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# 10 BY 10

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FLASH FICTION STORIES



NUMBER 2

## Introduction

**Welcome** to Issue #2 of *10By10 Flash Fiction Stories* featuring ten more outstanding flash fiction writers, each contributing one story to *10 By 10*.

The writers Rob Dinsmoor, Gloria Mindock, Gay Degani, Jacqueline Doyle, Riham Adly, Michael Minassian, Kathryn Kulpa, Brad Rose, Nina Rubinstein Alonso and Austin Alexis are all accomplished and well published in the flash/micro fiction genre.

In *10By10* all stories are five hundred words or less. But do not let brevity catch you off guard. These stories are packed with deeper meanings for the reader to discover. Each author's story is accompanied by his/her photograph and self-written bio.

I am pleased to report that the first issue was a great success and authors from around the world are submitting. In this issue we have Riham Adly who lives in Egypt and writers from several states. I have also received submissions for future issues from a number of countries in Europe, Asia and South America. I always try to select multi-talented writers whose work is thought provoking and entertaining. When you read these stories, I am sure you will agree.

So, enter these pages and enjoy the ten writers in *10By10*.

Sincerely,

Zvi A. Sesling, Editor



Zvi A. Sesling, Brookline, MA Poet Laureate (2017-2020), has published numerous poems and flash fiction. He edits *Muddy River Poetry Review* and *10 By 10 Flash Fiction Stories*. Sesling has won international and national poetry prizes He is a five-time Pushcart Prize nominee. He lives in Brookline, MA with his wife Susan J. Dechter.



## **Rob Dinsmoor**

has written dozens of scripts for Nickelodeon and MTV, published dozens of stories in literary magazines, some of them nominated for Pushcart Prizes, and is the author of several book-length memoirs. His latest short story collection, *You'll Never See It Coming*, was published by Big Table Publishing in 2022. He lives on the North Shore of Massachusetts with his dog Jack, a fellow native of Indiana."

### **Symphony 451**

Johann was horrified that, after more than 10M "hits," his symphony had been purged from the National Playlist. What had he done wrong? At 23 notes, his Symphony 451 had fallen well within the 50-note maximum specified by the Playlist. (The Playlist Conductor believed that most listeners couldn't follow music with more notes than this.)

Johann kept sending e-mails to the Conductor until he finally got a response. "Your content violates the 'nonmanipulations' rule," the Conductor replied. "Manipulative" content referred to music that thrust the listener into intense emotional states, such as sadness, triumph, fear, or ecstasy.

"I composed this symphony with absolutely no thought or emotion in my head," Johann replied. "I painstakingly assembled my symphony in such a way that the notes were completely random, unrelated, and unremarkable."

"Nonetheless, one of our Beta Listeners, who had suffered emotional trauma in her youth, claims that a sequence of six notes in your symphony caused her to feel intense sadness," the Conductor responded. "We cannot risk another such incident from your symphony."

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to Johann or the Conductor, the Beta Listener had recorded the symphony and now played the 23 notes over and over, crying until no more tears were left.



## **Gloria Mindock**

is editor of Cervena Barva Press, author of 6 books of poetry, her most recent, *ASH* (Glass Lyre Press), won 5 book awards. Gloria has been translated and published into eleven languages. Her work recently was published in *Gargoyle*, *The James Dickey Review*, *Setu-Western Voices*, and *Ibbetson Street*. In 2017 and 2018, she was poet laureate in Somerville, MA.

### **Chicken in a Blue Pleated Skirt**

In 4<sup>th</sup> grade, I had a navy-blue pleated skirt. I wore it in high school. It still fit. When I threw it out, it was still in perfect condition. Now, many things push my body to flatness. It is difficult to squeeze into life. Rain, storms, hit my skin until lightning bursts out of me. I feel half brilliant and half on a current taking me somewhere. Balancing, my mouth calls out to the hunters. This is the way it will always be, even in death, me smashed by the void, continuously making loud chicken noises from my red lips.



## Gay Degani

has received nominations and honors for her work including Pushcart consideration, Best of the Net, and Best Small Fictions. Her flash and short-story work has appeared online, in print, and in anthologies. She has published a small collection, *Pomegranate*, a full-length collection, *Rattle of Want*, (Pure Slush Press, 2015) and a suspense novel, *What Came Before* (Truth Serum Press, 2016). She occasionally blogs at Words in Place.

