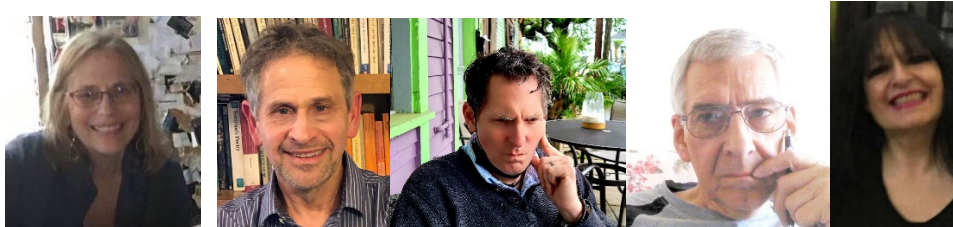


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# 10 BY 10

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**FLASH FICTION STORIES**



**NUMBER 3**

**AUGUST 2022**

**Welcome** to Issue #3 of *10By10 Flash Fiction Stories*. Ten more outstanding flash fiction writers are featured, each contributing one story to *10 By 10*.

This issue opens with Phil Temples's story about a college professor and her students. His protagonist fulfills the dream of anyone who has ever taught at the college level. Andrea Marcusa's story has a touch of the supernatural while bringing to mind the saying, "There's no place like home." New Zealander Sandra Arnold writes about what happiness is aiming to make us all think about what makes us happy. John Sheirer writes about death with a kicker ending reminding us all may it not be what it appears to be. Marie C Lecrivain tells us about something her main character cannot escape; perhaps none of us can. Laurie Rosen's story is offbeat and funny, while David Galef views school as prison, or is it the other way around? Foster Trecost has us thinking about happy hours and funerals. Dan Keeble in the UK writes a humorous story about a lady in a grocery store while Cindy Rosmus relates a different kind of funeral tale.

In *10 by 10* all stories are five hundred words or less and each carries a wallop. These stories are not only very entertaining, they make us think, laugh and maybe even cry. Each story is accompanied by the author's bio and his/her photograph'

This publication for readers of all genres is both as an introduction to the flash fiction genre, its many permutations and the writers who produce these enjoyable tales. I hope you enjoy the stories and delve further into each writer by reading their other works. These are multi-talented writers whose work is thought provoking and entertaining.

So, enter these pages and read the ten writers in 10 by 10.

Sincerely,

Zvi A. Sesling

Editor



## **Phillip Temples**

resides in Watertown, Massachusetts. He's had five mystery-thriller novels, a novella, and two short story anthologies published in addition to over 180 short stories. Phil is a member of New England Science Fiction Association, the Mystery Writers of America and the Bagel Bards. You can learn more about him at <https://temples.com>.

## **Tragic Fates**

Professor Gertrude Montgomery of Wentworth State's Communications Department struggles to grade yet another uninspiring paper from one of her students. She's only a third of the way through the stack sitting atop her desk. The title of the current paper is "An Analysis of Racially Biased Television and Media Coverage During the American Civil Rights Movement." She notes that the word "Rights" in the title is spelled "R-I-T-E-S" and shakes her head in disgust as she circles the word with a red marker. As she gets into the body of the paper, she can't help but think it resembles something a junior high school student might write.

The last half-dozen papers she's graded have been equally insipid. Gertrude wonders if today's generation of students have been "dumbed down" by constantly texting and watching YouTube videos. When she was in school—granted, a long time ago—she at least knew how to spell. Gertrude would have

been embarrassed to turn in such poor-quality work to her professors. She recalls the lengths to which she and her classmates would invent excuses, some clever, and some downright corny, in order to avoid turning in a poor or uncompleted assignment. Her college roommate, Mary, once even employed the time-tested, “the dog ate my homework” excuse in order to secure an extension. It actually worked; she showed her mangled paper—complete with teeth marks—to Old Man Edgerton in English Lit. Of course, her tears and theatrics helped to sell it.

