

ONE HUNDRED WORDS OF ASTOUNDING BEAUTY

S02E01 - Bird Chat

Featuring

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● Introduction & warm-ups

Welcome to One Hundred Words of Astounding Beauty, a flash-fiction podcast where a handful of writers each make a story with a limited wordcount in a limited time.

This is the first episode of the second season. We're didn't get any of the funding we applied for so we're not shaking anything up at all. 'More of the same,' that's the motto of every dying civilisation.

I am your host, [Tom McNally](#) and joining me tonight, introducing themselves by a short freeform warm-up prompted by a single word, are our writers:

Amelia Armande

Warm-up - 30 words or less, no title, prompt is: 'visible'

I am what is sometimes referred to as an invisible orientation. I am planning my orientational heists accordingly.

Joshua Crisp

Warm-up - 30 words or less, no title, prompt is: 'visible'

I could have seen the mushroom clouds from space. If only I hadn't pissed off Elon Musk.

Paul Davies

Warm-up - 30 words or less, no title, prompt is: 'visible'

White when it is dancing in the cold air; on the chilled pane, refracting, tiltshifting the world. But immersed in it? It is unseen, it is nowhere, it is nothing.

Claudia Treacher

Warm-up - 30 words or less, no title, prompt is: 'visible'

It was a sliding glimmer, a brief sheen in the grass. They only saw it fully when it struck.

Tom McNally

Warm-up - 30 words or less, no title, prompt is: 'visible'

The panic when you see the darkness in the bowl, a silent event horizon, and the relief when the memory rises of the sandwich from the morning. It's only beetroot.

● The rules

Listeners, now you've got the measure of us as thinking beings, we are now going to produce 100 words of Astounding Beauty for you. I will play an audio prompt, a sound you need not fully recognise, then you will have five minutes to write a first draft.

You listeners can write along with us. We will eat our own young with excitement when we receive any of your own 100 words of Astounding Beauty. Send them as text or a sound file and let us know if you'd like us to read them out or play them in the next episode.

● The prompt

[Writers, I'm about to play the prompt for your 100 words.](#)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Y9Zul3saV-VM_ZFqgeFhQ1qQWXWfYloD/view?usp=sharing

● First draft

Now you're prompted, you can explore that peculiar sound as you start writing your 100 words. Listeners, if you're writing along with us at home, pause here and time yourself for five minutes because we're going to skip ahead.

Amelia Armande

Amelia Armande first draft

Rising Tide

On reflection, it had been a bad idea to try and store rhinos in the lower decks. The shouting of the husbands bailing buckets up to their wives and children to pitch over the side became lost in the rising screams of terrified animals as the water levels rose. The dove and the crow were caged in the captain's quarters, reserved as scouts when the rains had stopped, but their cages had been knocked in the panic, the doors broken. Things were quiet as they hopped and flapped over the pooling cabin water. They reached the highest point left and squawked at the endless horizon.

Word count: 105

Amelia, your editor is: Tom McNally

Suggested edits: 105 words - more sleek

Thought onto the page

Alternate title: Noah's folly

Main suggestion is to re-order it so that the dove and the crow become the main characters. I've also streamlined things a little and cut out some words:

The dove and the crow hadn't made the decision to store rhinos in the lower decks. They'd been caged in the captain's quarters, scouts for when the rains stopped. Their cages had been broken in the panic, and now they could see that it had been a bad idea.

The heard the shouting of the husbands bailing buckets up to their wives and children, drowning out in the rising screams of terrified animals below.

The crow and the dove hopped and flapped over the pooling cabin water. They reached the highest point left and considered the endless horizon.

Word count: 98

Amelia Armande second draft

The Dove and the Crow

The dove and the crow hadn't made the decision to store rhinos in the lower decks. They'd been caged in the captain's quarters, scouts for when the rains stopped. Their cages had been broken in the panic, and now they could see that it had been a bad idea.

They heard the shouting of the husbands bailing buckets up to their wives and children, drowned out by the rising screams of terrified animals below.

The crow and dove hopped across the pooling cabin water. There were still places to perch out on deck. They squawked happily to see wide sky.

Word count: 100

Joshua Crisp

Joshua Crisp FIRST DRAFT

Electric Bicycle Birds Madman.

The bicyclometrist (←--PLEASE FIX THIS) was a genius. He knew this. He'd always known. Since the womb. Before the womb, probably. Electric cars were too silent. So called scientists had faked a droning engine buzz to alert the unwary. He'd managed the same with electric bikes, or electrocipedes, as he called them,

He'd spent years perfecting the perfect squeaky wheel. The final answer was obvious in hindsight: Birds.

