



10 BY 10

FLASH FICTION STORIES



NUMBER 20
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Welcome back to issue Number 20 of 10 By10 Flash Fiction Stories featuring an all-female issue with writers from New Zealand, China, Canada and South Africa. The U.S. represented by Massachusetts, Oklahoma, New Jersey and Florida, Each writer has a story for us. Whatever you fancy, I am sure some of these stories will fit the bill. All the pieces in this issue run from just over two hundred words to nearly five hundred words. They are all short, concise and worth your time to read and enjoy.

Please don't forget, whether you were previously published in 10 By 10 or not, you are always welcome to submit. Remember stories should be original, no AI or ChaptG, not previously published, 200 to 500 words accompanied by a bio and jpeg head and shoulders photo. Please attached all material separately.

I look forward to seeing your work. In the meantime, enjoy these stories.

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 and is a five-time poetry Pushcart Prize nominee. He lives in Brookline, MA with his wife Susan J. Dechter.

His flash fiction books are *Wheels* and *Secret Behind the Gate*. Paul Beckman and I will have a joint flash fiction book *40 Stories* out shortly to be published by Big Table Publishing.



Poet Laureate of New Bedford, Massachusetts from 2014 to 2021, author and playwright **Patricia Gomes** is published in numerous literary journals and anthologies. Gomes is the author of four poetry chapbooks. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee (2008, 2018, and 2021) as well as a 5-time Rhysling Science Fiction Award nominee. Recent publications include *Poem Alone*, *Horror Writers Poetry Showcase X*, *Potter's Field 8*, and the soon to be published anthology *The Lycanthropicon*. Her latest play, *Coffee, Eclairs, and the Conflict of Free Will* was produced and performed by Culture Park Theater in November of 2023.

Elizabeth: Two Days Before her Death

Aladard will come again, the seer told Mother so. She tucks me in each night with prayers, then bargains with the Blessed Virgin for my life. The nuns shall be cross when they learn of Mother going to a card-reader.

I'm all that's left — he took the others, though Nanny swears it was the pox. My eldest brother, James, then Mary, and then Little Thomas. Gone. I know it was Aladard and not the pox because Mary comes back at night. She sits upon the window seat, the moonlight shining over her. Her skin is unmarked — though dreadfully wan. She holds the doll Mother put in the coffin to accompany her to Heaven. I won't look at her. I turn my head when she comes, bringing the odor of tombs with her. Is it sinful to pray her away?

"Aladard is coming." Cook's boy whispers when he's certain no adults are about. I stick my tongue out at him. Mother says Aladard is seeking compensation from Father for his bringing heathens back with him to serve in our good Catholic house.

Father is a whaling captain and travels many months to warmer waters. He brings home so many wonderful things! And every now and then, he brings brown-skinned women to work in our kitchen, or brown-skinned men to tend the stables. They never look at me when I walk by, but their low chanting is maddening. Are they praying, I wonder, or do they curse our home?

Over tea, I heard Aunt Violet tell Aunt Cecile (in French—I was quite pleased with myself for being able to translate their conversation!) that Aladard seeks retribution not for Father's heathens, but for his unpius behavior and lustful ways—whatever that means. Then they discussed the deaths of the babies below stairs; what have *those* children to do with our home? After Mother leaves my room, I check my skin for spots. Not a one. I shall be able to sleep undisturbed except for Mary. I'm more afraid of Mary than of Aladard.

And now James, of course.

I saw him lurking in the garden by the forsythia bushes, and last night; I thought someone called my name. I saw him the very second I drew the drapes apart. The grass was wet with dew and there stood James without his boots. He waved up at me and smiled. I closed the drapes immediately because, you see, he had no eyes. What do you suppose happened to them? They were the prettiest shade of blue.

No, I'm not afraid of Aladard. He will take me to my Maker and I have naught to fear for I have always been an obedient child, Mother says. Heaven is a lovely place, Father Sullivan always tells us. I shall miss Mother and my darling new kitty, but I don't mind dying to save Father's soul; he has been *ever* so good to me.



Courtney McEunn was born in Florida and raised in southwest Oklahoma. She received her BA in English at Cameron University and is currently pursuing her MFA in Creative Writing (fiction) at Oklahoma State University. Her work has been published in *The Gold Mine*, *Route 7 Review*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, and *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*. For more information and to read her work, visit <http://www.courtneymceunn.com>

Bones

After I finish each meal I have to check and make sure my collarbones are still there. I run my hand over two neat and slightly protruding bones, using thumb and index to gently massage the spots that marks the sternoclavicular. I have to make sure they're significant enough, so that I can imagine everyone admiring my newly formed clavicle.

