

10 BY 10

FLASH FICTION STORIES



NUMBER 28

May 2025

Welcome to Issue #28

There are two or three stories I would not normally take, but they – pardon the cliché – tickled my fancy. Seven of the authors are back along with three new writers whom I am sure you will enjoy. The writers this month come from varied locations: China, U.K., Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Illinois, California, Pennsylvania and a pair of Massachusetts writers from either end of the state. It is always a joy to receive and accept good stories from new authors to returnees. For those who may be submitting for the first time a story should be 200 to 500 words in an attached Word.doc, bios of any length, and a head & shoulders jpeg photo also attached.

While reading these stories sit in a comfortable chair or couch, have a snack, adult beverage or a soda, ice tea or coffee and enjoy these offerings.

Sincerely,

Zvi A. Sesling

Editor



Zvi A. Sesling, Brookline, MA Poet Laureate (2017-2020), has published numerous poems and flash fiction. He edits *10 By 10 Flash Fiction Stories*. Sesling has won international and national poetry prizes. He is a four-time Pushcart Prize poetry nominee. He has also been nominated for a flash fiction Pushcart Prize. Sesling's flash fiction book is, *Secret Behind The Gate* and his flash fiction chapbook is *Wheels*. Sesling and Paul Beckman recently collaborated on a flash fiction book *40 Stories*. His *Selected & New Poetry* will be published this summer. Sesling lives in Brookline, MA with his wife Susan J. Dechter.



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 three times for both the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. She resides in Guangzhou, China with her family.

Scavenging

In a corner of the living room, a rustling sound came from the trash bin. Relatives bustled in and out, too preoccupied to glance around or notice the toddler scavenging beside it. Everyone's attention was fixed on Old Mrs. Chen, lying on the wooden bed in the dimly lit room. Her breathing was weak and rapid, punctuated by faint wheezing. The air was thick with a blend of bitter herbal medicine, stale urine, oppressive heat, and the mustiness of age. The child, oblivious to the solemn atmosphere, continued his search, revealing two tiny teeth as he dug through the bin.

His mother sat beside Old Mrs. Chen, and glanced around anxiously for her son. "Can't you just focus for once?" her husband muttered, rubbing his temples before slipping a cigarette between his lips—then, as if remembering something, shoving it back into his pocket. The mother lowered her head, her gaze no longer wandering.

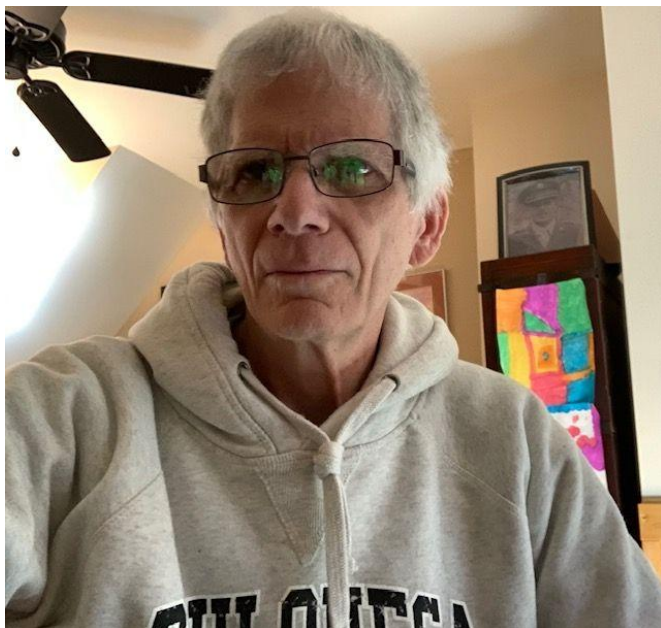
A middle-aged woman began to sob, prompting hushed words of comfort. The child glanced toward the sound, saliva pooling at his lips, but he was too preoccupied to wipe it away. His gleaming eyes returned to the bin. He grabbed a crumpled tissue, greenish-yellow mucus seeping through, and tossed it aside. His

fingers brushed sticky candy wrappers, crisp peanut shells, a cold, rigid ballpoint pen. He shoved a cigarette butt into his mouth, then spat it out, grimacing at the bitter tobacco taste, his saliva trailing after it. Eggshell fragments scraped his skin, making his face scrunch.