### Kitchen Love

Dark wood cabinets, harvest gold fridge, a plethora of stained glass. This morning, the radio plays Ronstadt, Creedence, Blood, Sweat, and Tears. When we moved here, we hung a *pothos* plant in the breakfast nook. Now its long green cords drape fat cordiform leaves along the curtain rod. We smoke a joint while you flip pancakes and I wash dishes, shaking off last night's yelling match.

I steal glances over my shoulder. I see you at the stove, shirtless in board shorts, your surf-hard muscles, your knobby knees, but you don't see me. Your hair is longer than mine, your face hidden, intent on your usual Saturday morning cheffing.

My mother's kitchen never saw a man at the sink washing, at the stove flipping, only finding him there to grab some snack, to fill a glass with water, to accuse her of some major slight, some minor sin. We are different, aren't we? From them. Our parents? Or at least, that's what I thought. Why is this doubt pulling

at me? This fear that you will leave. But I do know. My father says you and me, we live in sin. There's nothing to bind us, to keep us together when things go to shit.

My father kept me up all night, the night I told him we'd moved in together. I sat rigid on the sofa while he paced up-and-down his living room, long after he sent my mother to bed. I had never defied him before but then just after dawn, I told him he was wrong. His face reddened. My heart stopped. I swallowed but met his eye. He snarled the words, "He will break your heart" as he stomped off to bed.

Now I turn as you turn from the stove with pancakes heaped on a plate, their soft, sweet aroma teasing my nose. You grin, roll your eyes. I beam back. Yes, you might leave. But then again, you might not.



## **Jaqueline Doyle**

is the author of the award-winning flash chapbook *The Missing Girl* (Black Lawrence Press). Her flash has appeared in *Wigleaf*, *matchbook*, *New Flash Fiction Review*, *Ghost Parachute*, *Post Road*, and elsewhere. In addition to numerous Pushcart nominations and other honors, she won first place in *Sunlight Press*'s flash essay contest and in *Midway Journal*'s "Under 1000" contest. Find her online at [www.jacquelinedoyle.com](http://www.jacquelinedoyle.com) and on twitter @doylejacq.

### **Disappearing Act**

The Magician's Assistant has a few tricks up her sleeve. She's been practicing sleight of hand with coins and a deck of cards, reading back copies of *Vanish Magazine* and a biography of Houdini. Not exactly a household name, her magician bills himself as Mondo the Magnificent. She isn't billed at all, not even as the Magician's Assistant, though she's featured in the posters, wearing a fitted tuxedo jacket and pleated white shirt with very short shorts and very high heels, looking cute and leggy and impressed with the magician, standing to the side as he whirls his cape at the center of the stage. In reality, he isn't all that impressive, trotting out the same old tricks every night in the same old-fashioned black tie costume he's been wearing for twenty years. He hasn't paid her for three weeks now, and it's hard to blame him when she knows he's living on a pittance himself.

The Magician's Assistant can feel the audience's inattention as Mondo lowers the lid on the raised coffin-shaped box and prepares to saw her in half. Yawn. Half of them are looking at their cell phones instead of the act. And their boredom when he pulls a rabbit out of a hat and then hands it to her to take off

stage. Why not blackbirds, or a boa constrictor, something different? Or how about sawing a man in half for a change? Maybe she could master a new version of Houdini's underwater handcuff escape. A mermaid in ropes? The Magician's Assistant holds her breath in the bathtub every night. She's sure she can do better than Mondo. At least when she looks in the steamed-up bathroom mirror she's sure. She still gets nervous on stage when she has to say something. But she's improving.

Mondo rescued her, really. "You're a loser," her father sneered when she dropped out of community college. "Don't think you're getting a penny out of me. Get a job at McDonald's." She doesn't want any money from her dad, who falls asleep in his La-Z-Boy every night, TV blaring, surrounded by crumpled Budweiser cans. She doesn't want to work in fast food, or retail, or for some dumb boss in an office either. She wants to travel. Be somebody. At least Mondo bucks her up, sees her potential. He's taught her everything he knows. Sure, it's all make-believe, but when they pull off a trick, and someone in the crowd goes "aaaaah," it's magic.