I've worked very hard for these bones, with careful diets and habits consisting of counting carbs, proteins, calories, etc. I basically cut sugar and dairy out completely, too.

I went on runs. I counted the minutes I'm outside moving and made sure it is always more than the minutes I spent consuming food. I used to run so well back in my "I was team captain for my high school soccer team" days. Now I can't make it a mile without stopping for three minutes and forty-two seconds. But I'm working on it!

I've learned to not sit down, either. That's when the fat *really* shows. Only straight verticals and horizontals for me these days.

Every morning I check the scale to make sure the number doesn't increase. If it does, I'll wait for the boyfriend to go to work... Then lay in bed, skip my measly meals, and (sometimes) cry all day.

* * *

Even though I do my daily research, I still don't understand bodies. Yes, the clavicles are still there (I checked three minutes ago), but the twin iliac bones are taking their sweet time blooming. I have skinny little ankles, but my upper arms are the size of a D1 football player's (and I'm not talking about muscle). My legs are toned and I got little mountains for calves... but my stomach *refuses* to do any kind of altering. My high waisted shorts feel larger someday but suffocating the next. But the scale reads the same? I don't know. I don't get it.

* * *

This morning, I made the mistake of asking my boyfriend how much he weighs. He always eats like the world is ending and it's always that carb-loaded, grease-coated, sugar-injected crap. But his bones look great! They're always jutting out of him, begging to be released from his perfectly tanned skin.

He tells me *his* weight doesn't matter. He tells me I'm beautiful. Then he squeezes that little piece of fat on my hip that I'm convinced will never abandon me. I cringe.

I ask him to humor me. I'm only curious.

He sighs and goes into the bleak room containing the scale. He comes back and I tell him to give it to me straight. He does.

I put on a brave face and I don't know if he trusts it or just doesn't have the energy to convince me that it doesn't matter. Then, he gets ready and goes to work while I lay horizontally in bed for the next eight hours.



Sandra Arnold's eight books include her 2024 flash fiction collection, *Below Ground* (Impspired, UK), a novella-in-flash *The Bones of the Story* (Impspired, UK, 2023), *Where the Wind Blows* (Truth Serum Press, Australia, 2023), *The Ash, the Well and the Bluebell* (Mākarō Press, NZ, 2019), *Soul Etchings* (Retreat West Books, UK, 2019). Her short fiction has been published internationally and 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. www.sandraarnold.co.nz

The waterhole

Tommy insisted on dragging me along to the waterhole he'd found in the bush last weekend while he'd been tramping with his brother, over-ruling all my objections with his usual snide remark that I should grow some balls and do something out of character for once. It was always like this, with me having to go along with whatever Tommy wanted, which now involved trekking for hours through dense bush. When we finally came to a clearing, Tommy sprinted towards some rocks, scrambled up to the top of the highest one, and with a triumphant whoop, pointed down at the waterhole far below. No way, it'll be freezing!' I complained, pulling the collar of my fleece jacket up and around my neck and stuffing my gloved hands into my pockets.

‘Time to grow some balls!’ Tommy hooted, bending over to pull off his boots and socks. He yanked off his jeans, his underpants and started to pull his sweater over his head.

I stood there, shivering, thinking of the day we started school together and how he had laughed at me for being so small. All the times he had derided me in front of others for being a wimp. Why did he stick with me all these years when he held me in such contempt? Was it only to make himself look better?

I waited until he was struggling to get his sweater over his head. I pulled my hands out of my pockets and without a single word I stretched out my arms and rocketed right up behind him.



Cindy Rosmus originally hails from the Ironbound section of Newark, NJ, once voted the “unfriendliest city on the planet.” She talks like Anybodys from *West Side Story* and everybody from *Saturday Night Fever*. Her noir/horror/bizarro stories have been published in places like *Shotgun Honey*, *Megazine*, *Dark Dossier*, *Danse Macabre*, *The Rye Whiskey Review*, *Under the Bleachers*, and *Rock and a Hard Place*. She is the editor/art director of *Yellow Mama* and has published seven collections of short stories. Cindy is a Gemini, a Christian, and an animal rights advocate.

Reap The Reward

Twice, so far, I’d tricked death. Without realizing it.

“It’s this building,” Rocco, my ex, said. “The apartment numbers, and letters, they’re all screwed up.” He was the super now, lived in the basement, but still didn’t know which apartment was which.