Overjoyed by his discoveries, his tiny feet wiggled in a happy dance. He picked up an empty milk carton, squeezed it—leftover milk dribbled onto his hands. He stuck his fingers into his mouth, savoring the mingled flavors of milk, strawberry candy, dust, salt, and egg yolk. He licked and sucked, until the murmurs swelled into sobs. Women wept, some softly, some loudly. The men sighed. Startled, the child burst into tears.

The mother jerked her head up, looking toward the source of the crying. She wanted to stand, but a cluster of relatives surrounded her, blocking both her view and her path. Her husband shot her a glare, and she had no choice but to remain hunched over Old Mrs. Chen. The women formed a circle, dabbing at their eyes or squeezing out tears, lips quivering as they tried to look more sorrowful. The men, now smoking, filled the air with haze as they discussed funeral arrangements. One of them lifted his head, staring out the window at the gray sky, lost in thought.

His mother's grip on Old Mrs. Chen's robe tightened. For a fleeting moment, her gaze wove through the tangle of legs blocking her view, searching for a glimpse of him. Then, she shut her eyes again. The child's cries faded. He dug out a small, chipped toy car. He ran his fingers over its dented surface, then stuck it in his mouth, tasting dust, rust, and time—something only he could understand.



Barry Yedvobnick's fiction is forthcoming at *Neither Fish Nor Foul* and has appeared in *Bending Genres*, *Brilliant Flash Fiction*, *Literally Stories*, *Litbreak Magazine*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *10 by 10 Flash Fiction Stories*, and other places. His nonfiction writing, a health column, is nominated for a Georgia Press Association Award. A retired biologist, he also narrates stories for *AntipodeanSF* radio shows. He is online at: <https://www.chillsubs.com/profile/barryyedvobnick>

Open in an Emergency

My relaxation response is Adele. She's in a pink dress, surrounded by balloons at her sixth birthday party, and the moms pass out cake while the dads chill, drinking in freshly-mowed grass and beer, teasing about the decade remaining before our daughters discover boys—and after the party, I'm chasing Adele, waving a balloon. She covers her ears and laughs when I spread my arms and burst it against my head.

The relaxation response is not responding. At this morning's ballgame, my blood pressure spikes each time the boy glances at me, so I give him the stare, the one Pacino flashed in *The Godfather* right before someone died, and he recognizes it—all primates do, it evolved over countless generations. I want to charge down the bleachers like an alpha chimpanzee defending his troop.

Adele attracts attention and enjoys that superpower. She spotted a friend below us, so I'm scoring the game while monitoring a boy who's trying to score her. They pass a box between them, and when they touch, I toss the scorebook. Adele runs up the steps and asks if I want to see something funny. I nod, so she

hands me the box with *Open in an Emergency!* printed across its door, and I open it, praying I'm wrong, but I shake my head because I'm right.

‘Oh my God, Dad, you know what that is, don't you?’ she says, laughing, so I remove it from the wrapper and inflate it. When I spread my arms and burst it against my head, she's no longer laughing.



Sarah Flick lives and writes in northern Colorado. She has most recently published a Modern Love essay for the *New York Times*. Also, *101 Words* and *Flash Fiction*.

Schadenfreude

She always called him Honey, and he always called her Baby. He always opened doors for her and she always smiled when he did. They always waved at each other across crowded rooms at parties, church suppers—small, private hand flaps that said “I love you.”

“Cute couple,” we all said.

She always dressed up for him whenever they went out at night, and he looked at her like her beauty burned him with its hotness. He always held her hand saying “isn’t she amazing?” to whoever was listening, and she always pretended to be embarrassed. He cooked for her, setting the table with cloth napkins and she bragged about his grilling skills.

“Adorable,” we all agreed.

They kept two kitten plushies on the dashboard of their car and when he spoke too loudly she would laugh, saying, ``Honey! Not in front of the kids!" It was their little joke about how they really would have kids someday.

``They'll be such great parents," we all exclaimed as we glanced at our own, flawed partners.

