

# 10 BY 10

## FLASH FICTION STORIES



**JULY 2025**  
**ISSUE 30**

Welcome to Issue #28

Seven new authors and three repeat appearances and all 10 are fine story tellers. For those who may want to submit for the first time, send only one story that is 200 to 500 words in an attached Word.doc, along with a bio of any length and an attached head & shoulders jpeg photo. That means each submission should have three attachments to send in an email. No PDFs or Google docs, etc. **Please do not submit previously published stories whether hard copy or online.** The same applies to AI. Please send your own work. While reading these stories sit in a comfortable chair or couch, have a snack and an 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 by Big Table Publishing Company. Sesling lives in Brookline, MA with his wife Susan J. Dechter.



**Salvatore Difalco** writes from Toronto, Canada.

### **The Watermelon**

Cousin Rocco takes off from the picnic table, his shaved head glinting in the sunlight, sandals clapping. Aunt Teresa asks the others where he's going now.

Rocco is her 30-year-old nephew. His behavior thus far has been normal for him: he has spilled wine and beer, knocked over a barbecue, argued politics with his uncles, insulted his aunts. The men pause their bocci match and look up. The kids stop playing soccer. They all watch Rocco hurry to his rusted station wagon, parked on the shoulder of the road behind the other cars where they have stopped for a picnic at a dairy farm with picnic tables.

Rocco opens the rear door of the station wagon and lifts out an enormous watermelon. Rocco must wrap both tattooed arms around it and supports it with his beer belly as he waddles back to the picnic table.

"Clear the way!," he yells. "Clear the way! Fat Man is coming! Fat Man!" referring to the second atomic bomb dropped on Japan, but the allusion escapes the others.

Rocco's excitement darkens his face to a wine-like hue. He's quick to laugh but quicker to fly into a rage. The family handles him with kid gloves. The aunts clear the table and Rocco hefts the watermelon onto it.

"Now this is a watermelon!" he says, rapping his knuckles on the white-flecked green rind.

“Enough to feed an army,” agrees Uncle Ugo, Aunt Teresa’s nervous husband.

“Exactly,” Rocco says. “And aren’t we an army!” he yells at the kids standing there mutely. He pulls a long curved knife from his belt. A Sicilian relic. As a youth he visited Sicily with his parents, both deceased now. The uncles apprehensively observe as he lifts the knife and stabs the watermelon. He rocks the blade back and forth, opening an oozy red slit in the rind. He bends to it then he abruptly stiffens upright, holding up the dripping knife.

“What’s wrong?” asks Aunt Teresa. Rocco shakes his head. His lips and jaw twitch. He’s building up to something. Everyone fears what that might be. They steel themselves. But just when it seems he’s going to flip out, he bursts into tears, shoulders jerking, sobs piercing the air. No one attempts to console him, not even Aunt Teresa. Head bowed, Rocco skulks off to his station wagon. Everyone is silent for a long moment. Then Uncle Ugo inspects the watermelon, pulling away from it with a scrunched face.

“It’s bad,” he says. “Fat Man’s gone bad.”



**Bill Diamond** is a curious traveler and writer from Colorado where the Rocky Mountains are an inspiration and distraction. He writes for catharsis and to try and figure it all out.

### **Dams Fail from Within**

Kent was an engineer down to his DNA. The structured work and disciplined approach fit his personality. Solid and stolid. Less attuned to the emotional side of life, he was straightforward and acted based upon observable facts, data and precise calculations. His work was committed to building sound structures that were useful and added to society. Kent believed you could control the environment through use of strong materials and quality construction.

He had the same approach to the rest of his life. Kent forged relationships on a bedrock of strong principles and pure intentions, especially, loyalty and trust.

He practiced them in friendships, family and his marriage to Ingrid. Kent assumed those he loved did as well. It made him a reliable and supportive community pillar. Everyone knew Kent was a protective dam against the buffeting of life's inevitable trials and perils.

Then, Ingrid betrayed him.

The emotional earthquake eroded his foundation and the shockwaves fractured his soul. Aftershocks of pain and regret further weakened him. The new fissures sapping his spirit and beliefs were hidden beneath his unchanged surface.

The first signs were subtle. Her treachery undermined Kent's confidence. There were small cracks in his calm demeanor. Too inconspicuous for others to offer support or trigger repair work.

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No one saw the collapse coming.

When the disintegration occurred, it was complete. He crumbled and his life washed away.



