



10 BY 10

FLASH FICTION STORIES



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Editor



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Amy Grech has sold over 100 stories to various anthologies and magazines including: *10 by 10 Flash Fiction Stories*, *Apex Magazine*, *Even in the Grave*, *Gamut Magazine*, *Punk Noir Magazine*, *Roi Fainéant Press*, *Tales from the Canyons of the Damned*, *Yellow Mama*, and many others. Her published poetry chapbook is *A Shadow of Your Former Self*. She is a 2X Pushcart nominee. Amy is an Active Member of the Horror Writers Association who lives in Forest Hills, Queens. You can connect with her on Bluesky: [@amygrech.bsky.social](https://amygrech.bsky.social), Medium: <https://crimsonscreams.medium.com>, X: https://x.com/amy_grech, or visit her website: <https://www.crimsonscreams.com>.

All I Want for Christmas

Peter clutched his mother's hand while they stood in line. He could hardly wait to tell Santa what he wanted. His mother pulled him along when the line inched forward.

The mall was mobbed. Mrs. Wishfort hated standing in line every year so her son could sit on some impostor's lap and whisper a fleeting wish in his ear.

Peter already knew what he was going to say to the bearded man in the red and white suit: "Santa, will you bring my Daddy back?"

"Where did he go?"

"Away."

He felt his mother pulling him closer to the only man who could make his wish true.

Peter yawned. "How much longer, Mommy?"

Mrs. Wishfort gazed at the red-headed boy standing next to her and frowned. Peter looked just like his father. He had James' piercing green eyes. When her son stared, she wished she had to courage to tell him the reason Daddy wasn't coming back because he didn't love Mommy anymore.

With Santa just an arm's length away, Peter wanted to reach out and grab him.

Mrs. Wishfort inched up. He was next in line. Peter grinned and watched the blonde girl in front of them hop off the bearded man's lap.

"Don't ask Santa for something expensive. Money is tight." She warned and patted his head.

"My present won't cost much," he said with a grin.

Peter let go of his mother's hand wiped his sweaty one on her coat. He *knew* Santa would bring Daddy back.

The bearded man in the red and white suit invited the next little boy to share his secret. It was finally Peter's turn.

"Hello, son. What do you want for Christmas?" His green eyes twinkled.

He stared at Santa with a straight face and said: "All I want for Christmas is my Daddy to come home." Peter noticed a tiny scar in the shape of a star right below Santa's right eye. His father had an identical mark.

The bearded man scratched his chin. "Where did he go?"

"Away," the boy whispered, forlorn.

"How long has he been gone?"

Peter frowned. "Too long."

"And you want me to bring him back?" Santa winked.

The little boy sitting on Santa's lap nodded.

"I'll bring your Daddy back, but there's no telling how long he'll stay."

"Thank you, Santa! Daddy will stay, I *know* he will!" He hugged the bearded man in the red and white suit.

"Merry Christmas, Peter!" Santa hugged him back, hard.

"Merry, Christmas, Santa!" Peter climbed down and ran over to his mother.

He took her hand and squeezed it.

"Did Santa to bring you what you wanted?"

"He sure did!"



Paul Beckman's latest flash collection is *Becoming Mirsky* (Cervana Press) a fictional memoir in flash was a finalist for the 2024 Indie Book Awards. His stories have appeared in *Fiction, Litro, Pank, Playboy, WINK, Airgonaut, Jellyfish Review, 10x10, The Wax Paper, Monkey* and *Fictive Dream*. He had a story in the *2020 National Flash Fiction Day Anthology*, was nominated for 2021 Best of the Web, and in the *2022 Best Micro Fiction Anthology*. Paul also started the Fbomb flash fiction series in NY's KGB Bar and curated it for nine years.

Andrea's Senses

Andrea poured herself a cup of black coffee and spit it out. She made another and had the same reaction. She was a coffee snob. She smelled it and while it didn't smell bad it didn't smell like her regular coffee.

That night her five senses got together to talk about their lives and the possibility of forming a union.