*Even our excuses had more pizzazz!*

As she finishes grading the paper and assigning a mediocre grade, it suddenly dawns on her like a lightning bolt: she’s putting forth considerably more time and effort in critiquing these papers than the authors have in researching and writing them. This thought makes Gertrude flushed with anger.

At that moment, her dog, a handsome young Rottweiler named Mister Peabody, wanders into the room to see what his mistress is up to and to secure a good back scratch and a tasty treat.

Gertrude sees the pup but instead of treating him to a dog biscuit, she picks up the marked-up paper and waves it in front of Mister Peabody’s mouth. The young pooch *certainly* isn’t going to turn down an opportunity to play! He chomps down on the ten-page document and begins to jerk his head furiously to and fro in an effort to dislodge it from her grip. Before too long, the paper is ripped to shreds. Smiling, she grabs up another paper. And another. And another. For a solid hour she and Mister Peabody play tug-of-war with the assignments until both are exhausted.

Professor Gertrude Montgomery sleeps soundly that night. Tomorrow, she’ll come up with some clever excuse to tell the students about their papers’ tragic fates.



## **Andrea Marcusa's**

writings have appeared in *Gettysburg Review*, *Cutbank*, *River Styx*, *River Teeth*, *Citron Review*, and others. She's received recognition in a range of competitions, including *Glimmer Train*, *Raleigh Review*, *New Letters* and *Southampton Review*. For more information, visit: [andreamarcusa.com](http://andreamarcusa.com) or see her on Twitter @d\_marcusa.

### **Lost Wounds**

Once a woman awoke from a nap and found herself floating on a mattress near the shore where her house once stood. All she had left was her water-soaked handbag and the clothes on her back.

The woman was widowed, and her children had moved away long ago. She set out to look for them, in hopes of finding shelter. She boarded a train and settled into a seat by the window. When the conductor collected her ticket, he said her saw her house four stops away. "Get off at Marshaven, take Shore Road to the end."

"I'm headed that way too," said a nearby passenger with a bandaged face. Some of the gauze was discolored a yellowish-brown. Under other circumstances, the woman would have tried to help the wounded man. But today, she felt disinclined and slid closer to the window.

At Marshaven, she taxied to the water's edge. There stood her home, freshly painted yellow. Pink and white petunias lined window boxes. The blue swing set stood in the yard.

She hurried towards her house, eager to relax at her kitchen table with a cup of tea. Footsteps sounded behind her. She looked back and saw the man. His head bandage was now so soaked reddish-yellow that she had to look away.

"Your home's still on the trolley. Look." He pointed and she saw a flatbed and wheels were wedged under her house. The man opened the truck door it was hitched to. "Thieves been stealing old houses like yours during storms. Good money. Mine's still missing. Let me help you." His eyes were a startling blue and shined like stars.

The man started the motor, paused, and pointed to her calf. "You're getting Lost Wounds like me." Although she hadn't felt anything, her calf was shedding skin. "Happens when you lose things you cherish."

Each fleck she saw fall frightened her.

"Yours are still superficial. Without a home, they deepen." He pushed his bandages away exposing a red, angry sore on his cheek. "One year."

She recoiled but then stopped herself. His smile felt warm, familiar. He seemed to sense her anguish without her saying a word. She caught his glance; sunlight flooded her face. "Go inside. Reclaim your precious home."

At her front steps, her Tabby cat, Malcom, greeted her. She seized him, held him to her face.

Suddenly, the house began to roll. She looked toward the truck cab; the man's arm dangled from the window. He waved, she smiled and leaned on the arm rail to steady herself. The woman had no idea where they were headed, but she was back in her home, her pantry was full just as she'd left it, and Malcom rested in her arms, purring. Her calf would heal; it looked better already. She couldn't tell the depth of the man's wounds or how or where he'd find his way home. But this was a start.

She waved, he grinned. Maybe the hitch would hold.