Photo by Donald Johanson

**Robin Stratton** is the author of seven novels, including one which was a National Indie Excellence Book Award finalist (*On Air*, Mustang Press, 2011), three collections of poetry and short fiction, and a writing guide. A four-time Pushcart Prize nominee, she's been published in *Word Riot*, *63 Channels*, *Antithesis Common*, *Poor Richard's Almanac(k)*, *Blink-Ink*, *Pig in a Poke*, *Chick Flicks*, *Up the Staircase*, *Shoots and Vines*, and many others. Since 2004 she's been Acquisitions Editor for Big Table Publishing Company, Senior Editor of *Boston Literary Magazine* since 2009, and she was Director of the Newton Writing and Publishing Center until she moved from Boston to San Francisco in 2018. Her latest book, *Three Sister Stories*, won the 2022 Pinnacle Book Achievement Award for Women's Fiction. Visit her at [www.robinstratton.com](http://www.robinstratton.com)

### Big Secret

For about an hour I listen to my friend confess in great detail his Big Secret: since 2009, he has been having an affair with a woman he met at work. What started out as a flirtation turned hot, but since both were married, they called it off before anything happened. Daily run-ins at the office were inevitable, however, and it became more and more difficult to keep things at bay. They were both employed in positions where overnight traveling was not unexpected and decided to lie to their spouses and meet at a hotel. The guilt nearly killed me, he says, it literally nearly killed me. Also, the excitement, which turned out to be justified, as the sex was over the top spectacular. For two days they did nothing but stay in bed and order room service. The *Do Not Disturb* sign hung on the door while inside champagne flowed, oysters were devoured, and amid cries of bliss and sweet intimate conversation, they realized that they belonged together. Their spouses, they agreed, were decent people from whom they'd grown apart: we share the

same emotional distance, he says; we deserve to be happy. The way things are now? Not fair to any of us. I keep saying Wow! and Uh huh and oh wow, yeah. It has taken me completely by surprise that this mild-mannered community college math teacher I've known for over a decade is leading a secret life of smoldering passion. What else don't I know about him? About anyone? About my own husband? Do we have emotional distance? Do we? Oh my god, *do we?*





**Piper Pugh** is an emerging writer and educator, currently living by the lake. Her poems and flash appear in *The Citron Review*, *50-Word Stories*, and *Humans of the World*.

### Station

Eugene accosts me on a nearly empty train car outside of London. Really, he just pulls out my headphones and asks to read my journal. I am annoyed, but he's old, so I let him.

Soon is my stop. I don't get off because Eugene's son. Eugene's son who he rarely sees. Because it's not dying or the fear of dying but the terrifying thing of not fearing dying anymore. The war. Because Eugene wanted to be a writer but became a veterinarian. Because he wrote a whole book once but had to get reasonable instead.

After a while, he says *soon is my stop*. He says, *now don't you stop*, and I say, *now don't you either*. He says he's going to do something about that book in his attic. *Life gave me you like a kick in the ass*. Life gave me him like a ghost.

Eugene leaves with his rolling cart. I have his number, but I don't call then, and I don't call later.

I can't bring myself to.

I only want to see him the way I want to see him, pulling that dust-caked binder from the attic, maybe sharing his words with his son.



**Bill Brymer** lives in Louisville, Kentucky. A Pushcart-nominated poet, his work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Sheila-Na-Gig Online*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Southwest Review*, *Poetry South*, *Yearling*, and other publications.

### Smarts

The dog runs ahead, down the hill toward the park's small lake and the duck that's paddling around, minding his own business. His owner thinks about calling him back — she didn't bring a towel to dry off a wet dog, but after having spent the past hour in the car driving out from the city, the dog needs to burn off energy. So she lets him go and even laughs as he leaps in with a splash and starts to swim out, his head bobbing above the dark water. The duck watches the dog approach, casually turns his back to him and paddles away. The dog swims harder. The duck scoots ahead. Again and again, the dog single-mindedly closes in, the duck, teasingly out of reach, leads him into deeper and deeper water. The owner, watching this dance from her perch on the hill, feels a bead of sweat slide down her neck, cold and bothersome. She calls the dog's name, says *Come* in her sternest voice. But by this time the dog is exhausted from the chase — he lets out a frightened yip, coughs on a gulp of water, and slips beneath the surface. The duck flaps his wings, tucks them against his sides, rides the ripple spreading across the surface toward lake's edge where it almost disturbs the bale of turtles sunning on a fallen branch.



**Kalliopy Paleos** studied contemporary American poetry at SUNY Brockport. She recently completed her third full-length novel translation from Greek. Poetry publications include pieces in *Mediterranean Poetry* and Gnashing Teeth Press; her prose has been included in *ERGON Magazine for Greek-American Arts and Letters*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Flash Boulevard*, and is also forthcoming in *The Mackinaw Journal of Prose Poetry*.

### **Fairy Bird Shares Her Concerns About the Afterlife**

You can't miss Quick Mama's Gentle Neon Cemetery, right next to Fat Daddy-O's Portuguese Laundry. Just turn left into the alley with the balconies, climb up whichever one you like best and find the magic word on the balustrade. Then the Undertaker sh'bop-bops over to Daddy-O's where Grandma Spectacular is watching her television program behind the counter. He'll ask if any strangers forgot anything in the dryer to use for burial clothes. Got to be six month or more ago. That's policy. You never know who might come back, looking for leftover incidents and lingering accidents hidden in their blouses and underwear. Or you can ask to get buried naked if Quick Mama says it's ok.

