

ONE HUNDRED WORDS OF ASTOUNDING BEAUTY

S02E02 - Secret Book

Featuring

	Guest	Editing	Title
1	Amelia Armande	Claudia Treacher	Telltale
2	Joshua Crisp	Tom McNally	Raising a child
3	Paul Davies	Amelia Armande	At the Office of the Second Specialist
4	Claudia Treacher	Joshua Crisp	Paper Girl
5	Tom McNally	Paul Davies	For the good of all mankind

● 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 second episode of the second season. We have seized a large gas refinery in northern Mozambique, which we have converted into a new recording studio. Pretty comfy, huh?

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: detector'

I will not let the weather deter me - neither the rain nor burning sun. This grey beach is long and treasure is to be found everywhere. Fame and immortality awaits.

Joshua Crisp

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

Inspector Gadget's italian reboot incorporated very different devices including a heresy detector, an automated bank-robber and corruption radar. Go go gadget franchise!

Paul Davies

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

Re-e-ee-ee-ee-wind. The crowd say "Bo".

Claudia Treacher

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

The signal was muffled when it arrived and the humans couldn't decide what was said. Either: "Stop! Now!" or "Spock! Crowned!" They put Leonard Nimoy on speed-dial just in case.

Tom McNally

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

The feeling of panic will make me move away from the pocket of atmosphere where levels of carbon dioxide are too high. Otherwise I don't care about carbon dioxide.

● The rules

Listeners, now that you know everything important there is to know about our guests, we are 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 shave our luscious hair in rapture 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/1jkY-fK9c3OL5NgIJ2GoZnJZGa3YlwLPc/view?usp=sharing>

● First draft

Now you're prompted, you can explore the length or breadth of that sound as you write 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

Telltale

You must understand that I am not the one that is mad here. I was made to read the short story as homework for an English essay - I did not seek it out. And look - see here how calm and balanced my prose is in the essay I wrote, despite the strange sounds that had now begun to emanate from the book as I read. It would not leave, the sound - it seeped into my bookshelf, echoing even when I had torn all the pages from the original.

Word count: 91

Amelia Armande, your editor is: Paul Davies

Yep, I got the ref before the end!

So... humour? Place it in the headmaster's office, a naughty boy or girl, perhaps at the end?

Or... lead us in to the creepy, with something more innocuous at the beginning, leaving us with the tearing of the book?

Use 'telltale' doubly, such that a classmate has told on the speaker?

Word count:

Amelia Armande second draft

Telltale

You must understand that I am not mad. I was made to read the short story for an English essay - I did not seek it out. And look - see here how calm and balanced my essay is, despite the strange sounds that had begun to emanate from the book as I read. Truly, my self control was remarkable.

It would not leave, the sound. Even when I had torn all the pages from the original it persisted, like blood in my ears. Listen! Can't you hear its evil heart still beating in its empty covers? Fine me not, gentle Librarian!

Word count: 100

Joshua Crisp

Joshua Crisp FIRST DRAFT

It's the way he was raised.

Mrs Lonsdale furtively pulled the young boy's mangled corpse into a small cupboard. The other teachers had gathered the remaining children in the car park at the front of the zoo, and were waiting for Danny's parents to arrive. It was oppressively hot in here, and salty rivers dripped trails across her glasses and onto the old book in her hands. Obscuring the runes. She chanted by the light of her old iPhone and felt the child's corpse-heart quicken. Mrs Lonsdale smiled. She could now face Danny's mum.

Word count: 88

Joshua Crisp your editor is: Claudia Treacher

Claudia's edits: The first line is so powerful! In the second line the zoo setting did throw me slightly because I was imagining a cupboard in a school, so maybe you could have some kind of more obvious "zoo" space at the beginning like a toilet cubicle or food storeroom or something? Just a suggestion though because it still works if not!

The heat and the light of the iphone really capture the scene--it's fab description. I'd either lengthen the sentence "obscuring the runes" or put it at the end of the previous sentence so it runs better?

You could put in a teeny bit of contextualising for why she could face Danny's mum now? (Did she cause the death of the boy in the first place and was resurrecting him to make up for it?)

"The way he was raised]" could be a tighter title? It's really cool piece of writing!

Word count:

Joshua Crisp SECOND DRAFT**Raising a child**

Mrs Lonsdale furtively pulled the young boy's mangled corpse into a small cupboard. The other teachers had gathered the remaining children in the car park at the front of the school, and were waiting for Danny's parents to arrive. Danny's body lay cold and heavy on her lap. It was oppressively hot in here, and salty rivers dripped trails across her glasses and onto the ancient book in her hands. She whispered the latin words by the light of her old iPhone and felt the child's corpse-heart quicken. It would be alright. This time she'd bring one back. This time.

Word count: 100

Claudia Treacher

Claudia Treacher FIRST DRAFT

Paper Girl

The paper girl was all loose sheaves. She unfurled herself for scrutinising and lay unbound on the table. Flipped and read. The anxiety was crippling. She wished only for a spine to hold everything closed. Instead of endlessly laid bare and tearing herself better.