## **Sandra Arnold**

is an award-winning writer who lives in New Zealand. She is the author of five books including *The Ash, the Well and the Bluebell*, Mākaro Press, NZ, and *Soul Etchings*, Retreat West Books, UK. Her short fiction has been widely published and anthologised internationally. She has received nominations for The Best Small Fictions, Best Microfictions and The Pushcart Prize. She has a PhD in Creative Writing from Central Queensland University, Australia.

### **A multiplicity of whens**

Crackling in the air. A dearth of words.

‘Wens, your perseverance is admirable. But it really is time for you to lie down and die.’

Wens walked towards the cathedral, towards a man sitting by the door gripping a bottle of meths. Something about his face. Something about his bent body. Something about his mottled blue hands.

Wens asked him what he was doing. He said he’d been released from prison and had nowhere to go. Wens helped him up and ushered him inside.

Two women in fake-fur jackets turned from their task of stacking prayer books. They blocked his entrance.

“You can’t come in,” they tsk tsked, their Chanel Number 5 overpowering the man’s stink.

The man’s bottle slid from his hands and dropped to the carpet. His fingers fluttered like frightened birds. His voice a whisper. “How dare you judge me? Only one person can judge me and that person is not you.”

The fake-furs looked at each other. They stared at the ground. Tight-lipped they stepped aside. The man picked up his bottle and clutched it to his chest.

Wens led the man to a pew at the back. His eyes roamed over the jewel-bright stained glass windows, up to the soaring ceiling, and then closed tight. They stayed closed as he whispered his story. He didn’t drink from his meths bottle for that whole hour.

When he fell silent Wens asked him to tell her about a time he was happy.

He took a deep breath in and a slow juddering breath out. “When I worked on a fishing boat. When I heard the cries of whales. When the sea was dark as ink. When an albatross glided over the boat. When I saw the sun rising over the rim of the earth.”





## **John Sheirer**

lives in Western Massachusetts and is in his 30th year of teaching at Asnuntuck Community College in Enfield, Connecticut, USA. His latest book, *Stumbling Through Adulthood: Linked Stories*, has been honored by the National Indie Excellence Awards, Firebird Book Awards, Pinnacle Book Achievement Awards, Literary Titan Book Awards, Outstanding Creator Awards, and New England Book Festival Awards. Find him at [JohnSheirer.com](http://JohnSheirer.com).

## **Wrong**

Sarah parked a block away and walked to the memorial for the cyclist killed last month. Artificial flowers wove through the spokes and laminated photographs of the deceased dangled from the handlebars. Middle-aged, wife and kids, an electrician who worked the lights for high school football games. The newspaper said everyone loved him. The police still had no leads.

After an appropriate time, Sarah returned to her car, pondering the memorial bicycle's blue frame. It was too light, she knew. Before she drove away, she licked her thumb and wiped one last smudge of darker blue from her front bumper.



## Marie C Lecrivain

is a poet, author, and curator of *Dashboard Horus*, a travel-themed online zine for art and poetry. Her work has appeared in *Chiron Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Nonbinary Review*, *Orbis*, *Pirene's Fountain*, and other journals. She's the editor of *Ashes to Stardust: A David Bowie Tribute Anthology* (forthcoming, © 2022 Sybaritic Press, [www.sybpress.com](http://www.sybpress.com)).

### Orly

We step into the cathedral, late afternoon, when it's almost too quiet, even as a couple of acolytes prepare for an evening mass. The scent of beeswax and frankincense, along with the acoustics, force a veil of deference onto us as we begin to walk with measured steps, glad, for once, to be wearing trainers instead of clunky boots. I, a first time tourist, with my camera in hand, don't know where to begin.

By unspoken agreement, we separate, and begin to walk opposite sides of the cathedral perimeter; him to the right, me to the left, surrounded by alcoves that showcase centuries of mavericks and misunderstood, their personal histories whitewashed into sainthood. This isn't unusual; the city's inhabitants have distilled their love of the macabre into a year-round tourist draw. I snap a few photos for the folks back home, and to ensure my memory of this place remains intact for the next couple of decades, in case I find myself trapped in nostalgia.