Mondo says she can take over some day, but he doesn't seem in any hurry to step down. She's been trying out cheesy names: Sarah the Spectacular, Maya the Marvelous, Frida the Fabulous. She needs to find a good agent, someone with international bookings. Walk out on Mondo, a nice guy who's hopelessly out of date and needs to retire. Once she gets a little money in the bank, a little more confidence, some new tricks, a new name, she'll disappear for real. Presto! The Magic Wanda!



## **Riham Adly**

is a flash fiction writer from Giza, Egypt. She is a Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee. In 2013 Riham won the Makan award and In 2020 her flash made it into the Best of the Net anthology. In 2022 she won second prize in the Strands International Flash Fiction Competition. Her fiction has appeared in over 50 online journals. Riham 's collection *Love is Make-Believe* was released in Nov 2021 by Clarendon House Publications. She is the first African, Arab woman to have a flash fiction collection published in English.

### **Her Wet Matches**

He's not here when she rings the bell, and because it's raining I let her startled face and burning eyes in. She holds her box of matches like a gun. Her breath gets shallower as she tries and tries to light one. She takes some time before she looks up, her swallowed thoughts like her tears, still running. I foresee all that swirls in that wet and pretty head of hers—or so I believe.

To make sure, she lets me hold her gaze for what seems like forever, and in that forever I see his trembling lips in the loosening of her mouth, the cries and kisses and coming he and I share in the hysteria she tries to control.

It is not surprising when she touches my face, and it is in those accented black eyes of hers that I see the puzzling, raw vulnerability of his face. My hands are cold and moist and I want to run fingertips along her lips. She looks tired and the veins on her temple swell from all the senseless-sobbing and it's

just like on those occasions when I'm overflowing with emotions that bring him rushing to my arms, crying like the child we all are.

Her feelings are actions he tries to subvert, instincts I try to free, layer upon layer. He wants to be soothed and lulled, and she? What does she want? Faithfulness? Perfection? He is her husband still, she wants to say, but she sighs and I see in her face a beauty that drowns, suffocates the need for his separation, his liberation.

I wonder when our collective love will be finished, when jealousy is no longer an obstacle, when our role in each other's lives no longer preoccupies us.

She hesitates before she walks in after me, her disproportionate pride and insatiable need for affection a shadow, a resistance: ashes of darkness under her skin. She sits beside me, timid yet otherworldly. I'd like to peel off her anxiety, calm her need to hurt me, and open her up from the inside to scrub away the dullness and peace she desperately tries to light with her wet matches.



## Michael Minassian

is a poet and short story writer. He is also a Contributing Editor for Verse-Virtual. His poetry collections *Time is Not a River*, *Morning Calm*, and *A Matter of Timing* are all available on Amazon. A new chapbook, *Jack Pays a Visit*, was released in 2022. For more information: <https://michaelminassian.com>

## The Wolfman and Marilyn Monroe

*Dyin 's as natural as livin'*  
—Clark Gable in *The Misfits*

Jake Forester, a widower, was bitten by a wolf under a full moon. Ever since, at least once a month, Jake, a victim of lycanthropy, was transformed, terrorizing the neighboring area, attacking sheep, cattle, coyotes, and stray dogs. When not under the influence of the full moon, he owned and operated a small gas station and café halfway between Reno and Pyramid Lake.

One night, a few miles away, production on the film *The Misfits* was wrapping up. All seemed quiet along Pyramid Lake. The stage hands and lighting crew had left the soundstage. A few actors wandered outside to look at the night sky. John Huston and his DP went back to the hotel. For a brief moment, Marilyn was alone, having a last cocktail before the limo arrived to take her and Clark Gable to the city.

Moonlight spilled into the set through an open doorway, and a shadowy figure entered. The moon was full, and from deep in the desert the wolfman appeared, drawn by hunger and lust. He took one look at Marilyn and fell in love, tearing off his shirt to reveal a chest covered in matted fur and blood. Marilyn had no idea about this creature—to her, he was just another extra who wandered onto the set, maybe half a circus act, or one of the caterers.