I've been eyeing the Gentle Neon myself. Don't want to slip down ahead of time, even if Quick Mama says it's comfortable as that old *I Dream of Genie* bottle. Uncle Johnny told me to wait for him here before I go, but that was 150 years ago and still no sign. Nothing in the mailbox either.

And just last night Grandma Spectacular up and started bawling. Ain't seen that before. Did you know that after all them go-go boots she worn out and all them gentlemen callers in the parking lot, *the* Henry Ford designed a genuine

plush back seat in her honor? Yep, for their finest family sedan! That's Grammy Spekky all right. Maybe I can have her job at Daddy-O's when she goes Neon. Quick Mama says the whole jist is you never know what's next. I guess I can wait and see in the meantime.



**Michael Minassian** is a Contributing Editor for *Verse-Virtual*, an online poetry journal. His short stories have appeared recently in *Bending Genres*, *Impspired*, *Culterate*, and *10 By 10*. He is the author of three poetry collections and a chapbook of poems. His new collection of poems, *A Thousand Pieces of Time* is due for release in 2025 (Sheila-Na-Gig Editions). For more information: <https://michaelminassian.com>

### **You Have the Right**

I look out my bedroom window and see Doug, my neighbor, climb out the second story window onto his roof. It's a bright April morning in South Florida, so I know he's not out there to put up hurricane shutters. He walks back and forth then sits down facing the lake that butts up against our back yards. I wonder what he's doing. Doug is a former homicide detective and always seemed like the sharpest guy in the neighborhood.

Lately, though, he's been acting weird. A couple of days ago he stopped me at my front door and asked where I was on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1999. "I don't know, that was over twenty-five years ago. What's up Doug?" I ask. But he spins around and marches back to his house without saying another word.

The green parrots, refugees from the last tropical storm, notice Doug and start complaining. I can tell they're not happy from the loud squawking and the way they flap their wings. Doug's black lab, Briscoe, wakes up, starts barking, and now everything is clamor and commotion. I grab my cellphone and head outside. When Doug sees me he gets to his feet and points in my direction. At first,

I can't make out what he is saying, but then I realize he's reading me my rights, "You have the right to remain silent..."

The next day, I watch Doug drive away in his new SUV, Briscoe riding shotgun. When I walk into my backyard, I hear someone weeping. Through a hole in the fence I see Diane, Doug's wife, sitting and hugging her knees inside Briscoe's cage. I call 911 and the cops show up and use a bolt cutter to take off a padlock on the door to the cage. I invite Diane into my kitchen for some coffee, and she tells me Doug pushed her inside and said she'd have to stay "in solitary." Diane says she's had enough and asks me to call a taxi to take her to the airport. She hands me the keys to the house as she gets in the cab, saying she will contact a real estate agent soon.

In the morning, I wake up to the sound of sirens, bright yellow and red flames, and a thick bloom of smoke from next door. The house is a total loss and the cops put out an APB for Doug, but they never find him. After a few weeks, the insurance sends a company to cart away the debris. The only thing left standing is the fence around the swimming pool.

I realize I have the key to the gate and go for a swim every morning, all the while keeping an eye out for Doug. The water is a calming blue, and I float on my back, letting my mind drift back to that night in 1999 and smile to myself.



**Hugh Behm-Steinberg** is the author of *Animal Children*, published by Nomadic/Black Lawrence Press. His short story "Taylor Swift" won the Barthelme Prize from *Gulf Coast*, and his fiction can be found most recently in *The Glacier*, *Hex*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Heavy Feather Review* and *Your Impossible Voice*. He lives in Barcelona Spain.

### **Wolf Clothes**

It's winter; the snow is piled up. I haven't gone to the laundromat or visited the dry cleaners in ages: all I have left to wear are my wolf clothes. On my way to work, I don't mind; sauntering I blend in with the dirty snow, nobody pays attention. But on the floor I can feel the stares, the nervous laughs, like I've just confirmed to them who I really am. In my suit and tie, my business costume, I'm just a worker doing his job, but in my wolf clothes? My manager asks me to meet him in his office.

I can smell his nervousness, now that he's shut the door. He thinks he can just chew me out, or lecture me on professionalism. He doesn't realize it yet, but he just separated himself from his pack, it's just us two, and only one of us is wearing their wolf clothes.

But then he opens the drawer of his desk, the big one with all the files. He pulls out a wolf suit. I wear clothes, but he has a suit.

I watch him undress. I watch him put it on.

