came back down to eat. She had a menacing feeling that she was being watched, but every time she turned around, only the puppet was there.

There was a death-curdling howl. Georgia looked down to see their black cat, Domino, arching its back and yowling at the puppet. Her yellow eyes were wide, her ears were flat and her tail had bushed up to more than twice its size.

"What's the matter, Dom?" said Georgia. "Don't you like it?"

She scooped the cat up into her arms, but Domino had her claws into her so fast that Georgia dropped her again. The cat scooted out of the kitchen, hissing and spitting and slipping all over the place on the floor tiles.

*How odd,* mused Georgia.

"What's wrong with Domino?" asked Connor, as usual the first one to report in for tea. He was still watching after her over his shoulder.

"She didn't like our new friend," said Georgia, waiting for Connor to see the puppet.



Connor's head turned to his mother, and then his eye caught the brightly coloured creature on the worktop. "Wow! What's that?" he said, dashing up to have a closer look.

"It's a puppet," said Georgia.

"It's ace," said Connor. "Can I have a go?" Without waiting for the go ahead, he picked the puppet up by the wooden things at the top of the strings. Within seconds he had the clown walking across the kitchen floor.

"Mum, the cat's just thrown up on the landing carpet!" called Abbie down the stairs.

"Clean it up, then!" her mother called back.

"Urgh!" said Abbie's voice.

But within a few moments Georgia could hear something rubbing on the carpet, and she smiled to herself. Her daughter was a good girl who'd do something if it needed doing rather than wait for someone else to do it.

Georgia was watching Connor making the puppet dance. She heard the upstairs toilet flush and then a tap running in the bathroom sink. Then her daughter's feet came thumping back down the stairs.

"Don't forget to let your sister have a go," said Georgia, turning to serve up their tea.

Connor wasn't listening. He was miles away, a massive smile on his face.

Abbie had Domino in her arms when she came into the kitchen, but the cat yowled again, jumped down, and scampered back up the stairs. "What's wrong with her?" asked Abbie. "Is there a full moon... Wow, what's that?" she said before anyone answered, running to her brother's side. Connor was demonstrating his new-found skills and he made the puppet wave at his sister. Abbie was delighted, and she clapped her hands. "Oh, can I have a go?"

Connor was reluctant at first, but he conceded and handed the mechanism to Abbie. Like her mother, though, she couldn't make head nor tail of it and she handed it back to her brother.

"Where did you learn to do that?" she said, taking her place at the table.

"Dunno," shrugged her brother. "Never tried it before."

"I'm sure you'll get the hang of it, Abbie," said Georgia, putting their plates on the table.

Connor carefully sat the puppet back down on the worktop, washed his hands, and sat opposite her. He picked up a squeeze bottle of tomato ketchup and smothered his baked beans.

Georgia turned up her nose. She'd never understood how anyone could put ketchup on beans when they were already covered in it.

She took her place at the table with the kids, pinching a chip off Abbie's plate.

"Hey!" said Abbie, but she didn't mind really.

"I thought you might want to take him out trick-or-treating," said Georgia, pointing the half-eaten chip at the puppet.

Connor's blue eyes grew wider. "Can we?" he said.

"That's a cool idea," said Abbie.

The house phone rang and all three of them exchanged surprised looks. No one ever called the house phone. It was there purely for the internet. And Great Aunt Mabel, of course, who refused to call any of them on their mobile phones. "Too expensive!" she always complained.

Georgia hoped that Great Aunt Mabel was all right. But when she picked up the receiver, there was no one there.

"Perhaps it's Dad struggling to get a signal," suggested Abbie.

That was possible. If ever their father did have trouble calling any of their mobiles, he did in fact call the land line, just in case.

She dialled 1-4-7-1, but the electronic voice at the other end told her that the last call was three weeks ago last Wednesday... And it was, indeed, Great Aunt Mabel.

