

2014

April A-to-Z Blogging
Challenge

Flash Fiction

(with author notes)



by

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INTRODUCTION

The April A-to-Z Blogging Challenge is an annual blog-hop where bloggers are invited to post an article every day, six days a week, for the entire month of April. Each day of the 26 days is assigned a letter of the alphabet (the first is “A”, the second “B”, the third “C”, and so on), and each participant’s post must have something to do with that day’s letter.

For the 2012 challenge, I wrote a story every Monday. I followed this same pattern for 2013, but restricting myself to no more than 500 words. When it came to the 2014 challenge, I wanted to keep to a theme. But what to write that would hold my interest, and hopefully entertain my readers?

Over the past three years, I’ve enjoyed participating in writing competitions hosted by literary agent Janet Reid on her blog (www.jetreidliterary.blogspot.com). She usually provides five words and challenges her readers to write a story using no more than 100 words, five of which being the ones she provides. For a writer, flash fiction challenges like this are priceless for practicing one’s editing skills, and learning to consider carefully every word one uses.

I’ve also enjoyed writing 200-word flash fiction for the YA Buccaneers’ “Walk the Plank” challenge. One of the ways they make their challenge more interesting is to challenge participants to write exactly 200 words.

Because I love a writing challenge—and the more challenging the better—I decided that for the 2014 A-to-Z Blogging Challenge, I would write a piece of flash fiction every day. Like the Janet Reid contests, each story would be no more than 100 words long. And like the YA Buccaneers challenges, each story would be *exactly* 100 words long.

These are the stories I wrote, along with some comments on each story. I hope you enjoy!

Note: I am offering these stories to you for your enjoyment. You are free to distribute them and/or reproduce them however you see fit. I only ask that a) you don’t change the stories in any way, and b) you give credit where credit’s due (i.e., don’t plagiarize!).

NOTE: The graphics come from the “Blogging from A- to Z Challenge” site (www.a-to-zchallenge.com), and were made available for participants in the 2014 challenge.



ASH

Five inches of insulated steel hissed open. He had designed the shelter doors to withstand a supernova, so Adam wasn't surprised.

What he didn't expect was the landscape that greeted him.

Five hours ago, it had all been calculations and theories; possibilities and probabilities. Now he stood in three inches of ash, looking out at broken buildings and twisted metal, while a silent breeze kissed his face. Adam still held the detonation devise. It had to be done, he'd said. But as he felt the dust remains of his world under his feet, he wondered why he had to survive.

[AUTHOR NOTES]

*This was the first story I wrote for the challenge. It was in the latter part of February, and my blog friend Robin Moran was reading *ASH* by James Herbert. I was visiting her blog at the same time I was trying to decide on a topic for the first story. There on her sidebar was a picture of the book. The word "Ash" immediately made me think of some kind of post-apocalyptic scene. Don't ask me why. Writer's brains work that way. It wasn't long before the above story suggested itself.*



BOLO

The dogs pulled hard—when they catch a scent, there’s no stopping them—and we soon came to a small, thatch-roofed cottage. A young girl in a long nightgown and golden pig tails answered the door. I pulled out the BOLO.

“Excuse me, miss, but have you seen an obese, white male with a white beard...?”

“Oh yes!” the girl nodded.

“Is he here?”

“No,” said the girl. “He left that-a-way.” She pointed toward the horizon.

“Thank you ma’am,” I said. I returned to my sled and pick up the walkie-talkie.

“Patrol B to Grinch Central. Suspect spotted. In pursuit.”

[AUTHOR NOTES]

For some reason (see the previous note about writer’s brains) the letter “B” made me think of BOLO. I was actually surprised to learn from the blog comments how many people didn’t know what a BOLO is. Clearly, everyone needs to watch more NCIS. “BOLO” stands for “Be On the Look Out,” and is used by the police when they want all patrol cars to search for a person or vehicle, as in, “I’ll issue a BOLO for him.” But who would I have the BOLO be about? I like to misdirect my readers, so I thought it might be fun to make it sound like a serious criminal, and end up with it being... Santa! But who would be hunting down Santa? Why, the mean minions of the Grinch, of course.