Her family loved him and his family loved her. So when his unemployed alcoholic brother came to live in their basement she never complained.

``It's okay, Honey. He's family. I'm happy to help."

“Thanks, Baby.”

She outfitted their bed with 600 thread-count sheets and he said she had great taste. On the day he found her and his brother writhing and moaning on top of all that luscious linen, he pushed them out onto the front porch without a single thread count for clothing. He screamed to the whole neighborhood that she was, and always had been, nothing but a whore who deserved his loser brother.

Crouching behind a shrub, she screamed back that he'd always been a boring lover with bad breath... and, worst of all, a lousy cook!

We posted everything, including their angry red faces and the fleeing brother's buttocks, onto all of our social media.



Nina Rubinstein Alonso's work appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Ploughshares*, *Writing in a Woman's Voice*, *Broadkill Review*, *Peacock Review*, *Nixes Mate*, etc. Publications: *This Body* (Godine Press), *Riot Wake* (Cervena Barva), *Distractions En Route* (Ibbetson Street), *Travels With Fernando* (Wilderness. House), available on Amazon, and her novel *Balancing on One Leg* is upcoming.

Eight year old Elisa crawls under the dining room table, careful not to pull Christmas Eve decorations off the green tablecloth as she retrieves the silver ring she dropped. Her father, Luis, is stuffing tobacco into his pipe when his mother says, "take that smoky thing outside." He's reluctant but obeys, puffs his briar on the porch glider.

"Drinks too much, hides it well," says his wife, Martha, a petite brunette who hasn't given up on him yet, but will, and, after the divorce, Luis suffers a heart attack. His sister in law Olivia visits the hospital, sees purple blotches on his arms, neck, face. She wants to avoid sensitive topics as he can be acidly sarcastic, but before she can say anything he snaps, "Don't start lecturing me to stop eating meat just because I had a heart attack," slamming her with all the force he can muster as she's vegetarian.

"Hope you're better soon," she says and leaves. The next heart attack takes him though he outlives his younger brother, Olivia's husband Alejandro.

Her mother-in-law serves risotto while saying, "terrible things always happen on holidays." Her sons are here with their wives and her granddaughter, but her husband Jorge died years ago, age fifty-five. After dinner Olivia finds Alejandro in the study paging through photos of his father, the same dark hair,

though his father's eyes were brown, Alejandro's' hazel. He's never forgiven God for taking his dad when he was eleven.

Chiropractic adjustments don't ease Alejandro's back pain, then a doctor does x-rays, says 'it's muscular.' As there's no improvement he tries another doctor who studies the previous doctor's x-ray, tagged 'normal,' locates a tumor, orders more scans and confirms 'atypical lung cancer.'

They win the law suit, the first doctor admitting in court that 'mistakes happen,' but, after months of chemo, Alejandro dies, July 18, age forty five. People tell Olivia to consider time with him a gift, but this cosmic emptiness is like breathing vanished air. No one understands unless it happens to them, sometimes not even then.

Late November she calls her mother-in-law asking about Christmas Eve which they've always shared, but hears "You'll want to be with your people," pushing her away, as if Olivia's presence would be another 'terrible thing' happening over the holidays.

Her mother sighs, "These are the conditions that prevail," and helps gather Alejandro's clothes to donate.

Months later her mother-in-law calls inviting her to dinner but Olivia makes excuses. She stays in touch with Martha and Elisa, but never sees her mother-in-law again, trust fractured.



Grace Balena is a writer whose works have appeared in *Springer Ln* and *The Centinel*. She enjoys writing fiction and poetry about love and littleness, and is pursuing a BA in English. Originally from California, she now lives in Utah.

Toenails

I always noticed her feet when I drove by her house. Barefoot with age-yellowed toenails, her feet resting on the wooden porch step. Just feet on the porch, feet in front of a rocking chair that rarely rocked. I drove slowly as I pulled out of my own driveway, only a few houses down.