When I reach the back of the cathedral, I find what I've been looking for: the Mother of Night, high on a pedestal, surrounded by long rows of lit votive candles that throw shadows across her pale face. She looks mildly irritated, and for a moment, I feel a spark of sympathy for her, trapped for centuries, the victim of desperate hopes and prayers piled, nailed, like her son, in place with a moral code that squeezes a few more coins from the faithful.

I'm about ready to move on, when a ray from the setting sun flashes through a stained glass window. The Mother's gaze, beatific, holds my own, and for a moment, I'm dazzled. Before I know it, I find myself, taper in hand, votive in another, and three euros poorer. I chuckle. The Magic still works. After all this time; I, who wear my excommunication as a badge of honor, have been convinced to contribute, once again, to the scam.

I gently blow out the candle, and when it cools, I stick it in my purse. I'll keep it on my altar at home, a reminder that I'll never totally escape the search for a moment of rapture, inspired by a yearning to be part of something larger than myself, the egocentric certainty that I matter, but only to myself. It's *that* truth that gives me strength to continue as an outlier in this indifferent universe.



## **Laurie Rosen**

Is a lifelong New Englander. Her poetry has appeared in *Muddy River Poetry Review*; *Oddball Magazine*; *Zig-Zag Lit Mag*; *Peregrine*; *New Verse News*; *Gyroscope Review* and elsewhere.

### **The Hitchhiker**

As I drove out of town I sighted the hitchhiker, a brown bear, paw casually stuck out into traffic, a quizzical look on her face. I swung my red Mustang convertible into the breakdown lane, thought for a moment or two, turned the car around and went back for her. It was one of those warm days in February, a misplaced day that one would expect in April or May. The bear, groggy and scrawny, tilted her head, unsure whether she could trust me or not. I nudged her to join me and well, she reeked desperation.

I heard she got herself into a mess, clawing at bird feeders, knocking over compost bins, ripping apart garbage pails, flinging herself against the cafe's screen door. Neighbors demanded she leave, to journey somewhere south where the berries and buds might have begun to grow.

I guessed she heard about my woes, too. Though mismatched we might still be good for each other, we were traveling in the same direction

and I carried along a pouch full of trail mix I was happy to share.

Neither of us spoke of the mayhem we left behind, we understood we were victims of differing catastrophes, but catastrophes nonetheless. Off we went, spasmodically at first—new at manual driving,

I hastily surrendered the clutch, pestled the gears, finally soaring away from that place. The narrow road wound through canyon, hairpin turns and steep cliffs, my new friend smashing up against the door with every curve. She grit her teeth, I pushed harder on the gas pedal, eager to escape.

We began to hum along to the radio, a catchy song, it mattered little that neither of us knew the words or even spoke the same language.

We relaxed—that bear lacked all judgment and boy, she carried a tune!

The music and noon sun melted any facade between us. Hesitantly, we shared our stories. Somehow we understood one another. The bear expressed her frustration at being maligned—the enemy, in fairy tales and war stories, the aggressor—a metaphor for the worst of humankind.

Couldn't they see her bearyness? She let out a growl, a large tear fell down her fuzzy face. She was fighting for survival—something I recognized in myself too, during those despondent days.

From that moment on I vowed to do my part, plant some trees and call the despots what they are: Not bears but slimy, evil snakes.

One day, long after the bear and I went our separate ways, I craved the road again and silently slunk out of town, this time in my fully charged electric jeep.

There on the side of the highway, I spied a glistening, green spotted rattler, erect in a woven willow basket. Her forked tongue hung out the side of her mouth—pointing in the direction I too, yearned to go.





