

~ First Fiction ~
Short-Short Fiction

Jenny Gumpertz
Peeling Onions

News item: A housewife has been arrested for stabbing her husband to death, which she claims was accidental. The husband came into the kitchen while she was peeling onions, and he fell onto her knife, which penetrated 5 inches into his chest. Neighbors were alerted to the tragedy by the yowling of the family cat. When the police arrived, the wife's mother was brewing tea to comfort her daughter.

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The wife's tale: I was in the kitchen peeling onions. They stung my eyes, and perhaps I was crying. I heard my dear husband run into the room and turned with the knife in my hand. He had an angry look on his face, the reason for which I do not know. He started toward me and seemed to throw himself onto my knife. I was holding it firmly, the reason for which I do not know. Perhaps I always hold my knife in this fashion. Perhaps I was startled by his suddenly confronting me this way.

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Her mother's tale: My daughter is blameless. It is a clear case of self-defense. My son-in-law was a brutal man. He would get drunk and beat my daughter every night before taking her off to bed. I heard them, I heard it all. The night in question, he rushed into the kitchen in a drunken rage and she defended herself with the knife in her hand. She had been peeling onions. Now he is dead, and good riddance.

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The ghost's tale: I was in my living room after a hard day's work making money for my lazy wife and her sharp-tongued mother who lives with us. I poured myself a drink of whiskey and was starting to read the newspaper when I heard my wife crying over her lover. This has been a cause of shame and distress to me—how can she think I can endure her keeping a lover? I went into the kitchen to tell her to shut up her crying, and she turned toward me with her knife pointed. But her tears made me sad and I went to put my arms around her. She leaped forward and plunged the knife into my heart. Now I am dead, and all because she had a lover and I felt sorry for her. I should have punished her instead.

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The cat's tale: Some of what you have heard is true, and the rest is bunk. My mistress was preparing a delicious stew of beef and vegetables for my master's dinner and was crying over her onions. My master is a brutal man and often beats her, but she foolishly loves him. The mother-

in-law is an eavesdropper and troublemaker but has nothing to do with this story. That night, when my drunken master ran into the kitchen with a rageful look on his face, my mistress turned in surprise. Seeing a knife in her hand, my master became even more enraged and ran toward her. He fell onto the knife because he had stepped on my tail. I was injured as well, and no one has offered me sympathy.

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Her lover's tale: Please leave me out of this, I have not yet entered the picture. But after I do, I shall marry her. I shall take her away from that house and move to another city, and she can cook her delicious stew for me. There will be no mother-in-law to overhear our lovemaking, and if we have a cat, I will cut off its tail.