Something to do with A meaning “first,” B meaning “second,” so . . .

“You being in E-4,” Rocco said, smirking, “Confused the reaper. Poor guy.”

Or girl. Who knows what Death really looked like? In Twilight Zones, it was Robert Redford and that creepy hitchhiker guy.

Both times he (or she!) hit the wrong place. That math professor in D-4, whose wife left him, followed by Susie next door, in E-5, who tended bar at Scratch’s. Lots of free drinks would be missed, I thought, with poor Susie gone.

But better her than me.

Mysteriously, both their hearts gave out in place of mine. Within a week.

“He’s getting closer,” Rocco said. Like he could care less.

“Gotta tell you,” he said, after they’d found Susie all bug-eyed, on her bathroom floor. “When I got the call . . .” He squeezed my arm. “And heard ‘wellness check’ in ‘E-5,’ I was tearing up.”

“I’m E-4,” I said.

But as the EMTs brought out Susie in a bag, I was lost in his touch. I guessed I still loved him. One last fling, I thought, before I croaked.

“How do you feel?” he asked today. “Do you have chest pains?”

On the fifth-floor landing, we stood, him leaning on the mop. Finally, he was cleaning the hallways.

“No,” I said. As near-death as I should’ve been, I felt great. Rallying, the docs called it. Geniuses, right?

Don’t you know?, I told them, There’re more old drunks than old doctors?

“I’m hungry,” I said, cracking a beer. “Let’s order a pie.”

The pizza guys, too, always confused these apartments. But maybe, just once, he’d get it right, first try. While the pie was scorching-hot. Just once, I thought, before I croaked.

A half hour later, Rocco was inside, downing my last beer. The mop abandoned. I hoped Pizza Man didn’t trip over it on his way up.

Footsteps, I heard, at first distant, then closer. Not trudging up five flights, like you’d expect. But prancing. Like instead of a job, the feet were doing it just for fun.

I’ll get it,” Rocco said, when my bell rang.

“E-4?” the guy asked jovially. “E, like in ‘Edward,’ E meaning ‘fifth,’ and “one-two-three-four?””

“Yeah,” I heard Rocco say.

He started choking. Or gasping. Then there was this huge thud.

By the time I reached him, he was dead. From the stairs I heard laughter that got fainter with those prancy footsteps.

Teary-eyed, I sunk down beside Rocco.

On the floor beside us was the pizza box. I smelled sausage and peppers. But we’d ordered plain.

This time, the reaper tricked me.

But I’ll live.



Denise Raynor, MD, MPH has been writing fiction for the last few years following a career as an academic perinatologist (think prenatal ultrasound diagnosis and high risk pregnancy management). My historical novel *Birthing Pains* will be published in 2025 by Running Wild/RIZE. As an emerita of Emory University School of Medicine, I continue to study and teach, primarily seasoned lifelong learners, indulging my interests in the experience of the enslaved and their descendants in the US. I read a lot, beyond nonfiction, across genres in contemporary and historical fiction, mysteries and thrillers; wherever I can find a good story. I love good eating, the theater and dance, travel and photography when I'm not fooling around in the Atlanta aquarium with my grandchildren.
raynorbd@yahoo.com

Flight

A huge round moon sits near the horizon, dimly lighting the fields, flat as the squashed bug on my windshield, that I barrel past somewhere between Cleveland and Columbus. "Every breath you take" is blaring through my speakers on this weekly journey to Cincinnati to see my kids, staying with my mother as I complete a 4th year medicine externship at Case Western. This weekly ritual is my lifeline to real life outside the dimly depressing confrontation with end-of-life issues that is the ICU. I need to inhale my kids to brighten this month. "Every move you make" I belt out, swiveling my hips as I tap the rhythm on my steering wheel. It's not that I'm tired; I need this immersion in music to be launched into otherworldliness, soaring above the ravages of disease and the inhumanity of man to man.

I live like a monk, festooned in a tiny dorm room, studying the orthodoxy of medicine. As the only med student on the rotation, I'm a stranger from a strange land trying to impress the attendings to snag that outstanding letter of

recommendation for residency applications. I've made no friends. I know nothing about Cleveland except the road out of town. There's only the weekend respite with the joys and tribulations of family.