The yards in that neighborhood were thin strips of dirt and scraggly grass that provided a meager cushion between curb and house. Like I said, her feet rested on the single porch step, uncomfortably close to the potholed road. The longer I lived there, my eyes began to search, as if my gaze were a horizontal rain that fell upon the decrepit scene of her life. Taking out my trash, checking my mail, I regarded the neighborhood, my eyes always returning to the woman. The patchwork grass of her yard matched the fungal yellow of her toenails. The slouching house was made of mousy clapboard that reeked of pot and cigarettes.

Always, she held tightly to a gray shirt—much too small for her lumpy, sagging body—the folds of fabric pinned in midair by her iron grip. Her old body sank into the chair. I'd never seen the chair without her. Sometimes I could see her rocking—gently, gently—as if cradling a baby. The sinew of her legs slid smoothly over the bone in her ankle.

The house itself was shrouded in deep quiet. My heart raced when I drove past her house. I did not allow the volume of my music to exceed a reverent buzz, as if disturbing the quiet of the woman cradling a shirt on her porch could somehow curse me. I imagined myself in her quiet life of ugliness.

I began to worry about my own toenails. Got regular pedicures. Quit smoking cold turkey. I watered my lawn until the thin strip of it glowed green and fresh, and repainted my house pearl-white. I chastised myself for smiling, laughing, talking—anything that could cause the spread of wrinkles.

I called my mother and was too embarrassed to explain the business of the woman and the toenails and the shirt. She became convinced I was seeing someone, or abusing stimulants, or succumbing to marketing schemes that target women's insecurities. I kept my fears to myself from then on.

Once, I saw her smoking on the porch. This time, standing up, her body curling in on itself from the effort. She began to cough, and as she held the ugly gray shirt to her mouth, I realized it wasn't a shirt at all but a toddler's onesie.



Mikki Aronoff lives in New Mexico, where she writes tiny stories and advocates for animals. She has stories in *Best Microfiction 2024* and in *Best Small Fictions 2024* and upcoming in *Best Microfiction 2025*.

Any Way Up

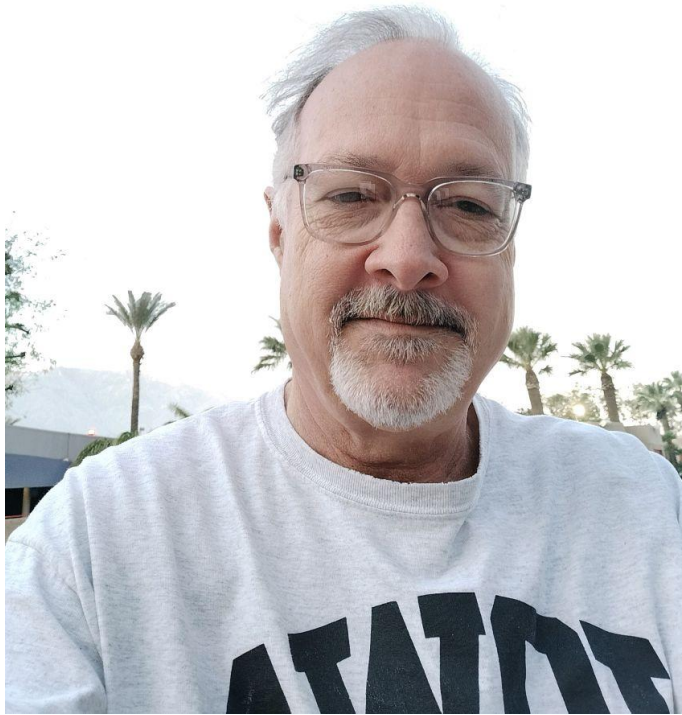
Estelle's wet swimsuit sticks to her like a compression stocking. Peeling it off takes forever, sand scratching her tender parts. Now she's standing and glowering at a too-tight wedding dress splayed out on the motel bed. It looks like a dead corsage. Estelle sighs; she should've used more sunscreen. The straps on the dress are going to hurt.

Estelle never did like the ocean. Too big. Too repetitive. Too salty. Too many fish. Too much grit lodging under her overhangs and in her cracks. But she'd buckled under Barry's bribe to get married at the Vista del Mar Motel, famous for its fishing expeditions. Estelle fought for a mountain lodge reception, but his tongue in her ear and a tennis bracelet convinced her otherwise. Now they're in separate rooms facing the water till after the ceremony.