COLD

Carlton dragged the bag down to the basement. With each ka-thunk on the steps, he remembered.

Ashley White.

Ka-thunk.

Maria Broward.

Ka-thunk.

Colleen Simpson.

Ka-thunk...

Each had skewered his heart with the knife of rejection.

Carlton opened the walk-in freezer and dragged Colleen's body from the bag. He placed her next to Ashley and Maria. High school was fifteen years ago, but their crimes were not forgotten. Each one skewered in the heart by the knife of justice.

Carlton felt no anger. No resentment. This was simple justice.

As was the final ka-thunk of the freezer door sealing him in.

[AUTHOR NOTES]

I'm not a big fan of horror, but I enjoy writing suspense. It's hard to do well, especially with only 100 words, so this was good practice. In this piece, I'm using "cold" in more than one sense. There's the physical cold of the freezer, and there's also the coldness of the killer. These two meanings combine at the end when the killer is closed in. I also use "knife" both metaphorically and physically, which was satisfying to me. If it crept you out, then even better.



DELETE

Darren was still grinning when Danni kissed him.

“Amazing,” he said. “After twenty years of marriage, it felt like the first time.”

“Some girls just know how to make a man happy,” Danni smiled. “Coffee?”

She slid out from the satin sheets and into her robe.

“Back in a moment,” Danni said with a wink. Darren grinned back.

While the coffee brewed, Danni fumbled in the back of the china cabinet until she found the bottle:

Delete: erase the last hour from your mind!

She dropped one of the pills into Darren’s mug, smiling.

Doesn’t every marriage have its secrets?

[AUTHOR NOTES]

Another genre I’m not a fan of—romance. So what better way to step up the challenge than attempt to write something in a romantic vein? Of course, there’s a twist at the end. It’s true, you can never repeat the first time for anything, and that goes double for that first romance. Even if the kiss, or the relationship, wasn’t something to be proud of, there’s something about the innocence of that moment that is special—almost sacred. To what lengths would someone go to relive it? Would it be worth it?



ELF

“But people are paid to do it!” Laura insisted. Ed wasn’t listening. He pulled his Mazda Miata into the self service bay; the gleaming paintwork in stark contrast to the grime of the garage.

Ed had just started examining the car when he heard running. He backed away as five small men with pointed ears and green jumpsuits approached carrying cleaning supplies.

“Wait! Stop!” he shouted, but to no avail. The men set about cleaning Ed’s Mazda while he watched, helpless. Then he noticed the sign over the bay. Until now he had thought a letter was missing:

ELF SERVICE

[AUTHOR NOTES]

As my kids would say, this is classic “Dad humor”—which means it’s some kind of hokey pun or cheesy word-play that makes them groan, or sympathy laugh. I can’t claim to have originated “elf service.” I think it comes from the movie “Elf,” where there’s a whole slew of “elf” jokes (“elf service,” “elf help,” “elf sufficiency,” etc.). It made me smile, anyway.



FLASH

It looked more like a confessional than a photo booth. In the middle of the mall? My curiosity piqued, I ventured behind the crimson curtain and sat on the velvet cushioned seat.

The word *SMILE* suddenly appeared in LED letters on the plate glass screen in front of me. I smiled.

Flash.

Flash.

Flash.

A message blinked:

Please wait...

The booth interior was wood paneled, and warm like an embrace. So why did I shiver?

A new message appeared:

Your soul has been found wanting. Please prepare for penance.

I tried to leave but the seat give way beneath me....

[AUTHOR NOTES]

This was actually the last story I wrote for the challenge. I had written an "F" story weeks before, but a couple of days before it was due to post, I decided I didn't like it. I noticed that "Ash" and "Cold" were relatively well-received, so I decided to go for something in a similar, eerie vein. The word "Flash" came to mind, and I got this strong picture of a photo booth in a mall. But what if the camera cared more about something deeper than your appearance...?