During the week, I'm watching a husband and father turn orange, his eyes yellowing a little more each day as cirrhosis destroys his liver, perhaps a sign of the family dynamics that leave him unvisited. Or maybe they want to avoid the faint odor of bedsores that are gnawing away at his body. His heart is pumping just fine; his lungs are filling him with life sustaining air. There is nothing to do but wait. He and I are equally lonely. I can't help him much and he can't help me.

"It's my destiny to be the king of pain.." The mood on the return trip is as light as the early evening sun which fully illuminates the hog barns and corn fields along the highway littered with semis and minivans. I've left the joy behind, wondering what I expected--a peek at a potential application site, maybe, but in truth, the atmosphere, a staple of medical facilities, is not different. I have enjoyed the ethical discussions, though, ethereal, hypothetical, real brain work, unlike the routine, deductive diagnosis and treatment algorithms. I lay down to sleep in my dorm room and begin a new week.



Marcelle Neumann lives in rural northwestern Pennsylvania. She is a member of a local writers' group and has attended writers' conferences held by Pennwriters, St. David's Christian Writers Association, and the Institute of Children's Writers. Along with having articles published in a local book anthology entitled *The Keep* and the Pennwriters' newsletter, she also fosters cats and is an amateur home remodeler. Mrs. Neumann is a caregiver for her husband, who is a disabled Navy veteran.

Forever and Always

“...the one less travelled”

- Robert Frost

I was given six months to a year to live. When the doctor said I needed to prepare for the end, I wanted to ask, "The end of what?" For me, life had always been one continuous life event after another. He told me to take it easy. Taking it easy never crossed my mind growing up; no reason to start now.

As my husband drove me home from the hospital, memories began to slam into my mind one after another. Being the younger sister to spirited twin brothers afforded me the opportunity to engage in some rather outlandish and dangerous activities. They did not care if I tagged along, and our mother had no idea what my brothers were up to. When I was nine and they were fifteen, we all jumped off the old railroad bridge, which had been abandoned long ago. I remember screaming with delight the whole way down.

When my father gave me his old Ford truck on my seventeenth birthday, I knew I was not about to take it easy on the road as he had instructed me. It was held together by rust and a prayer, but I managed to get it up to speeds nearing

eighty miles per hour. Later in the day, I went airborne over the median between the lanes of the highway. Memories of me crashing against some rocks flashed in my mind. Sadly, my father took the truck back.

The ski trip with friends gave me a broken leg and also a good excuse to go back to school at twenty-nine; I knew I had it in me to conquer any mountain.

After parking the car, my husband rushed to my side to help me get past the wet cement in front of the porch. I did not give him a chance. I jumped the railing and turned to him, inviting him to do the same.

“Always the road less traveled.” He smiled.



Huina Zheng, a Distinction M.A. in English Studies holder, works as a college essay coach. Her stories have been published in *Baltimore Review*, *Variant Literature*, *Midway Journal*, and others. Her work has received nominations twice for both the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. She resides in Guangzhou, China with her husband and daughter.

Never, Ever!

It was just another typical seventh-grade day, with kids rushing around and screaming at playtime with complete lack of awareness. Then this boy from my class approached, grinning as if he was about to say something hurtful. With a jab of his finger into my chest, he exclaimed, “Look at yourself, so fat, huge breasts!” His words set off a burst of laughter across the room; each guffaw was a dagger to my heart.

I felt a tidal wash of emotions that included deep perplexity, humiliation, and sorrow. It felt like I had been sent back in time to that fatal day in third grade, when I had desired to shrink away into nothingness.

Ling, my one-time desk buddy, turned into an enemy when I refused to help her cheat. From that point, I was a constant irritant to her. She frequently shoved me, yanked my ponytail, and persuaded other girls to shun me. My homework often bore an unwarranted big “X,” and my pencils seemed to vanish mysteriously. That day during recess, she said she wanted to be friends with me and offered me her juice. Naively, I accepted, only to hear her shout with glee, “The pig drank my pee!” as I took a sip. Their giggles pricked me like a swarm of needles.

I told my mother everything later that night in the hopes that she could provide me consolation or guidance. “How come other girls weren’t targeted?”

You are the one with the issue,” she dismissed my pain. “You should learn to get along with your classmates.”

The pain of that third-grade humiliation persisted over the years, never quite going away. Here I was once again, facing down a bully in the classroom. My mother’s harsh words echoed in my mind, stinging like thorns. It felt as though I turned on a switch inside of me, releasing all those pent-up feelings I couldn’t hold back anymore. The boy gave me a cruel smile and laughed at me, thinking that my quiet was a sign of weakness.