He pedalled gaily. The birds that still lived, strapped to the inside and the outside of the wheels of his velocipede screeched feebly. They were broken. They had learned.

Word count: ??

Joshua Crisp your editor is: Amelia Armande

You're at 97 words.

Bicyclometrist - Sono/Aural/Tumult for sound? Rotary for wheel? You could have velocipede in here as you're using electrocipede later. Like, Doctor Velocipede is a great Robotnik type name. Clear mad scientist vibes.

The womb bit is great.

I think I'd make them his personal invention - "He'd managed the same with his electrocipedes." I don't know, maybe the sense gets lost. At your discretion.

'Perfecting the perfect' - one of those perfects has to go. I think I'd change that final velocipede to electrocipede.

Below edits not certain about, but ideas:

MAYBE you start with electric cars were too silent, and THEN go onto your mad scientist. I'd also maybe change the title, but I also kind of like it. Feels very pop art 90s loud. Depends on what you want. This feels like a jazz title, and I think it suits the piece. MAYBE more like a science report? From a lab assistant perspective?

Word count:

Joshua Crisp SECOND DRAFT

Electric Bicycle Birds Madman.

Doctor Velocipede is a genius, and sane as a bicycle. He knows this. He's always known. Since the womb. Before the womb, probably.

Electric cars are too silent. So called "scientists" have faked a droning engine buzz to alert the unwary.

He's managed the same with electric bikes, or electrocipedes, as he calls them,

He's spent years perfecting the squeaky wheel. The final answer is obvious in hindsight: Birds.

Now he pedals gaily, daily. The birds that still live, strapped to the inside and the outside of the wheels of his electrocipede screech feebly. They are broken. They have learned.

Word count: 100

Claudia Treacher

Claudia Treacher FIRST DRAFT

Space Twitcher

The asteroid aviary had been abandoned for some centuries. When it lost its funding after the financial collapse of the Intergalactic Bird Keepers Association, the keeper of Aviary 6591 and her twitcher wife resorted to pouring a murderous mix of chemicals into the central drinking pool, turned off the lights, and left on the last shuttle out.

Over the years however, the birds adapted to the mix, and the aviary membrane swelled. The concoction brewed undisturbed through the explosion of several nearby rocks, and grew taut like the belly.

Word count: 89

Claudia, your editor is: Paul Davies

*Suggested edits: Aiming for mediocrity, homespun, crafted
What is happening?*

No thought into how it is conveyed

89 words - space to expand

*There's a concept but no character, maybe too many ingredients,
reduce the conceptual load*

I like the idea -- I nearly took this tack!

*Title is on-the-nose, could do with replacing. I dunno what.
Something abstract/thematic? "Abandon"? "Womb"?*

*Between the first paragraph and the second, a short para with your
spare 11 words to confirm/stress the *expected* outcome, and mark
time? (It's all clear enough, btw.)*

*Should that last pair of words be *a* belly?*

*'Survived' or 'endured' the explosion, rather than just 'through' the
explosion?*

Claudia Treacher SECOND DRAFT

The Tautening

The asteroid aviary had been abandoned for some centuries. When it lost its funding after the financial collapse of the Intergalactic Bird Keepers Association, the keeper of Aviary 6591 and her twitcher wife resorted to pouring a murderous mix of chemicals into the central drinking pool, turned off the lights, and left on the last shuttle out.

Accordingly, the accounts were closed, and the birds registered extinct.

Over the years however, the birds adapted to the chemical mix, and the aviary membrane swelled. The concoction brewed undisturbed and survived the explosion of several nearby rocks. It tautened like a belly.

Word count: 100

Paul Davies

Paul Davies FIRST DRAFT

Working title

Tender birds, the world's birds. They inhabit the scattered inches of the city. They fit in, they integrate. They nest and visit. Around them travels the fat velocity of the traffic. This bit is forbidden; this bit, a bin. This is litter, this is, look! -- nibblable bits. Twitter, it, twitter it.

We live in it, we birds. We flit, we chatter. The twigs are thick enough, still; the ice familiar. Listen: water. Forests are in it. Rivulets.

And off we set. Soaring, above all, hush, the air, we feel it, it is ever, it is all, it is ours.

Word count: 99

Paul, your editor is: Joshua Crisp

First sentence is minor sentence, needs changing

Probably needs to be shorter - outstays welcome, too on-the-nose

Aiming for beauty. Need a title - might nick words to bung in title

Okay, so I like the first bit, AND the last bit, but they're written by different people. Perhaps too bold to fit into the same 100 words. Are we observers, or are we the birds? Pick one.