GRANDFATHER

Grasping hands and guiltless joy, gurgles and grins.

Sparkling eyes and a line of drool.

Is he happy to see me, or does he need to be changed?

Without words,

these innocent gestures are so vague.

If only he could talk,

tell me what he wants,

tell me how he feels,

that he wants me here,

that he needs me.

that he loves me.

All I have are these grasping hands, these gurgles and gummy grins.

A reminder of how I used to be

many years ago.

An echo of what I might become

a few short years from now.

[AUTHOR NOTES]

Despite the fact that the only Janet Reid contest I have won so far has been for a poem, I don't consider myself to be a competent poet. There's not a lot of poetry I enjoy reading, so it's not something I generally try to write. However, every now and again, an idea strikes that demands poetic form. I tried to write this as a piece of prose, but it wouldn't conform. I'm sure you've heard writers talk about how they were forced by the story to go a certain direction, and you might find that hard to believe. The writer dictates the story, after all. But there are times when the idea is a square peg, and no matter how much you want to shove that square peg into your round hole comfort-zone, it won't go. This was one of those times.

I resonate with the sentiment of this poem, not simply because I now have adult children who may, sometime in the near future, produce grandchildren, but because the older I get, the quicker time seems to slip by. More and more I encounter people who were babies when I was getting married, or weren't even alive when I was in college. Young people seem so much younger, and old people are fast becoming my peers. These thoughts aren't meant to make me depressed, but to spur me on to make sure I don't leave this world without leaving a mark. And to realize how relatively little time I might have to do that.



HARDBOILED

I needed a break and the loser in the seat was my last chance. Just my luck that he decided to play stupid. He said he worked for some paltry outfit, that he'd been in some hot water, but he was done. I'd sooner have trusted a politician. Those guys he worked for, it was just a shell organization, and he was playing me for a dummy. I'd had enough with the nice guy routine, so I got out the knife. He cracked and opened up. But he wasn't as solid as I thought. Next thing I knew, he ran.

[AUTHOR NOTES]

I enjoyed the word-play here. For those who maybe didn't pick up on it, "hardboiled" is not only a way of cooking an egg, but it's a sub-genre of detective fiction, which I have attempted to imitate in this piece..



INVISIBLE

I pour the last of the tea into Terry's mug.

"Susan's coming in an hour," I say. "Won't you stay to see her?"

He drains his mug and grips my hand.

"No," he says. "She doesn't understand."

"But she's our daughter!"

Terry just smiles and kisses my cheek. "Later, Corrine."

And he's gone.

And I'm alone with the flowers on the window sill, and the sympathy cards on the bedside table.

I've tried talking to Susan, but she says I'm imagining Terry. Grief, she calls it. But I'm never sad when he's here, and he's always here—just sometimes invisible.

[AUTHOR NOTES]

Switching gears again to a more serious piece. Each time I pick a theme word, I try not to go for the obvious. In this case, the obvious could have been a super power, or perhaps a ghost story. Instead, I went to the grieving widow, and particularly the elderly grieving widow. I can only imagine what it must be like to lose a spouse after, say, 50+ years of marriage. When you've shared lives for so long, how much easier it would be to simply imagine them as invisible to everyone else than have to deal with the cold reality of their absence.



JALAPEÑO

“Two more and you can have a drink,” said the chief hazer, glancing at the beer on the table in front of them. Rick clenched his teeth, pulling against the cords binding his wrists.

Hazer slapped Rick’s face, forcing his mouth open enough to jam another jalapeño in. Rick bit down; a cheer went up.

Suddenly, his tormentors scattered.

Maybe it was the oil in the pepper skin; maybe it was the seeds. Whatever, the smoking remains of the beer table, and the faint burning sensation on his lips told Rick why he had been denied peppers all his life.