I hesitated, caught between restraint and the urge to fight back. That’s when something in me snapped. Without thinking, I kicked him in the stomach, and he fell to the ground, sprawled out. Driven by years of suppressed fury, I pinned him down and let out all my rage by scratching his face. He writhed beneath me, struggling to break free. Though slender, he was no match for me—my size, once a liability, now gave me an undeniable advantage. He couldn’t bring me down because I was much bigger.

A rush of unfamiliar strength pulsed within, a powerful tide. I was in charge this time. I wasn’t the weak link. He lay helpless and frail beneath me, in sharp contrast to my newly discovered might. I vowed then and there: I would never back down from a challenge, no matter how big or small. I would never shrink back. Never, ever!



Rosalind Goldsmith lives in Toronto, is a volunteer facilitator with the Writers Collective of Canada and tutors literacy for adults. Before writing short fiction, she wrote radio plays for CBC Radio Drama and a play for the Blyth Theatre Festival and also translated and adapted short stories by the Uruguayan writer, Felisberto Hernández, for CBC Radio. Her short stories have been published in over fifty literary journals in the USA, the UK, and Canada, including *Orca*, *Litro*, *the Temz Review*, *Fairlight Books*, *Chiron Review*, *the Lincoln Review*, *Stand*, *Fiction International* and the *Masters Review*. Several of her stories have been nominated for the Pushcart and Best Small Fictions. Her first collection of short stories, *Inside the House Inside*, will be published in Spring, 2025, by Ronsdale Press.

The Wrong Thing To Say

My friend's lover threw an ashtray at him. He was introducing her at a party and forgot her name. When they got home, they had a big fight. She was screaming, he was upset, and then she picked up this big green ashtray and threw it right at his face.

He had to teach his English class with a bandage over his left eye and cheek. He explained to his students that he was getting a vase down from a shelf and it fell on him. Told his colleagues the same thing, but they didn't buy it. They guessed it had something to do with his girlfriend, since they were at that party when he forgot her name.

When I saw him, he told me the story and complained she was being entirely unreasonable, she was insane to react that way, it wasn't so important, just a tiny lapse of memory, and what was wrong with her anyway?

Then they split up, and that was the end of it. He met a woman at a reading of excerpts from *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. She loved D.H. Lawrence almost as much as he did, and they got together after that reading and had long conversations about Lawrence and passion and what it meant and who had it and who didn't, and why some people were passionate and others not. The woman had pale orange hair and freckles. When I met her, she told me she was a vegan and stayed away from salt because it affected her digestion. Her laugh reminded me of tinsel on a Christmas tree. My friend told me they were going to get married and would I come to the wedding, but I had to be away for that.

The next time I saw my friend, he told me he was bored. His new wife bored him to distraction, he was bored to death, there was no end to his boredom, she talked about furniture all the time, and now he couldn't get out of it. He asked me what to do.

"What about D.H. Lawrence?" I said.

"She hasn't got a clue about D.H. Lawrence," he said. "She wouldn't know a passion from a ham sandwich."

"Well," I said, "at least she'll never throw an ashtray at you."

That was the wrong thing to say. He didn't talk to me again after that.

I saw them both at a concert once. Evgeny Kissin was playing Liszt and Chopin. I was in the balcony and when I looked down, I saw him in the third row, just beginning to sit down beside his wife. Her hair was still orange, but his was grey now, and he was stooped over and clutching to her arm as he sat down. When he was settled in his seat, he bowed his head forward, as if in prayer or defeat, and from where I was, I could see the nape of his neck above his shirt collar.



A retired Anthropology Professor, **Elizabeth Bird** has published over 100 academic articles and seven books, and now writes creative non-fiction. Her work appears in *Under the Sun* (winner, Readers' Choice Award 2022), *Tangled Locks*, *Biostories*, *Streetlight*, *Dorothy Parker's Ashes*, *HerStry*, *The Guardian*, *Mutha Magazine*, *3Elements Review*, *Heimat Review*, *Witcraft*, and elsewhere. Her essay "Interlude: 1941," was named a Notable in *Best American Essays 2023*. Her website is: www.lizbirdwrites.com.

Not this Time?

Home early, she stands rooted at the bedroom door. They're way too busy to notice her.

Another eager student, glossy-haired and baby-faced. Beguiled by his word-weaving. She sighs. Soon it will begin again – their banal, predictable script. Confrontation, anger, apology, flowers, forgiveness, uxorious attentiveness.

But he doesn't know she saw them. Perhaps it's finally time for her rewrite.