Barry'd run out at dawn looking to catch a big one before squeezing into his tux, hoping to nab a sailfish, preferably not taller than him. He'd frame the photo for his waiting room. Size is important to Barry, as is killing things for dinner, especially for the main course. And not losing—at anything. Barry recently wondered—*out loud*—if he could marry someone who lost every round of bingo, which is something his fiancée had done the week before. Estelle

downed two cartons of mint chocolate chip that night and didn't return his calls for days.

Estelle hears a gentle tapping on the door. The maid wants to vacuum the room. Estelle puts her index finger in front of her mouth and blows out *shhhhh*, pulling Sofia inside. She mimes the rest of her plan. She dangles a 100-dollar bill and the bracelet in front of Sofia, who looks like she was built to hitch her dreams to such matter. *He's a dentist*, whispers Estelle, wide-smiling and fake-brushing her teeth and pointing to the wedding dress. Sofia snatches the C-note and bling and plops her ample body into the billowy material, hoists up her bosom and grins. *My last one was butcher*, she says. *That, too*, says Estelle, stuffing the rest of her clothes into her travel duffel, tossing it over the balcony, tumbling right after.



Chris Callard lives in Long Beach, CA. His poems have appeared in *Spillwords*, *The Writing Disorder*, *Ariel Chart*, *Witcraft*, *Cadence Collective* and *One Sentence Poems*. His short fiction in *Maudlin House*, *Friday Flash Fiction*, *Bright Flash Literary Review*, *Witcraft*, *Ariel Chart*, *Gemini Magazine*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *A Story in 100 Words* and *ZZyZxWriterZ*. His work has been nominated for Best of the Net and Best Small Fictions.

Review, Repeat

“You’ve got no willpower,” she said.

“As if you would know.”

She glanced at his feet. “You’re wearing dirty socks. Is laundry such a chore?”

“I hate the laundromat. And the laundramat. I especially hate the laundermat.”

She looked around the apartment like her life depended on it. “Lovely little hovel. Cobwebs dressing the acoustical ceiling.”

“Great cross-ventilation, stems the stench of stale cigarette smoke. You like that lamp? It was on clearance.” He spit the gum he was chewing on the floor. “The carpet has a few stains and the landlord will try and make me pay for the cleaning when I move, even though they pre-date me.”

She reached out and caressed the handle of a vacuum cleaner. “This is encouraging.”

“It’s clogged. Makes me sneeze.”

“Your books.” She strolled to one open on the desk. “Reminds me of things.”

“My secondhand dictionary. I leave it open to the page with the word ‘useless’ highlighted.”

She sat down next to him on the lumpy couch and pulled a faded pillow to her chest. “You’re so irritating. How are you otherwise?”

“It’s no different out there except I’m not as sharp now. Plus I have occasional flashes of rage when reminded of the lies and the liars.” He looked pointedly away. “Why shouldn’t I be hard on everyone? Like you usually are. I’ll bet you’re practically engaged by now.”

She wore those artificial eye lashes that he adored; they waved at him when she blinked.

“I want you back,” she said. “There’s no one like you. For me.”

“I see.”

They both stared at the tarnished carpet, noticing clearly in its dirty cut pile the dizzy patterns of repeated cycles, of love and loathing, self-absorbed belonging, emotional suspension, unrecognized arrogance, believing all was amendable. A soggy truth for the ages, or at least for another six months.



Robert Nisbet is from Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire. He graduated from University College, Swansea and the University of Essex in the 1960s and taught English in schools for many years, before becoming an associate lecturer in creative writing at Trinity College, Carmarthen, where he was also adjunct professor to exchange students over from the Central College of Iowa. For 30 years he was an active short story writer, being published mainly in Wales, with his collections including *Sounds of the Town* (Alun Books, 1982), which was shortlisted for the Dylan Thomas Award, and a *New and Selected Stories, Downtrain* (Parthian, 2004). After that latter volume, he switched to poetry, and has been widely published in Britain and the USA. With his poetry collection *In a Small County* due in October, he is now returning to fiction.