[AUTHOR NOTES]

Another dramatic gear change to something a little lighter, and perhaps bordering on the super-hero-y. Just as Popeye got his power through spinach, Rick found his through peppers! All you hazers out there... beware. You never know who you might be dealing with...



KNIGHT

Mark offers to walk me home. I decline.

“Beware of The Knight!” he says. I laugh. Ghost stories. Maybe that’s why I’m walking through Kelemen Woods. Silly fables from rustling leaves, moonlit shadows, and wild imaginations.

Footsteps. I keep walking.

Someone’s breath close behind me. I walk faster.

A glint of silver in the corner of my eye. I jog.

Someone screams. I run.

I don’t look back. I run until I’m inside my house. In my room. In my bed.

But the biggest scare comes the next day. The newspaper headline reads:

“Serial rapist found decapitated in Kelemen Woods.”

[AUTHOR NOTES]

This was one of the hardest to write. There’s such a lot of atmosphere and story I wanted to get into 100 words, but that’s really not enough for something like this. I’m satisfied with what I did, but it could have been better with another 100 words. Clearly, it’s a play on the chivalrous knight theme, and it borders on the horror genre, which I’ve said before is outside my comfort zone. So, why do I keep going that direction? I don’t know! I should stop before I get good at it...



LUGE

“What good are you, Hypnos?” I turn over in my bed, ignoring Zeus, which stirs his ire. “You’ll never be an Olympian,” he screams, “you lazy—”

He kicks my bed frame. Suddenly I’m sailing through the open doorway. My bed lands with a thump on the side of the mountain. And then it starts to roll. I hang on for dear life, using my body to steer the bed away from rocks, trees, animals.

It finally slows to a halt at the foot of the mountain. I’m wide awake, my heart pounding like I’ve been running. Like an athlete...

[AUTHOR NOTES]

This piece was inspired by the 2014 Winter Olympics. One evening my wife and I were watching the luge, and it occurred to me that of all the Olympic sports, this has to be the only one where the athlete is lying down for the whole event. He’s not running, or jumping, or throwing things, or skiing, or climbing—he’s just lying there. Now appearances can be deceptive, and I’m sure lugers would object, but to the untrained eye there appears to be no real physical activity involved in the luge. If you have an imagination like mine, you immediately start wondering how such an event could be considered an Olympic sport... and you come up with something like this.



MATRICULATION

Tarren watched as Dr. Schultz pulled up his data sheet.

“Straight A’s,” Schultz said, his dark eyebrows frowning.

“I tried,” Tarren said, his nerves choking the words from his mouth.

“Clearly.” Schultz rolled his eyes.

“Ah, some trouble with computers?”

“Yes,” Tarren barely said.

“Altered the grades...?”

Tarren blushed.

“Coded a virus that took down the entire network a year later?”

“I can explain...”

Schultz held up a hand.

“Then hacked into the FBI and nearly started war with Iran?”

“I—I—You see...”

But Schultz was smiling.

“I think you’ll do well here, Mr. Kaine. Welcome to Villain University.”

[AUTHOR NOTES]

Of all the “M” words in the world, why “Matriculation”? It’s not exactly a word on the tip of most tongues. I don’t remember why I chose to use this word, and it’s possible the idea of “Villain University” came first, and the word was suggested by that theme. A fun idea, I think.



NOVICE

I gave the man a benign smile from within my hood. The large cassock sleeves hid my sweaty palms. I had practiced many times; but this was for real.

We walked to the small chapel, and I ushered him inside. He knelt at the rail, and I came alongside him. I crossed myself. He glanced sideways.

“What now?”

“I have a message from Kallen,” I said, slipping my right hand into my left sleeve. Three thuds to the chest. The man fell.

I don’t know what scared me more: that it was my first hit, or that I enjoyed it.

[AUTHOR NOTES]

I decided I wanted to play on the word “novice,” using it both in the sense of a religious neophyte, but also as applied to someone doing something for the first time. Since I enjoy misdirection, it seemed natural to make you think the novice was one thing, when in fact, the truth is quite different, and quite sinister.