He thinks we're going to get along great, now that we both know who we are. He shows me his teeth; he thinks he's just smiling, looking good standing there in his shiny wolf suit.

I climb on top of his desk, I push aside the phone and the monitor, the cute pictures of his family, the various printouts and mail he still gets in his wire inbox, the award he got for being such a good boy.

I show him *my* teeth.

And then we howl.

And that's when some VP knocks on the door and lets himself in. He asks us very nicely about the Dunham account. My manager looks at me: I'm the one who's standing on the desk after all.

I tell the VP very nicely we'll have the report ready by the end of the day.





**K.R. Van Horn** is writing full-time from an oceanfront patio in the tropics. That's not true. In reality, he has kids to raise and bills to pay. But the writing never stops. He lives in South Korea with his family, things, and ideas. Follow him at @krvanhorn on X and Bluesky.

- Si! Amore! -

Beneath a sleepy Tuscan sun, the hills rolled like soft sighs, golden with wildflowers and fat-cheeked grapes. Two young tourists wandered, one with a poet's heart and the other with a guidebook.

They crested a hill, and there, like a secret scribbled in sunlight, sat a girl under a crooked fig tree. She was reading something ancient and beautiful. Her dress waltzed with the breeze. The poet-boy froze, heart pounding.

"I'm going to marry that girl," he whispered.

His friend snorted. "You can't even order gelato in Italian."

"I'll learn."

With bravery borrowed from the wine they'd sipped at lunch, he approached, his friend following close behind. The girl looked up, bemused, as if they were right on schedule.

His friend cleared his throat. "Ciao, bella... eh, um... questo è mio amico," he gestured to the poet, who grinned like a dope. "Lui... eh... lui pensa... tu sei... come si dice... bellissima, come luna?"

A distant church bell chimed softly, approving their nonsense.

The poet, eager, flipped open their dog-eared dictionary and added, "Io... sono... in love with you?"

She giggled bright as birdsong. "Amore?" she teased.

"Si! Amore!" he said, and clutched his chest, all theater and truth.

The friend nodded solemnly like a monk and offered her a slightly squished apricot, a humble token of sincerity.

She folded her book. "You boys are ridiculous."

"You speak English," he blinked.

"Of course. But watching you duel with language... it was too entertaining to interrupt."

The poet-boy flushed.

"You're both very brave," she smiled, patting the ground beside her

The sun slipped westward, casting long shadows over the hills, and they sat beneath the fig tree, passing a crumpled bag of sugared almonds and translating each other's laughter.

And though no wedding came that day, something curious and golden bloomed.



**Zary Fekete** grew up in Hungary. He has a debut novella (*Words on the Page*) out with DarkWinter Lit Press and a short story collection (*To Accept the Things I Cannot Change: Writing My Way Out of Addiction*) out with Creative Texts. He enjoys books, podcasts, and many many many films. Twitter and Instagram.

### **Bird of the Between**

I found him near the alder roots, wind-tossed and whimpering, a scrap of feather and bone too proud to beg. His eye caught mine...not pleading, not wild...just... ancient. Like a curse. Like a gift.

The Turul, they say, is a bird that flew before language. Carved into cliffs, sewn into flags, he chooses rulers and carries dreams in his talons. But what ruler limps under birch leaves, bleeding quietly into snowmelt? What sovereign lets a girl cup him in trembling hands and wrap his wing with thread?

I sat beside him each day, offering crusts and quiet. He took both. The wind never touched us. I whispered things: my father's silence, the ache behind my knees, the way the stars look like undone buttons when I cry.

Once, he blinked slowly. I felt his eyes behind mine.

They told me not to name him. Not to tether wild things. But already he was stitched into my shadow. Already he was coiled under my ribs.

Other birds have flown these stories.

The Phoenix immolates, but is reborn...always alone, always ash-slicked and gleaming.

The Simurgh lives at the edge of all things, cradling kings and madmen alike, waiting to be believed in.

The Garuda devours serpents and carries prayers in the folds of his wings.

And the Turul? He appears to the ones who do not seek him. He waits in the breath between asking and being asked.

He grew stronger. One morning, he beat his wings and the dust lifted from the porch like in spring-time. He looked at me. Not like a pet looks, not even like a god looks...but like a mirror might look, after years of being covered.

"You may go," I said, though he did not need my permission.

He did not bow, or cry, or burst into fire.

He flew.

Not high, not far. Just enough to prove the sky would have him back.

And my heart...my pale, ordinary heart...cracked like a seed. I watched him until he was wind-shaped and vanishing.

Some say I imagined him. But the porch still smells like cedar and breath. My fingers still curl around an invisible pulse.

In dreams, I sometimes see feathers falling, and each one has a name.

Simurgh. Phoenix. Dove. Turul.

Bird of the between. Wing of the unseen. Friend of the forgotten.

They land softly in my palms.

I let them go.