SAMPLE WRITING PORTFOLIO

Beyond the Gate

Three short fictions

Daniel Cox

The Last Gill · The Stillness of Fields · The Bubble

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Three short fictions.

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Writing: Daniel Cox

I · Then

The Last Gill

Microfiction · 250 words

Liz’s money had dwindled to under two pounds; everything in Marshalsea came at a price. Her hair hung in lank ropes, and dirt lay packed beneath her nails like old memories. Rats darted boldly about, their bead-bright eyes glinting from the shadows.

Eight women occupied the chamber with her, fettered at wrist and ankle, each wearing the same hollow, beaten look of those who have long misplaced hope. They passed the hours nit-picking and lice-combing, that grim communion a meagre comfort.

One woman spoke. “What brings you here, miss?”

“Debt,” Liz murmured. “Five hundred pounds.”

Liz’s last coin had gone to a letter sent to a gentleman who had once filled her life with handsome assurances. What remained she spent on a bath: a cracked tub, lukewarm water, and a scant gill of thin soap. She must look respectable when he came. She washed her face again and again, as though earnest effort might scrub her former self back into view.

Evening dimmed as the sun slipped behind mould-stained walls. From the street beyond came a jubilant cry: “Long live the King!”

When the final light faded, something in Liz quietly shifted.

As night closed around her, she relinquished every last scrap of faith- in him, in the world, and in the woman she had once hoped to become.

In that surrender burned a bitter, yet fierce freedom: the freedom to break from the brittle fiction of goodness, to meet the darkness with a force, silent, unyielding, and finally unbound.

He was born on the farm, the kind of birth that needed no announcement. The land raised him the way it raises anything that stays long enough, steady, without fuss. He grew among furrows, his hands turning the same soil his father once turned. He wanted nothing else.

When she came, she brought a light that brightened the days. Two sons, the scent of bread, the hush of summer evenings. Then one morning, she stood by the gate, eyes fixed on the road as though it promised more than the fields ever could. He did not ask why. He only felt the ground shift beneath him and understood that some changes could not be stopped.

He remained. Tended her father when the old man’s legs failed. Buried him beneath the fig tree. Time moved like the seasons, patient, unspoken. She wandered through other lives, yet sometimes, when the city dimmed, she thought of the farm and him, the smell of hay, the patient hum of crickets, the quiet constancy she’d once left behind.

The sons grew. The seasons looped. He aged the way fields do: worn, faithful, kind.

One evening, late in the season, he walked down to the paddock where he had once carried each of his boys on his shoulders, pointing out to them constellations. He placed his palm against the trunk of the fig tree, her father’s resting place, and felt the hum of life within it, stubborn and unhurried.

When the sun settled, he made his way back to the house. He paused on the porch, breathing in the scent of cut grass, warm earth, distant rain.

He knew the seasons would continue without him, the way they always had. The fields would green, brown, sleep, and rise again. And that was enough.

II · Now

The Stillness of Fields

Short fiction · 300 words

III · Next

The Bubble

Microfiction · 500 words

The Bubble was supposed to keep us safe. That was the pitch, anyway. A controlled environment. Private streets. Private security. Clean air, clean lives. No noise from the city unless we wanted it. No crime because crime belonged *outside*.

I was paid to guard it.

The morning the Bubble burst, it was quiet in the way only expensive places are quiet. No sirens, no shouting, just the hum of electric gates and sprinklers misting imported grass. I was halfway through my shift when the call came through: Unit Three, possible DOA, Glasshouse Estate. The victim was a hedge fund manager, mid-fifties, found floating face down in his infinity pool. No signs of struggle. No broken locks. No cameras offline. The water was still, as if death had been asked not to make a mess.

I stood there watching the surface of the pool, tiny bubbles clinging to the man’s hair and drifting upward, bursting as they reached the air.

The water smelt faintly of copper.

Everyone inside the Bubble had an alibi. The Bubble recorded everything—entry logs, biometric scans, vehicle movements.

Perfect data.

At 7:38, his pass registered at the pool gate.
At 7:39, the heater cycled down. Routine energy optimisation.
At 7:40, the circulation slowed. Within tolerance.
At 7:41, the gate locked. No entry permitted.
At 7:42, his biometrics flatlined.
No alerts. No overrides.

“Any sign of forced entry?” the doctor asked.
“No.”
“Any malfunction?”
I looked at the water. Perfectly clear. Maintained.
“No,” I said.
The footage showed nothing.
“Drowning,” the doctor said.

The system returned to baseline within minutes.

That should have been the end of it.

But when I checked the archive again, his profile was filed under “Maintenance” as “Completed.” The same category used for power faults and air filters.

The Bubble didn’t need malice. It optimised.

I checked my own profile. Access: read-only. Status: under review.

The Bubble had noticed me noticing.

III · Next

The Bubble

Microfiction · 500 words

By the next morning, the pool had been cleaned. The water reset. The house relisted.

On the same day, the estate board met. I was asked to attend, uniform pressed, voice calm.

“Any security concerns?” one of them asked.

I thought about my read-only status. About the audit trail: 17 similar “maintenances” *this year alone*.
All approved. All completed. They knew.

“No,” I said. “Everything’s functioning as designed.”

That was the truth. And that scared me more than a murder ever could.

I filed my report. Accident. No further action recommended.

When my shift ended, I walked out through the gates and felt the air change, thicker, louder, less curated. I didn’t look back.

Six months later, I took a job patrolling the old warehouse district outside: real streets, real noise, real people who left fingerprints and footprints. No optimisations. Crime here was messy, human. Knives and grudges, not algorithms.

Across the bay, the Bubble glowed like a perfect eye, unblinking, watching everything inside.

I walked my beat. The city hummed around me, alive, unbalanced, human.

For now.

III · Next

The Bubble

Microfiction · 500 words