ONIONS

“Why?” said Andrea for the n-teenth time. I wanted to answer, but between her bouts of ugly-sobbing I didn’t stand a chance. Then, at last, after about half an hour, she stopped.

“Because he’s a guy,” I said.

“And all guys are stupid!” she replied.

“No. Guys are onions.”

Andrea rubbed her puffy eyes and stared at me.

“You think you know them,” I explained. “Then you peel a layer, and you find something new. Then you peel another layer... then another... You’ve got to peel the layers to really know a guy.”

“Yes—and I always end up crying!”

[AUTHOR NOTES]

This one was for my friends who write and enjoy Young Adult Contemporary Romance. It’s not my genre, so I’m not pretending that my dabbling is anything more than that—dabbling. They won’t get a novel out of me, but hopefully this hat-tip will do.



PAPER

I glance at the clock. Two hours to go, and I'm not even half-way done. My fingers cramp from holding this pen. I try to work through the pain, but my mind keeps wandering to a place where forms are digital, automated, and take seconds to complete...

... like in the old days... back when we had computers... before the anti-tech revolution.

It was supposed to make life purer. Less complicated. Fifty years on, and the revolutionaries are waiting on their Social Security checks.

Waiting on me finishing these forms...

.... that would have been done weeks ago with computers...

[AUTHOR NOTES]

Since computers started taking over the world people have talked about the paperless society. What if that actually happened? And what if a faction of people decided they didn't like it anymore and decided to launch a revolt against technology? This short piece suggests what might happen as a result. Balance is always a good thing, and I think digital and analog, paper and plastic, man and machine, need to learn to co-exist. They both have a place, as I point out in this little tale.



QUERY

Dear Ms. Price:

Angela was a hard-nosed literary agent with a flair for snark, and a rejection count as large as the national debt. Then she received the query she couldn't turn down. The email threatened her life if she didn't say yes, and the sender had attached the 150,000 word manuscript. There was no name at the bottom, just the signature, "I know where you live."

TWO DAYS TO LIVE tells the story of Angela's search for the writer who would try to kill her—and probably will. The 150,000 word manuscript is attached.

I know where you live.

[AUTHOR NOTES]

This is my favorite piece of the whole 2014 A-to-Z Challenge, and not just because I identify with the whole process of querying. I like the voice, the language, and the twist at the end. If this was the premise for a suspense novel, I would suggest these 100 words as the cover blurb without changing a thing.

For those outside the publishing industry, a query letter is a letter (more commonly an email) an aspiring writer sends to a prospective agent to persuade them to take them on as a client and sell their book to a publisher. At its most basic form, the query gives a brief but enticing overview of the premise, and provides the agent an idea of the word count and genre. Just as in the above. But without the death threat. Usually.



RESET

“This, my lord, is our latest experiment.”

The creature pointed a talon at a screen. It showed a man pressing a large button, disappearing, then reappearing, only to press the button again and disappear.

“Interesting, Wormwood. Explain.”

“Well, your magnificence, the subject is given a ‘Reset’ button, so he can go back and undo his mistakes.”

“Yes?”

“Of course, it’s a deception. You can’t undo time. He simply goes back, makes the same mistakes, hits the button, and is held in a perpetual loop for all eternity.”

“A self-made hell?”

“Precisely,” Wormwood grinned. “Created out of his own regret.”

“Excellent!”

[AUTHOR NOTES]

Who hasn't wanted to hit reset on their life? Anyone who's lived a few years can point to things they'd love to "do over." I don't think it's wrong to recognize past mistakes, but it's very unhealthy to live in regret. That's the message of this little piece, set in an environment familiar to any C. S. Lewis fans, I hope.



SUMMER SNOW

At first I thought it was a small petal blown by the gentle breeze. But it touched my face. And melted. More fell from the cloudless sky. Excited, I stuck out my tongue to catch the small white flakes, disbelieving the evidence of my senses.