Four, Three, Two, One

The four of them would gather like geese, cluster in the café at eleven every morning for a damn good cackle. What in many parts they call a good crack. They really rollicked in that Long Haul Café, even when in time the four of them become three. They were at their most satirical about the world of what

they gleefully called Farce-book; later there were Smart-arse phones. Back in the day, they'd all done courses at the local tech, a couple of them right through to HNC, so now they really hooted at the Mickey Mouse degrees going around. Most mornings they'd have a go at the kids who should be doing a good day's work. They'd done National Service themselves, it had made men of them. Oh boy, they loved their mornings in the café.

Then there were two. But Laurie and Frank kept things going, the Long Haul Club, for some while, defiant and jovial.

**

Eleven one morning in late spring, Laurie came in slowly. Liz the waitress brought his tea (one sugar, dab of milk), and just said, "On the house today, Laurie,". Pouring the milk, she added, "How was the funeral?"

Laurie smiled briefly before jollyng her a little. "Yup. Good funeral. We saw the old boy off."

Then Megan, Laurie's late wife's niece, came across. They saw very little of each other those days, and she decided not to mention Frank, so they chatted on for a while about her son and his partner. And suddenly Laurie, for the first time ever, was looking at a Smartphone. She scrolled and Laurie gazed, in a vague way appreciative enough, although at moments his understanding was flickering. "He sent you these from Leeds? "

"Two hours ago?"

She told him of the boy's degree in retail management, and Laurie, aware of the comforting thigh beside him and her being there, smiled. "Sounds interesting. Sounds very interesting."



David Henson and his wife have lived in Brussels and Hong Kong and now reside in Illinois. His work has been selected for Best Microfictions 2025, has been nominated for four Pushcart Prizes, and has appeared in various journals including *10 by 10 Flash Fiction Stories*, *Maudlin House*, *Gastropoda*, *Literally Stories*, *Ghost Parachute*, *Gone Lawn* and *Moonpark Review*. His website is <http://writings217.wordpress.com>. His Twitter is @annalou8.

The Thread

“Follow me, detective. There’s an old laptop in the basement.” You won’t find anything on it either. Phone, tablet, desktop. I’ve been beyond careful. No how-to searches. No online rants.

When Speers told me the early retirement package was voluntary, his tone coiled like a rattler around his words. We both knew if I didn’t accept the offer, he’d make life miserable for me. He’d wanted to get rid of me for years.

I said during my exit interview that Speers was my best boss ever — my praise part of the plan I was weaving.

I retrieve the laptop from behind a toolbox. “I’m sure the battery’s dead, detective.”

There’s that saying about revenge served cold. I put mine in the deep freeze for a year. Waiting wasn’t easy but distanced me from suspicion.

It was the worst-kept secret in the office that my former boss was seeing Shirley McGovern, the company's rising star. My research — *stalking* is such an ugly word — revealed that Speers spent every evening, but Tuesdays, with his wife.

Detective Swanson pushes the power button on the laptop.

"Told you it was dead."

"We'll charge it at the station, Mr. Cooper."

The first Tuesday I followed Speers from his house, I had a good idea where he was headed. From my investigations, I knew Shirley lived in an apartment on the north side. Speers drove a circuitous route, parked a block away and cut through a dark alley.

One Tuesday, Speers stormed out of the apartment with Shirley behind him. Their shouts stabbed the quiet of the night. I couldn't decipher what they were saying other than Shirley screaming "Don't come back."

Detective Swanson zips the laptop into the bag. "Is there a password?"

"Nah. I got nothing to hide."

I sent Shirley a dozen roses. The next Tuesday, she greeted Speers with open arms. I could only imagine how my ploy played out at the office: *They sneak into the supply closet. She kisses him and thanks him for the roses. Being the snake he is, Speers takes credit, figuring it'll get him back in her good graces. And her bed.*

"I'm curious Detective Swanson — why bother with me? I haven't seen Speers since I retired a year ago."

The detective plucks a piece of lint from my sweater. "Let me fill you in, Mr. Cooper. Getting away with murder is harder than you imagine. Sometimes the killer outthinks himself."