## David Galef

has published extremely short fiction in the collections *Laugh Track* and *My Date with Neanderthal Woman* (Dzanc Short Story Collection Prize), extremely long fiction in the novels *Flesh*, *Turning Japanese*, and *How to Cope with Suburban Stress* (Kirkus Best Books of 2006), and a lot in between. His latest is *Brevity: A Flash Fiction Handbook*, from Columbia University Press. Day job: professor of English and creative writing program director at Montclair State University. He's also the editor in chief at *Vestal Review*.

### Correction

“Is this your first time doing this?”

“D’I look as if I come here often?”

“Noted. I assume you know what you’re in for?”

“Yeah, I’ve been a bad boy. I need a spanking!”

“Not exactly.”

“Whaddya mean by that?”

“You need correction.”

“Great. I’m gonna lay down here....”

“It’s *lie*, not *lay*.”

“What is?”

“A lot of people confuse *lie* with *lay*. You *lie* down. You *lay* a book on the table.”

“What’re you inferring?”

“No. You mean *implying*. Not inferring. You really *do* need correction!”

“Look, what I came for is some S&M. Humiliation. Isn’t this Lady M’s House of Correction?”

“You don’t find this humiliating? I can certainly do more. Well?”

“That would be a yes.”

“*Is* a yes. Not ‘would be.’ Don’t use the false conditional.”

“Stop! This isn’t what I came for.”

“Too bad. It’s what you’re going to get. You want to be used? I’m an expert in usage.”

“But your not—”

“Wrong. It’s ‘you’re’: *y-o-u-apostrophe-r-e*, not ‘your’: *y-o-u-r*.”

“*Huh? How can you even hear the difference between ‘your’ and—and the other one?*”

“I have a good ear.”

“That’s it. I’m gonna grab my coat and walk out of the door.”

“Walk *out* the door. You’re not inside the door.”

“Hah. Okay, *that* makes sense. Never thought of that.”

“Most people never think. And how they use their native tongue leaves something to be desired.”

“Speaking of tongues and desires....”

“No. A little cooperation, please!”

“You mean get my ass together.”

“Act.”

“What?”

“Get your act together. Get your ass in gear. The metaphor’s off.”

“Jesus. Whatcha do all day, correct people?”

“I’m paid for it. I provide a service. People need me.”

“Yeah, well, I’m not sure that’s what I want.”

“You have no idea how many men say that.”

“Well, how about some real action?”

“Do you have any more money?”

“Not on me.”

“Then you have half an hour left. Make the most of it.”

“And start this business all over again? Uh-uh.”

“‘Start again’ or ‘start over,’ but not both. Now turn around. Put on this blindfold.”

“That’s more like it. What’re we gonna do?”

“You’ve been a bad boy. Lie—*lie*, not *lay*—face-up on the bed.”

“But—*ow!* Why’d you hit me on the head?”

“Do as you’re told. Your brain is the part that needs discipline.”



“C’mon, really? *Hey*—that really hurt! What was that, a book?”

“Good guess. It’s *Warriner’s English Grammar and Composition*.”

“This isn’t the kind of humiliation I wanted.”

“This handbook’s for seventh-graders. How much shame can you handle?”

“Not that! *Ow!*”

“Say, ‘Yes, ma’am.’ Or I’ll have to give you detention. Do you hear me?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Good. We’ll start with common diction errors.”



## **Foster Trecoast**

writes stories that are mostly made up. They tend to follow his attention span: sometimes short, sometimes very short. Recent work appears in *Potato Soup Journal*, *Right Hand Pointing*, and *BigCityLit*. He lives near New Orleans with his wife and dog.

### **Free Champagne at the Five O'clock Happy Hour**

Seems like we were in the car more than anywhere else – a few days driving followed by a few days driving back. So it went with family vacations, the minutes crept by just like the miles. My dad chose the hotels and he always chose the cheapest, but when a marquis advertised free champagne at the five o'clock happy hour, the less expensive hotel next door somehow seemed too cheap. We checked in at four forty-five, fifteen minutes to spare. He disappeared into the bathroom and emerged as someone we barely recognized. He had slicked back his hair and it looked stiff, like it might crumble if he ran his hands through it. He'd shaved so fast, red nicks dotted his neck.