“This is impossible!” I said. “It’s 90 degrees—there shouldn’t be snow. How can there be snow in the middle of summer?”

“You forget where you are, young lady,” said the dog, padding up beside me.

“Of course, Ricewine,” I said with a smile, and climbed back into bed. “Only two more hours until morning...”

[AUTHOR NOTES]

I’m fairly certain this was inspired by the unusually long winter we had this year. Coupled with the image of small white petals blown on the wind like snow, I couldn’t resist this piece of flash fantasy. Fun, perhaps whimsical. Someone asked why I chose “Ricewine” for the name of the dog. It came into my head and I went with it. I don’t think I’ve ever had rice wine, but given the fact one of my daughters is an Asiaphile, and likes to talk about Asian food and culture, such a term would not be far from the surface of my subconscious.



TEXT

who's there?

me

diku?

it's jed.

nw idbi

i'll prove it 2u

how? OW! my phone shockd me!

i know

u do that?

yes

jed

yes

r u ok?

idk. think so

any msgs?

yes. tell Laura

yes?

tell Laura i 4give her

u 4give her?

yes she didn't know

how u know that?

idk. I just know. iac, it didn't hurt. rly

rly? not u maybe. it hurt e1 else. 2m2h.

sbt

w/e

but don't blame Laura. she didn't know what would happen

i'll try. it's hard.

btw tell Laura

?

tell Laura

w@?

she looks beautiful in black.

[AUTHOR NOTES]

My original idea for "T" was "Tweet" and I was either going to write a piece that was both 100 words and 140 characters long (lots of short words!), or a 100 word story made up of 140 character (or fewer) Tweets. While I love a challenge, it was nearly April 1, and I really didn't have time. So I abandoned that, and went with text messaging. Still a challenge, but a bit more manageable (with the help of a text abbreviations dictionary). Maybe I'll write the "Tweet" one next year. For those who are as familiar with text abbreviations as I was before I wrote this, a translation into plain English follows.

TEXT
(Translation)

who's there?

me

do i know you?

it's jed.

no way! i don't believe it

i'll prove it to you

how? OW! my phone shocked me!

i know

you do that?

yes

jed

yes

are you ok?

i don't know. think so

any messages?

yes. tell Laura

yes?

tell Laura i forgive her

you forgive her?

yes she didn't know

how do you know that?

i don't know. I just know. in any case, it didn't hurt. really

really? not you maybe. it hurt everyone else. too much to handle.

sorry about that

whatever

but don't blame Laura. she didn't know what would happen

i'll try. it's hard.

by the way, tell Laura

?

tell Laura

what?

she looks beautiful in black.



UNICORN

Death seeped through my veins. I could feel its progress as I staggered toward the barn. I collapsed on a bail of hay, the sickness clouding my thoughts.

A blurry figure approached me, holding a vial.

“Drink! Quick!” he said pouring the contents down my throat. It was thick, sticky, and powerful. The darkness retreated. My senses cleared.

“What...?”

“Unicorn blood,” said the man. “How far away are they?”

“About ten minutes,” I said. He walked out of sight. When he returned he handed me a club.

“Have you your strength?”

I nodded.

“Then we must be ready to fight.”

[AUTHOR NOTES]

When I thought of “Unicorn,” instead of some fantasy tale, I thought it might be interesting to do a twist on the “Unicorns vs. Zombies” argument. What if, in a strange sort of justice, unicorn blood was actually the cure for zombie-ism? So by killing unicorns, zombies actually provide the means for their own demise. Not only did this give me an interesting premise, but it provided me with my “Z” story...



VIOLA

Alina nestled the instrument close to her neck. Her deep breaths slowed her pounding heart, but they did nothing for her clammy fingers struggling to grip the bow. She was a violinist; viola was her second instrument. Now she had to give the viola recital of her life. There was no room for error.

She had thirty seconds.

Alina began.

Her fingers found each note with perfect vibrato, her bow drawing out every sweet, sonorous tone.

