

Evesham Literary Festival Short Story Competition 2022 - Judge's Report

Just like last year, it's been a delight to read through this year's entries. Open-themed competitions attract a wide diversity of stories, and this year's entries were no less diverse.

I've been entertained by characters who can't dance (something I can identify with), characters who love the sunshine but yearn for a bit of good old-fashioned British fog from time to time (something I can identify with), and characters who go around murdering people (something I can't identify with, but sometimes wish I could).

I'd like to thank everyone who entered, for you certainly entertained me, and also made my job a challenging task, as I determined which entries I wanted to award the top three places to. Here are my results, and why these stories appealed to me.

First - The Flower Man

It is sometimes said that when people die, their life flashes before them. Well, for The Flower Man, it was more of a slow realisation that perhaps he should have treated his wife, Margaret, better during their marriage. As he lies on the grass, surrounded by his precious flowers, experiencing the unmistakable pain of a heart attack, he's convinced Margaret will call an ambulance quickly. Except, as the story unfolds, we soon realise Margaret has little incentive to hurry to the phone.

And as the ending drew near, I found myself urging Margaret not to make that phone call. When a man is in so much pain that he cannot move or make a sound, he has two things left to do: endure the pain and think about what he's done with his life. Telling a great story is about choosing the right viewpoint. And this wouldn't have worked as well had it been told from Margaret's perspective.

Second - The Burial

This appealed to my sense of humour and my love of cosy crime. And, as someone who has worked in the past for a local Church of England diocese, I know what some vicars have to put up with! So, for the Reverend Marjorie Jones to find herself in this predicament on her last day, well, she deserved a break. The fact she manages to

bury a body and still catch her flight to Barbados in time just shows that the Lord works in mysterious ways! And, as the story explains, it wasn't really the vicar's fault. If Beatrice Conway hadn't had such awful marital problems, she wouldn't have needed to see the vicar in the first place. There's always a moral to stories, and this one is no different: one should always have realistic expectations on an exercise class that takes place in the Church hall and is called *Nifty Fifties*.

Third - The Man in the Tent

Not only does Clare help Tarquil get his tent back, but she, as a person, has changed by the end of this story. Her perceptions have changed, and Tarquil has taught her that not all men are looking for someone to do their washing and cook their meals. Understandably, Clare has her reasons for thinking in this way, but only when she gets to know Tarquil better does she understand what he's really after. Prejudices can be overcome if you're open-minded enough. And in this story, Clare realises her attitude is wrong and does something to not only change that, but change Tarquil's life too.

Congratulations to everyone who was long-listed and short-listed. Your stories showed a skill at writing that should be pursued. I also want to say that I really enjoyed *Hunger*, *Kneelers* and *Shall We Dance*, too, so I hope these writers continue submitting their work to competitions.

Many thanks to the Evesham Literary Festival committee for inviting me to judge this year's competition. It's been great fun.

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