Word count: 44

Claudia, your editor is: Amelia Armande

Amelia Armande's edits: Love this central image. It's so pretty. I think you could go in lots of different directions with it. Questions that come up: who is she unfurling for? How was the paper girl made? What wider world does she exist in - a magical one? A sci-fi one? Is she commonplace or unique? 'Tearing herself better' is an interesting phrase that I don't entirely understand. I think there's a lot of potential for a sort of Frankenstein/medical thematic overlap here. Spine aside, pages can be cut neatly, aligned, sewn or stitched together - maybe even, ironically bound with some kind of hide or skin, like a reverse Pinocchio. Probably too much to think about in 100 words, but pull what you like and have a play.

Claudia Treacher SECOND DRAFT

Paper Girl

The paper girl was all loose sheaves. She unfurled herself for scrutiny and lay unbound on the table: flipped and read. The anxiety was crippling and she wished only for a spine to hold everything closed instead of endlessly laid bare.

I find myself stitching her together without her consent, in an order she finds unbearable. I write her angst into the pages. I know it makes her uneasy, because she responds in the only way she can: crumpling parts of herself up so that they can no longer be re-written and read. She rips up her pages as self-defence.

Word count: 100

Paul Davies

Paul Davies FIRST DRAFT

Working title

We'll just check. Let's check. It's better that we know.

Okay. You'll need to sign here, here... and here, please.

Okay.

So we're going to connect this, it'll be a little cold, but not uncomfortable. We'll use a little gel.

You feel that?

Oh huh.

Are you okay?

I'm good.

Good.

Okay. Okay. Hm. So. Fibrillation. We'll wait.

Just a little more.

Not long now.

Okay.

Just relax now.

Okay, okay.

Let me just note something. We won't be long.

Okay, okay.

Won't be long.

Word count: 85

Paul, your editor is: Tom McNally

Imitating a specific style, no guidance on that - several authors

Haven't brought it round yet

85 words, needs to be less flat - more shapes

Suggestions for the end

Tom's edits:

Title suggestion: Specialist

I get it! Some tingly medical horror. Especially like the forms being being put in front of the patient.

Perhaps the simplest way to add structure would be a third person intro and outro.

Proposed intro: "A different specialist, indistinguishable from the others, swept into the room"

Proposed outro: "He left the room and was gone for some time."

If there's room, a hint of unnecessary impatience from the doctor would heighten things.

Word count:

Paul Davies SECOND DRAFT

At the Office of the Second Specialist

We'll just check. Let's check. It's better that we know.

Okay. You'll need to sign here, here... and here, please.

Okay.

And also here. You understand what you've signed, yeah?

Yeah, I understand.

Good.

So we're going to connect this, it'll be a little cold, but not uncomfortable. We'll use a little gel.

You feel that?

Uh huh.

Are you okay?

I'm good.

Good.

Okay. Okay. Hm. So.

Fibrillation. We'll wait.

Just a little more.

Not long now.

Okay.

Just relax please.

Okay, okay.

Let me just note something. We won't be long.

Okay, okay.

Won't be long.

Okay.

...So.

Word count: 100

Tom McNally

Tom McNally FIRST DRAFT

For the good of all mankind and me

She left her lab book in her study before the plane crash. She had refused to publish until she was sure it would only be put to use for the good of the world. Her servants, careless in their mourning, were lured out to the tomb with a crude explosive. Her dogs I had subtly trained to this for years.

Her study was just as she'd left it, meticulously organised, and it was hardly a moment before I had twelve crumpled pages. I used the old tunnels and slipped back to the city.

Word count: 93

Tom McNally, your editor is: Joshua Crisp

Josh's edits:

Okay, I'm really not sure what's happening here. We have a strong hook: someone's world-changing research is in a book and they're now dead. Awesome. Great start. And then she had servants, okay, that's quite limiting, helps define her, and then there's explosives and a tomb. But it's a lab-book, so the kind of egyptologist vibes don't work with that... maybe make it her 'archaeological findings'?

Make the Plane crash 'mysterious'.

Her dogs you had subtly trained to this for years? What? No. Confusing, doesn't add anything, lose it.

Is one of these characters an ancient evil? Clearly not, but then WHY not? You've got old tunnels and a tomb and a murder.

What's in the lab-book? If it's relevant, we need to be told, and the rest of the vaguery is kind of okay. If it's not relevant and you want to leave it vague, then you have to be more clear with everything else. What's their relationship? At the moment, we just don't really care about any of this, because we don't have enough to go on.

Word count: not enough.

Tom McNally SECOND DRAFT

For the good of all mankind and me

The head of department had refused to publish her formula until she could be certain it would only be put to use for the good of the world. She had never trusted me in life, but my contact among her staff had told me that she had left her lab books in her study before the unfortunate plane crash, and all its collateral damage.

Her study was just as she'd left it, meticulously organised, and it was the work of a moment before I had twelve crumpled, vital pages. I used the old tunnels and slipped back to my employers.

Word count: 100

● Wrap up

And there we have it. We hope you've enjoyed our stories this day. Joining me with their 100 words tonight has been:

Amelia Armande with *Telltale*

Joshua Crisp with *Raising a Child*

Claudia Treacher with *Paper Girl*

Paul Davies with *At the Office of the Second*

Tom McNally with *For the good of all mankind and me*

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](#). The track art [was generated by Midjourney](#).

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

'Step Up' by Dorrie Smith

'Feather and Beak' by Dec (LazyWolf)