"Hmm," she said, replacing the receiver on the wall-mounted cradle. As she started to clear up the kids' dinner plates, the phone rang again. This time there was just a hollow cackle before static took over again. She hung up, dialled 1-4-7-1 again, but got the same message as before. She stood there thoughtfully for a moment before seeing the clown's face looking right at her, making her jump. But when she checked again, his painted eyes were simply staring, unseeing.

Another shiver ran down Georgia's spine. She needed to pull herself together. This Halloween lark was getting to her.

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The kids went to get changed into their Halloween fancy dress outfits. Connor was a vampire, Abbie was a witch. Georgia had

bought a black harness and lead for the cat, so that the witch's familiar could accompany them. However, of Domino there was no sign.

Georgia didn't bother dressing up, although she did change into some warm clothes. She was only there to supervise in any case. She wished that Terry wasn't working away that night. He always dressed up in a skeleton costume when he accompanied the kids. She hoped that the puppet would make up for him not being with them this year.

As it happened, the kids didn't seem to notice. Abbie carried the bucket for people to fill with sweets and chocolate and Connor walked the clown along, making him wave at passers-by as they passed by. Most of the neighbours seemed to like the puppet. It did make some of the older residents jump with fright, however. And even old Mr Jones at number forty-two who usually told them to clear off dropped some fifty-pee pieces into the bucket, eyeing the clown cautiously before slamming the door in their faces.

"Charming!" said Georgia.

"He always does that," said Abbie.

"Dad says he's a right old misery guts," said Connor.

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The kids were more than satisfied with their evening's haul as they shared everything out equally between themselves. They were only allowed to eat one chocolate bar each. Everything else went into goody tins on the kitchen counter. That was one of the things that Georgia liked about Halloween. She didn't have to buy any sweets for the next month.

As the kids made themselves comfortable in front of the telly, Georgia made her own dinner. She always ate her meals later than they did, because usually she ate with their dad. When he wasn't there, she stuck to it so that she didn't get too hungry the next time he was there.

She eyed the puppet, which Connor had sat back on the worktop, but this time it was sitting next to the goody tins. Georgia got up to fasten the lid back onto Abbie's goody tin, but when she sat down again at the table, it was unfastened again. "Hmm," she murmured, not taking her eyes off either the puppet or the tin.

The house phone rang again, but once again there was no one there, and once again 1-4-7-1 told her there hadn't been any callers for three weeks. When it rang again, she ignored it. But when the ringing stopped, she could hear Terry's voice.

*I've had an accident, said the voice. Help me! Help!*

She jumped up to pick up the phone, but all she could hear was that cackle again. She called her husband back, on his mobile, but it went to voice mail. And when she slammed the house phone back into its holder, she caught the puppet looking at her again, this time with an even bigger smile on its face.

Georgia shuddered. "You're creepy," she said, and the clown's head slowly started to move...

She grabbed at the puppet, dashed outside, and stuffed it into a wheelie bin, almost tripping over the cat.

"Oh, Domino!" she exclaimed. "You could have broken my neck!"

The cat hissed and spat at the wheelie bin and ran inside the open door into the house.

Georgia looked at the wheelie bin, then she wheeled it up the drive and left it at the side of the road. It was bin day the next day in any case and it would save her a job in the morning.

When she went back into the house, she saw Domino in her basket quite contentedly licking her paw. The cat paused for a moment to regard her human before carrying on.

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A few hours later, after everyone had gone to bed, a car crawled along the road in the rain that had grown heavier throughout the evening. Terry Lennard had decided to come home tonight rather than tomorrow morning. He hadn't told his wife because he wanted it to be a surprise.

Domino was sitting on the windowsill looking out into the dark when she started to growl. She twitched her head and opened her eyes wide as she watched the lid of a wheelie bin slowly lift up. The clown clambered out and calmly went to stand in the middle of the road before melting into a pile of rags.

In his headlights, as he was turning into his driveway, Terry saw a pile of clothes lying in the road. Knowing how Georgia felt about people who abandoned kittens in sacks, he left his engine ticking over and went to investigate.

When he saw it was a puppet he decided to take it into the house. Georgia and the kids would be delighted when they saw what he had brought home when they got up in the morning.

the end



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