Taste went first and told her story of the coffee and her Lean Cuisine dinner that she couldn't finish.

Nose shared how the smells she once loved had shifted but she didn't want a union.

Hearing complained about Andrea's habit of cranking her iPhone up to max volume which she was sure to bring on early deafness.

Vision was angry overall at Andrea who, since breaking up with her boyfriend six months ago, turned into a real slob. Andrea, once a sharp dresser, now tossed her clothes in a pile on the bedroom floor and rummaged through the pile every day to find something to wear. She was a yes on union.

And Touch was a definite union vote. She couldn't even touch a man's arm without cringing these days.

The vote was 4 to 1 but it had to be unanimous. They finally persuaded Nose to join the others and if they couldn't help Andrea get back to her old self, they would just shut down their senses until she came to hers.

When Andréa got to work there was a vase with a dozen white roses waiting for her. There was also a card. *My Dearest Andrea, these past six months have been terrible. I miss you so much and want to try and rekindle our romance. Call me. Love, Alex.*

Andrea was touched, and happy to hear from Alex. Unconsciously she smelled the roses, and the room was filled with perfume.

She called Alex and hearing his baritone voice made her smile and bang her knees together. They agreed to meet for drinks that evening.

When Andrea walked into the bar, she saw Alex across the room and walked over. They stood looking at each other and Andrea thought that Alex was not as good-looking as she remembered but he was still okay. They hugged, lightly at first and then a lover's hug and she found his usual after shave that she loved once, now a bit cloying. She had to break from the hug and took his face in her hands and gave him a big, long kiss. Andrea felt uncomfortable touching him as they hugged but expected that because it'd been a while, but then when she held his face to kiss him, her palms sweated and she knew that all her senses couldn't be wrong, so she said, "I just stopped in to say goodbye," and then turned and walked out into the welcoming evening breeze.



Cindy Rosmus is a diehard Jersey girl who 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*, *Punk Noir*, *Rock and a Hard Place* and *Gemini*. Her story “Toast, Jello, Tea” was nominated for both the 2025 Pushcart and Best Small Fictions prize. 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.

Unmasked

For Bernice H.

1983

“Wait!” my best friend Andrea said. “Check this out.”

Trouble, I smelled, right off. Lately, she’d dragged me into too much. Even for “nice” Jewish girls.

That Tower Records store, on East Fourth and Broadway? In the window was this huge photo. That band, KISS, with the weird, demonic makeup? Well, here they were, without it! “Unmasked . . .”

“Is that all?” I said.

Lots of people were crowded around the window. What was the big deal? Four guys who looked like anybody else. Except . . .

“Yeah?” Andrea said. “And they’re all . . . ugly!”

This collective gasp, around us. Like from an angry mob. Over some band. Still . . .

“Andy!” I whispered, “Come on!” But she wouldn’t budge.

“That Big Tongue guy . . .” Smirking, she turned away. “Needs that spider face! Right, Helena?” she said, as I dragged her away.

Just like last weekend, they followed us. Not the same bleary-eyed biker chicks, but still...

“Who you lookin’ at?” one biker chick had yelled.

“Ugly?” This Tower Records chick yelled. “You’re ugly , , , Helena!”

Now I gasped. Just like last time, I got blamed.

“Looking at you!” Andrea had told that biker chick. “And it’s not easy.”

A shrink, Andrea needed. Since we were kids, she acted weird. Sometimes she forgot stuff. I stuck by her, ‘cos maybe I needed to protect her.

“Right, Helena?” Andrea had said. Before we ran for our lives.

I was always stuck in the middle.

And fed up with it.

They kept surrounding us, these two chicks, and one guy. The leader chick in front.

It wasn’t hot out, but I was sweating. My red hair was super-long, past my hips. Always swinging, like the rock star I wished I was.

“Hel-en-a!” she sang out, from behind me.

I knew what was coming.

When she grabbed my hair, rage took over. I turned and rammed my fist in her face. She was caught off guard. Hands still filled with my hair, she fell backwards, with me on top of her.