Meanwhile, the wolfman's fangs and claws grew longer; his wolf-like erection rivaled the Eiffel Tower. Before he could leap onto Marilyn's silky-smooth neck, Clark Gable came through the door and kicked him in his wolf-rump.

Marilyn sighed and laughed: *Thanks, Clark, come over here and let me rub your ears for good luck.* The wolfman howled in pain and limped back to the desert—Gable felt a twinge in his chest and had a heart attack two days later—within ten days, he was dead.

The next morning, Jake, no longer under the influence of the full moon, re-named his business: Jake & Marilyn's Café. Over the next four weeks, he re-modeled the interior, putting in new tables and chairs, a marble counter, and movie posters of some of Marilyn Monroe's films: *Some Like It Hot*, *Seven Year Itch*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, *Bus Stop*, *Niagara*, and, of course, *The Misfits*.

Jake always remembered the night he fell in love. Devastated when he learned of Marilyn's death within a year after the film's release, Jake disappeared one night under the full moon. Some say you can hear him weeping still on the wind-swept road along the ruins of the café, and once a month, hear him howl all night long.



## **Kathryn Kulpa**

is a writer, editor, and librarian with work in *Atticus Review*, *Monkeybicycle*, *No Contact*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Smokelong Quarterly*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, and *Wigleaf*. Her stories have been included in *Best Microfiction* and nominated for *Best Small Fictions*. She was born in a small state, and she writes short stories.

### **Castaways**

Every morning we gather on the sandy shore and pledge allegiance to the plane.

From wing to shining wing! We sing.

Morning stretch, morning fire, morning chores, and so on until last meal and night stories and first sleep, or first watch, depending on the rotation.

People's lives didn't go so well when they had long days and nothing useful to fill them with, Grandpa says. They made a mess of things out there.

"Out there" is where we came from. Not all of us. Grandpa and Grandma and Dad and Mama-may-she-rest-in-peace. We were born on the island, Wilson and Robinson and Ginger and me. We only know the stories, wars and diseases, fires and people dying. How we got away just in time.

The plane was broken—that's how we ended up here—but it's fixed now. Every week we check the plane, turn on the engine, watch the propellor spin. We don't have fuel. Maybe enough to get us to the next island, but we could swim there, and there's nothing we don't have here, except some very grumpy pigs. Someday we'll have new fuel, Grandpa says. The Professor here will invent it out of taro peel and coconut oil. He's clever like that. It's why we took him along.

Then he claps Dad on the shoulders and laughs, but I'm not sure what's funny. Sometimes at night after the grownups tell their stories we make up our own. We look at the sky and tell stories about the star people, who ride flying horses and swim in moon pools. I like to think Mama-may-she-rest-in-peace is one of them, but I don't say that. I'm the oldest; I remember her best. She's already half a story to most of them.

One night we see a bright star circling, moving fast. A falling star, Dad calls it. But I've never seen a star move like that.

Wilson and I are pulling weeds in the garden when we see the plane, bigger than ours and shiny. We jump up and down, like if we got close enough we could pull it down to us. Grandpa says we should hide. There could still be bad people out there. The plane goes away.

That night Grandpa's stories are the scary ones, about the woman who turned to salt because she looked back, about a flood that covered the earth, and the man who built a boat to save his family.

The next morning the plane comes back. Grandpa tells Grandma to take us into the caves, but we can still hear the crack, like the time a pig charged me and Grandpa shot it. We can hear the explosion. Smell the fire.

By the time Dad lets us come out, the plane is black hunks of metal floating on the waves.

They could have saved us, I say.

Someday you'll know how much I love you, Grandpa says, and I'm not even sure which part of that I don't believe.