A few others had gathered in the lobby, but not many. He grasped his glass as though his hand was accustomed to the shape and took tiny sips, not because he thought he was supposed to, but because he wanted it to last. A goofy grin settled across his mouth and he mingled with the others, toasting them like privileged members of an elite club. We watched from a corner, often unsure who we were watching.

I knew his glass was empty when he tipped it upside down and tapped the bottom. He shrugged his shoulders and tilted his head in an oh-well sort of way. One glass per guest, no refills. His music had stopped, but it didn't go gently; the needle scratched across the grooves telling him it was time to go. He set the glass on a table and walked right past us. During dinner he smiled in an unfamiliar way, just a hint, but I could see it and I'd never seen it before. The next day it was gone. We crammed in the car, and so were we.

Years later I told this story to a group of men, each holding a glass of champagne. Free champagne. I said my father would've wanted it this way and to enjoy because life doesn't give refills and neither did I. They seemed to understand and tipped their glass toward the casket. I thought more about that happy hour and wondered if it was the happiest hour he'd ever known.



## **Dan Keeble**

hails from the furthest point East in the UK, and has enjoyed many successes with online and print publications of poetry, short stories, humour, and more serious articles

### **Salad Days**

Mary shuffled along the aisle of the store, wearing a heavy worsted coat. Her bowed head exaggerated her stoop. *Nobody gives old folk a second look.* Today she was wrong.

She examined an iceberg lettuce, and turned her head towards the till. The assistant was looking away. With a swift hand, she scooped the lettuce into an inside pocket of her coat. Part of her lunch had been taken care of.

Unfortunately, the assistant was viewing the CCTV monitor. She was caught on camera, and the facial recognition software had captured her glance.

Mary strolled nonchalantly along the other aisles. Finishing a deceptive browse, she ambled towards the door, gazing downward. At the exit her eyes fell onto a pair of shoes, barring her way.

‘Er, no you don’t, Mary,’ their owner said.

Mary tilted her head slightly.

‘Please move aside young man, she said. ‘I’ve got to go home to my husband.’

The shop assistant stood his ground.

‘Lettuces are not free, and you know you are barred, Mary.’

Mary saw from a name-tag that she was being challenged by Ralph.

‘Is this how you treat an old lady?’

Ralph sighed.

‘But you have been seen taking goods before without paying, Mary. You can’t keep doing it.’

‘That’s not fair to say I deliberately steal. I get confused. You see how mixed up things are when you are 89, son. Don’t you have a grandmother?’

Ralph sighed again.

‘Look, I don’t make the rules. If I let you off again, I’ll lose my job. Why do you take things without paying, Mary? Don’t you get enough money? There’s people who can help you if you are struggling.’

Mary knitted her brow.

‘I don’t need charity. I just need is a bit of kindness and understanding.’

‘I’m supposed to call the cops.’

Mary dabbed her eyes.

‘Oh no, son, please don’t do that. Would you send your grandmother to prison?’

A young woman shopper overheard the conversation. She stepped forward and glared at Ralph.

‘Aren’t you ashamed of yourself, threatening a struggling elderly lady?’ With that she slapped a bill down on the counter. ‘Take the price of your miserable lettuce out of that.’

Mary’s eyes moistened. She took the woman’s hand and kissed it without saying a word. The young woman smiled, and choked on her words.

‘You take care my love.’

Ralph shook his head, and opened the door for Mary.

‘Thank you, both,’ Mary whimpered.