She backs away. A glance in the hallway mirror sparks a shiver at the creeping lines and faded auburn, sparking every cliché of the long-suffering wife. Snagging his office keys from the kitchen hook, she's in her car and away, her mind churning as she drives. She pulls into his parking space; campus is deserted on this lazy Friday afternoon. Slipping into his office, she boots up his computer. She'd guessed his password long ago - a superannuated symbol of their shared past. She settles into his chair.

With his sweet, self-deprecating smile, he always says she's the one with the tech skills. Her mundane job, you understand. He doesn't care to know more; there are poignant poems to write, lofty thoughts to think, shiny students to seduce. But he's right; she moves easily around his machine and into the dark web beyond. The pathways are well-worn; occasionally she remotes in, but to be safe, she prefers to work from his office IP address. In her long and careful curation, spurred by each new humiliation, she has installed a gallery that makes her stomach turn. It will be unforgivable. Deftly she adds the final touches to her

labor of lost love. It's clumsily hidden, as he would do it -- but easy for IT to find, with the right nudge. A grenade triggered to blow up his world.

And only she holds the pin. Her new, never-used email address: GroomerhuntXX. A message to IT will set the story in motion. Then the department chair, the dean, the Board Chair ... Oh, and that public affairs reporter on Channel 7. Parents watch that. And herself, of course. All timed for maximum impact. Whenever she's ready.

As she returns to her car, the new script plays in her mind. It will star appalled administrators and tearful, shell-shocked wife:

"Just horrifying! I had no idea!" It will spiral satisfactorily from there. She ponders as she drives. Perhaps tonight? Or maybe in a week or two? Does she give him a chance to keep the pin in longer? What would it take to defuse it?

But for now, a quick text to tell him she's coming home. She'll pick up supper on the way. He'll have the bed made, the bathroom spritzed, and that endearingly crooked grin on his face. She hates that it still gets to her.

"Can you open some wine, honey? I bought crusty bread and soup."

"Sounds wonderful, sweetheart! Want me to warm it up?"

"No worries; it's vichyssoise. Always served cold."



Glynis Goyns is an environmental and social justice activist, living in Cape Town, South Africa. A retired Presbyterian Minister, she believes in the intrinsic inter-dependence of all life forms, calling for mutual respect and a celebration of diversity. Her visual perspective tends to be shaped by a musical understanding of reality that sees rhythm, harmony and synchrony in life.

Shadow Talk

Damien was bereft. He had lost his shadow. It had been his close companion all his life, now it was gone. All that was left were its tattered remnants attached to his heels. The space it usually occupied glared back at him as a bright void.

In its absence, Damien felt his very being had been negated. His shadow affirmed his existence. It was integral to his conversation with life. Would he be plunged into perpetual silence because his partner in dialogue was missing? When, and how, and why had he lost his life-long companion? Where should he search for his shadow?

Only in times of total darkness had he ever lost sight of his shadow. Had it been abducted in the deep of night as he slept? And who would want to steal someone else's shadow? Did his shadow still retain the remnants of his alter ego, or had it developed a completely new persona to match that of its new companion? Were they comfortable with each other? What conversation did it enjoy with life now?

"It's odd," thought Damien, "how modern psychologists emphasize the darkness and hiddenness of our shadow selves when, in fact, shadows are visible only in the light. Yet here I am with no shadow self, steeped in light that reveals

no more than a vacuum and a deep silence. My conversation with life has suddenly ended.”

His dilemma perplexed him. He would have to seek his shadow in the dark, where it had got lost or been abducted, but he could see it only in the light. And, if it had become attached to another person, how would he recognize it as his shadow since it would surely be shaped by the identity of its new owner? Would it even still belong to him? But it had shared the conversation of life with him and understood the journey that he had taken.

That night, as the darkness gathered around him, Damien adopted the only strategy he could think of to search for and recover his lost shadow. Through the long dark hours of the night, he reminisced, sharing his life story with vivid and detailed descriptions of his emotions, successes and failures. He painted pictures of colour, texture, form and pattern. He introduced overtones of sound and aroma. He presented times of harmony and disharmony. With all the honesty that he could muster, he presented to the night the story of his life with all its light and shade, and its many nuances.

As the first glimmer of dawn crept through his bedroom window and lengthened in shadows on the opposite wall, he saw himself gradually projected there, growing with the lengthening shadows, and heard a gentle sigh of contentment from his alter ego. His shadow was back and it still belonged to him. He was ready to continue his conversation with life.

(479 Words)