## Brad Rose

was born and raised in Los Angeles, and lives in Boston. He is the author of three collections of poetry and flash fiction, [\*Pink X-Ray\*](#), [\*de/tonations\*](#), and [\*Momentary Turbulence\*](#). Two new books of prose poems, *WordinEdgeWise* and *No. Wait. I Can Explain.*, are forthcoming, in 2022. Six times nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and three times nominated for the *Best of the Net Anthology*, Brad's poetry and fiction have appeared in, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *New York Quarterly*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Clockhouse*, *Cloudbank*, *Baltimore Review*, *45th Parallel*, *Best Microfiction 2019*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Cultural Daily*, and other publications. Brad is also the author of seven poetry chapbooks, including the recently released [\*Collateral\*](#), and [\*Funny You Should Ask\*](#). His website is: [www.bradrosepoetry.com](http://www.bradrosepoetry.com)

### Just Like an Accident

A few days after Jimmy got out of the joint, me and Angel “invited” him to come down to the beach with us for a swim. Though the weather is a little dicey this time of year, the ocean is beautiful—the waves, cool and shiny as a pile of new chips spilling on a gaming table. After we picked him up and drove to the beach, the three of us walked toward the water's edge. I turned to Jimmy and said, “*Hey, no hard feelings, man. It's all water under the bridge.*” The three of us swam out about a 100 yards, when, sure enough, grey clouds bunched up, the current shifted, and a sudden squall began to beat the face of sea with a punishing vengeance. Two rollers pushed me and Angel toward shore and by the time we caught our breath and turned around, Jimmy was gone. When we finally made our way back to shore and got to the car, I said to Angel, “*At least this time we won't have to make it **look** like an accident.*”



## **Nina Rubinstein Alonso's**

work appeared in *Ploughshares*, *The New Yorker*, *Ibbetson Street*, *Taj Mahal Review*, *Bagel Bards Anthology*, *U. Mass. Review*, *MomEgg*, *Black Poppy Review*, *Southern Women's Review*, *Broadkill Review*, *Writing in a Woman's Voice*, etc. Her book *This Body* was published by David Godine Press, her chapbook *Riot Wake* by Cervena Barva Press, and two other collections are in the works.

### **Ashes on Cake**

Aunt Dora scowls at her untouched slice of pink cake, says, “sugar chokes me, sweetness is poison,” then starts unspooling dark threads of family history ignoring the array of baby shower balloons garlanding this party room.

Listening to her is like opening a closet full of dead people's shoes. I heard hints growing up, always at a distance, no direct details.

She describes the clothes Jews wore in the Kiev shtetl, says my great grandfather wrote Yiddish poetry, which I never knew, his books all lost. Then describes how Russian Cossacks attacked my great grandmother Christmas Eve, bashed in her cottage door, dragged her bed outside onto the frozen river because she was a Jewish woman about to give birth on Christ's birthday. Did they know or care that Jesus was a Jewish baby, or was that detail twisted and negated, canceled by hatred?

Grandma Bessie, Dora's mother, was five years old, hiding in a cupboard, told to keep quiet no matter what she heard, even her mother screaming while Cossacks dragged her bed through the smashed door out into the snow and onto river ice where she died.

Somehow the newborn was rescued and Bessie survived, but there's no explanation how it happened or how she grew up and later reached the United States with Grandpa Sasha.

I remember Grandma as watchful and suspicious, trusting no one, refusing to taste the cake a neighbor brought after her leg was broken shielding her grandchild's stroller from an out of control car that veered onto the sidewalk, as if nothing a Goy offered, even cake, could bring anything good.

"How was the baby rescued, how did Grandma Bessie grow up and come to the states? Who named the baby Bathsheba?"

Aunt Dora won't answer, as if it's senseless and annoying for me to keep asking questions, unbearable to say another word about her mother's suffering. She turns away, ignores me, refills her wine glass, flicks ashes on pink cake, shoves her cigarette butt into white icing.



## **Austin Alexis**

has new work published or forthcoming in *Flash Boulevard*, *Home Planet News Online*, *Dash*, *Scribes MICRO Fiction*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Otoliths* (Australia), *Plath Profiles*, and elsewhere. He is the author of *Privacy Issues* (Madgett Poetry Award) and two chapbooks from Poets Wear Prada. He received the Great Weather for Media Press Flash Fiction of the Month citation.

## **World**

People ambling around--without heads. Sluggish, as if bathed in slow motion. But far from still. Not mummies, not zombies, not monsters of any kind. I observe them from a distance; they fail to see me. Or, being aware of me, they ignore me. Certainly, they have no wish to harm me. Therefore, no conflict exists. The stakes can't be raised because there are no stakes. I am not in danger; they have no agenda. Maybe this is my vision of an afterlife: people without egos, at rest...but conscious. Wants are invisible to them. They step beyond striving.