Your opening line is a bit sappy, but that's beautiful in the right light and I think you can pull it off in this piece.

Maybe a better word for integrate? I like the sentiment, but think the word isn't 'beautiful' enough. Maybe you can fix it with performance.

"Around them travels the fat velocity of the traffic" is a lovely line but too long for it's surroundings "nest and visit. / This bit is forbidden" - maybe use it as a title?

"Listen: water. Forests are in it. Rivulets." is wonderful. Bring us into the world of the birds and then send us off.

If we're going to set off, maybe give us a narrative. Maybe we're migrating. We've just had forests in water, we could feel the allure of warmer climes, or the pull of our native home. Make it a specific journey we're leaving on.

Word count: ??

Paul Davies SECOND DRAFT

Prospectors

Brittle birds, the world's birds. They inhabit the scattered inches of the city. They fit in, they interpolate. Around them hulks the fat velocity of the traffic. They nest and visit. This bit is forbidden; this bit, a bin. This is litter, this is, look! -- nibblable bits. Twitter it, twitter it.

We live in it, we birds. We flit, we chatter. The twigs are thick enough, still; the ice familiar. Listen: water. Forests are in it. Rivulets.

And off we set. Soaring, above all, hush, the air, we feel it, it is ever, it is all, it is our limit.

Word count: 100

Tom McNally

Tom McNally FIRST DRAFT

Incredibly Awks

The prophet of the awks descended through the fourth dimension. She had seen everything.

The heads of the church surrounded her as the rock cooled. They patted about in the scorch marks and chattered with as much deference as they could. She had been gone so long and they were desperate for an answer at last.

"Every last one of us,"

And of the hated Southerners, the arrogant penguins?

"They will become the beloved seabirds of the gods."

The elders rent their clothes and plunged into the depths, not to find fish but solace.

Word count: 94

Tom McNally, your editor is: Claudia Treacher

Dreadful. Title doesn't fit, Main character but undercooked

Aiming for comedy but missing, Bit of spice

It genuinely made me laugh!

I agree, take out 'incredibly' from the title because it's too on the nose and doesn't work. You could have something pared back and simpler just like 'Awks' or 'The Awks' or more descriptive like 'Report from the Fourth Dimension' or something.

Keep the penguins! I like the penguins!

You could change the vibe of the last phrase slightly to alter the outcome of the future of the story? So instead of "not to find fish but solace" (presumably because they all died in the future or became enslaved or something right?) you could have something more triumphant or hopeful or warlike or penguin-oriented along the lines of "to find fish, and glory" or

something. Which might imply they evolve into penguin beings? Or kill the penguins? Or just die in glory? I dunno.

It's a good piece! It just needs work!

Word count: ??

Tom McNally SECOND DRAFT

The Reckoning of the Awks

The prophet descended through the fourth dimension and landed on Cathedral Rock.

The bishops surrounded her. She had been gone years and they were desperate for an answer. They patted about in her scorch marks and chattered with as much respect as their anxiety allowed.

"Every last one of us will go," said the prophet.

"And of the hated Southerners, the arrogant penguins?"

"They will become the beloved seabirds of the gods," she said, and then died forever.

The bishops gouged their feathers and plunged one by one into the depths, not to find fish but to cheat the future.

Word count: 100

● Wrap up

And there we have it. We hope you've enjoyed our stories, our little paper darts against the brick wall of the universe. Joining me with their 100 words tonight has been:

Amelia Armande with *The Dove and the Crow*

Joshua Crisp with *Electric Bicycle Birds Madman*

Claudia Treacher with *The Tautening*

Paul Davies with *Prospectors*

Tom McNally with *The Reckoning of the Awks*

That was 100 Words of Astounding Beauty, which is a production of Red Button Audio and was edited by myself, Tom McNally. The theme tune is '[Music for Jellyfish](#)' and was composed by Bell Lungs, check them out on [BandCamp](#), '[bell-lungs](#)' or on [Instagram @sonicallydepicting](#).

The story music [was generated by Computoser](#).

Give us feedback by emailing 100words@redbuttonaudio.org or tweeting us on [@RedBAudio](#). Please also send us any 100 Words of Astounding Beauty you have made while listening along, and let us know if you'd like them to be included in a future episode.

Submissions for this episode were 'The Ad Brake' by [Christopher T. Dabrowski](#) (Translated by: Julia Mrazn)

And 'Kindred Shadow' by Elana Crowley.

Go quietly, go still, go forever.