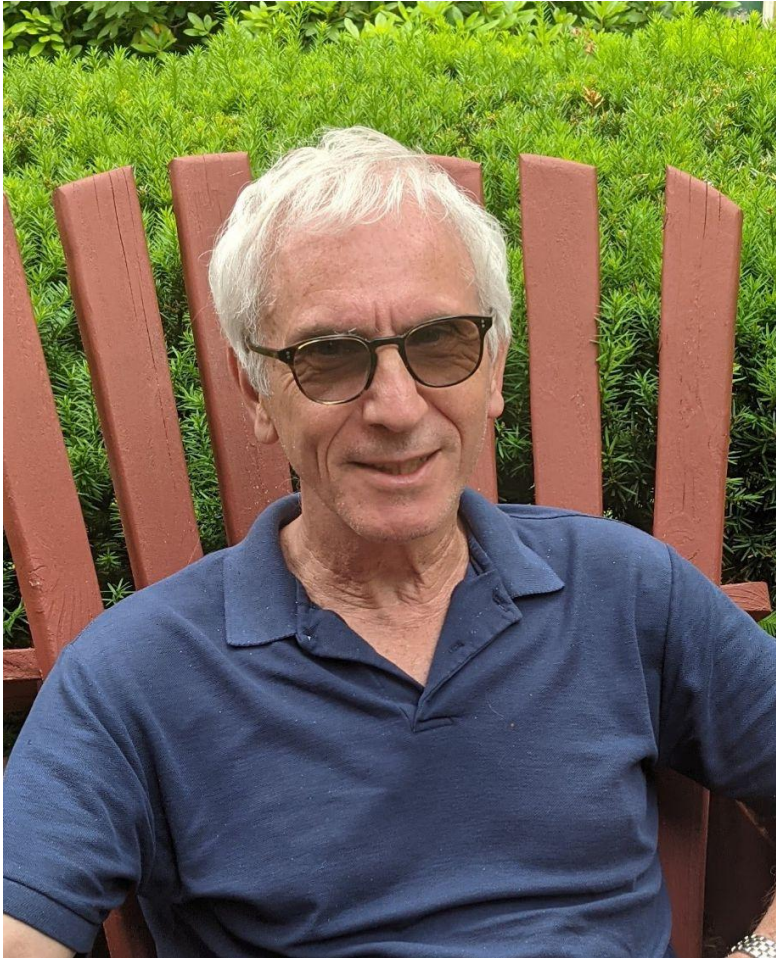
Where's he going with this? I force a smile, sweat beading on my forehead.

"It may not be obvious at first, but there's usually a loose end, a thread to pull. Might be something the killer said.... What did you say about Speers in your exit interview, Cooper."

My relief is like a cool breeze. "I said he was a great guy and a wonderful boss."

"Everyone else thought he was a complete jerk."

I feel a tug.



Gerald Yelle has worked in restaurants, factories and schools. His books include “The Holyoke Diaries” (Future Cycle 2014), “Dreaming Alone and with Others” (Future Cycle 2023) and the bored (Alien Buddha 2025)/ His chapbooks include “No Place I Would Rather Be” (Finishing Line 2021) and “A Box of Rooms” (Bottlecap 2022). He lives in Amherst, Massachusetts.

He Went to the High School Dance

He got there early and went to the basement –not wanting to stand around looking eager and self-conscious. The bathroom wasn’t the way he remembered. Sinks along the left had been replaced with small urinals. You could see them if the door was ajar. Around the corner an old disconnected bowl stood beside a new sink. A janitor was peering into it. The kid checked out the stalls and noticed the bowls in them weren’t connected either. He went back to the urinals. The janitor looked at him then looked away. Upstairs the band was setting up. After a while they began to play. Nobody danced. The drums were loud and you couldn’t hear the singer. People trickled in. They stood around, facing the band. A girl he knew

showed up drunk, staggering and draping herself all over the boys she bumped into. He was thrilled to have her lean on him, though it was clear she was only minutes from puking and passing out. He couldn't get over the moral rectitude of the young men around him. They either acted like she was repulsive or tried to steer her toward someone who would help. He thought he must be some kind of pervert and his excitement would show in the way he acted. He did his best to hide it. He just couldn't hide it from himself.