Ten seconds to go.

She swallowed down panic.

Five... four...

Alina bowed the final note, tears in her eyes.

The disabled bomb blinked: 00:03.

[AUTHOR NOTES]

This was actually among the first stories I wrote for the challenge. The idea hit, and I decided not to wait until I got to "V" to write it. When you schedule posts ahead of time, you have that flexibility. Most viola players I know started out on the violin, and consider the viola their weaker instrument (although they tend to master it quickly—at least the ones I know did). That seemed to me like a good set-up for this tense drama. By the way, the name "Alina" was a direct steal from season 4 of "Worst Cooks in America" on The Food Network. I wanted my viola player to be Eastern European, and it so happened that the winner of that season was a girl called Alina from Latvia. In fact, I could imagine real-life Alina playing the viola player in this piece.



WISH

“I don’t care that you’re not tired. You have school tomorrow. Bed. Now!”

James dragged himself to his room, changed into pajamas, and stared out his window.

“I hate school,” he told the night.

A twinkle caught his eye. A shooting star. James squeezed his eyes shut, and smiled. Silly, perhaps, but he felt better for doing it.

It was three in the morning when his father woke him.

“What is it?” said James, yawning.

“Come see.”

They went to James’ window. A fire blazed in the distance.

“It seems a large meteor just crashed into the school.”

James gulped.

[AUTHOR NOTES]

Perhaps not what Jiminy Cricket had in mind, but the word “wish” suggested wishing on a star... and then to give it a twist, what if the star ended up making the wish come true? Be careful what you wish for!



XENOPHOBIA

After six days, we parked the ship and disembarked, glad to be on solid ground. The place we came to was full of lush vegetation. Our team walked toward the native dwellings, hoping to make contact. This intention was greatly hampered by the reluctance of the natives to meet us. Some emerged from their domiciles, but they screamed, and quickly retreated.

“Did you see them?” said Bargs.

“I did!” I replied with equal enthusiasm.

“They only have two eyes,” said Angip.

Bargs turned to me. “Do you think we can take one back home?”

“We’ll have to catch one first...”

[AUTHOR NOTES]

This could have been a story about racism, or bullying, or some other serious take on the theme of xenophobia. But I like to try to avoid the obvious, so hopefully I made a similar point, but with a different kind of stranger.



YARN

Jethro's mistress was busy with her knitting, so he pawed a ball of yarn from her basket. It fell to the floor and started to roll. His ears twitched. He gave chase.

The old lady shook her head and smiled.

Jethro loosened the end with his claws. The ball trundled along the floor, unraveling. The cat pounced; the ball shot away, long cords of yarn drifting down. He pounced again, a strange urgency in his eyes.

He may not have understood mistress's threat to cut her brother from her will. But he knew where the man hid her heart medicine...

[AUTHOR NOTES]

I thought "yarn" would be a fairly unusual "y" word to choose, though there was one other person who used it (granted, not for a flash fiction story). But what to do with "yarn"? The first image that came to mind was of a kitten playing with a ball of yarn. Cute, I'm sure, and a nice challenge to describe. But where's the twist? I mean, what can be so strange about a kitten playing with a ball of yarn? Well, I've always maintained that cats are smart...



ZOMBIE

We lost the barn door with the first one. I nearly lost my friend with the last. I was preoccupied watching these unconscious zombies return to the living. I saw grey skin turn pink, glazed eyes blaze into life. Some even smiled.

Then the last stormed through the doorway, pushing me aside. He went straight for the man with the unicorn blood. I got up in time to see the zombie over him, hands around his neck, the last vial spilled on the ground.

I had no choice.

I set aside the club, and took up an axe.

[AUTHOR NOTES]

Part two of the story started in "Unicorn" as the zombie battle draws to an end. I had originally intended that these all be stand-alone stories, but the urge to link "Unicorn" and "Zombie" was irresistible. I actually wrote this one directly after writing "Unicorn" to keep the momentum of the story going.