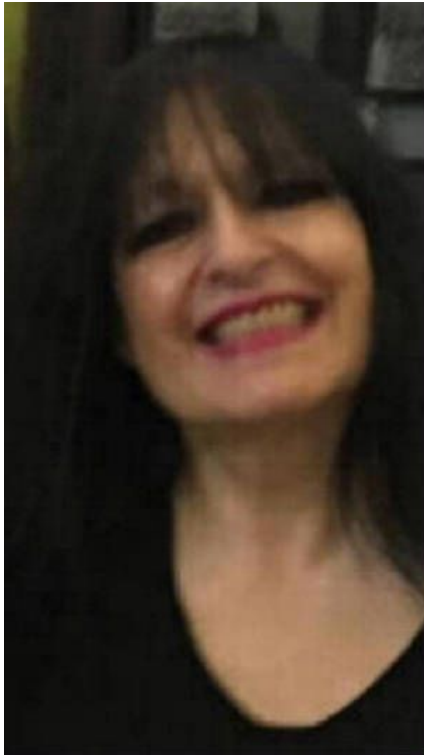
Around the corner a black limousine was parked. The capped chauffeur opened the door, and Mary settled herself into the plush interior.

‘Where to now ma’am?’

‘The Mini-Mart. I fancy some vine tomatoes and spring onions to treat myself to a salad. I may not be able to shin up the hotel drainpipes any more for their jewels, George, but I don’t want the bastards to think that Mary Crane has lost her touch.’

‘Too right, ma’am.’

‘Well,’ Mary laughed, ‘A girl has to have a hobby.’



Cindy Rosmus

is a Jersey girl who looks like a Mob Wife and talks like Anybodys from West Side Story. Her noir/horror/bizarro stories have been published in the coolest places, such as *Shotgun Honey*, *Megazine*, *Dark Dossier*, *The Rye Whiskey Review*, *The Raw Art Review*, *Under the Bleachers*, and *Rock and a Hard Place*. She is the editor/art director of *Yellow Mama* and the art director of *Black Petals*. She has published seven collections of short stories. The latest, *Backwards: Growing Up Catholic, and Weird*, in the 60s, is available now on Amazon. She's also a Gemini, a Christian, and an animal rights advocate.

### **Knew You'd Want To Know**

Why?

Why'd you have to tell me? What good could it do?

Services were last week. Wake, funeral. Cremation at that fancy place off the turnpike, where geese ruled the lawn. Remember? My dad had passed, and we were outside, smoking. "The geese," I said, after a long drag on a Marlboro, "make me feel peaceful." "Damn geese," the caretaker said. "Crapping all over. Can't you smell it?"

All I smelled was death.

Why?

It was just like you. Typical. “Knew you’d want to know,” should be scrawled on your face. Like I’d wanted to know he’d been with that other chick. That the night he’d dumped me, his profile pic changed to them making out at the bar.

Knew you’d want to know ...

That chick was one of many.

If I could’ve made the wake, maybe. That stench of formaldehyde you smelled over overpriced bouquets from the phonies. Ten minutes I would’ve stayed, before sneaking out the back door.

But it was too late for the wake.

Weeks ago, he was out on the stoop, drinking a beer. Made like he didn’t see me. Wearing jeans with holes. Bony and white, his knees were, like cue balls.

Now, thanks to you, I picture him dead. Instead of holes in the knees, the back of his dress pants is missing.

Like the back of his head.

Knew you’d want to know.

Really? How he was ambushed—I mean, caught off-guard—looking down at his phone. So absorbed in texts from that selfish, controlling chick that ...

It was as easy to shoot him—point blank—as to reach up and sneak a kiss.

He had the softest lips, and the hardest ...

But you already know that. ‘Cos you did him last. When the killer snuck up on him, he reeked of sex, and you. That perfume, or body wash you love. Smells like overpriced bouquets to you, but formaldehyde to me.

You’d always wanted him, yourself.

What do you want to know? How both arms shook from the weight of that gun? How the killer was splattered with blood, and chunks of brain?

How the killer knows where you’re hiding?

Knew you’d want to know ...

I already do.