“Yeah!” Andrea yelled but didn’t budge to help.

That smack had felt so good, I gave the chick another, wanting to feel bone breaking. But I wasn’t that strong. Still, she untangled herself from my hair, scrambled to her feet, and ran.

Her friends, even the guy, had already left.

“What was that all about?” Andrea said, as we walked back a few blocks.

We wound up back at Tower Records. A different group of KISS fans had gathered, gazing into the window at their “Unmasked” photo.

Their song, “Rock and Roll All Nite,” was a good one, I remembered.

This time Andrea kept her mouth shut. Her eyes on the photo, she even smiled.

Ugly? I thought, almost laughing. Nah, none of those guys were ugly.

In fact, one was real pretty.



Andrew Boylan has yet to find a summer night that smells as good as Ohio's. He lives by a river in New England where he writes horror screenplays. Find him on all socials: @deserthorror

Summer, Dayton, Ohio, 1996

I drove twenty-seven hours so we could rollerblade to a crematorium because she was convinced dead people smelled like ketchup. This was something she told me several times over the phone. She had yet to steer me wrong. We had sex first, when I arrived at the house she rented with seven other girls from the school. We always had sex first. We couldn't wait to have sex. It's a good idea to have sex before rollerblading through a cemetery to smell the dead bodies whether they smell like condiments or not.

The hills were steep and fast. Very few people visited that cemetery, she explained, so it was safe to take the downslope with abandon. Just before I let loose on the descent, she warned me how the long grass at the edges of the pavement whispered the secrets of the dead awaiting their turn in the incinerator. People don't tend to go fast in graveyards, so the voices aren't always clear. At top speed, it was easier to follow the entire logic of a story. She didn't know how the grass absorbs the story.

At the right velocity, the whispers turn words and phrases about a life lived, not always well, sometimes with intention, often put-upon. There was this one man the grass had a lot to say about.

For right now, I want to remember the feeling of her firm body in my arms after the long car ride. That smell of ketchup in my nose as we fly past the brutal, concrete structure where they burned all those stories.



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 five poetry collections, including *A Thousand Pieces of Time* which was released in October 2025 (Sheila-Na-Gig Editions). For more information: <https://michaelminassian.com>

The Empty House

No matter how hard she tried to look away, her gaze always returned to the empty house across the street.

She thought back to last year, her neighbors now gone, fighting in the front yard, toe to toe, shout for shout. Their two children on the porch begging them to stop. Neighbors on either side standing on their own lawns, cell phones in hand.

That evening, she described the scene to her husband, watched his eyes flick away. After dinner they sat and watched the news. Later, she played a few Schumann songs on the piano, while he did the Times' crossword. A stillness fell over the house. No one spoke until he looked out the window. "A police car just pulled up in front of their house," he said in a quiet voice.

Her anger disappeared when she stepped into their back yard. An orange-colored cat ran across the yard then leapt over the fence, and a blue jay cried out in warning. The air seemed static, charged with ions, as if a quick thunderstorm had come and gone. She looked up as a cloud passed in front of the moon, painting a mustache on its surface. She played back the earlier scene of her neighbors arguing, their fingers pointing, wondered why the pointing wasn't in the direction of their house.



Tony Press tries to pay attention and sometimes he does. His story collection, *Crossing the Lines*, was published by *Big Table*. About 150 of his stories and poems can be found in print and online. He cherishes walking the streets of Brisbane (the one in California, USA). He swears he once played catch with Juan Marichal, and, on a different day, chatted with Alexander Kerensky.

Chasing The Turtle

Ten days till Dallas and we still don't have a car. Nicky's on the lookout but nothing yet. He's the best but if he doesn't score soon we'll need to bring my brother in. But nobody wants him. He's the biggest know-it-all in town and that's a freaking long drive.

Nine now, and still no ride. No Nicky, neither. Jane said he got busted at the Motel Six. He's usually careful but he's been hitting the hemp a little heavy, and that's not good. When the judge sees his priors, there's going to be bail to pay. In big numbers.

Eight hundred bucks, that's what I've got in the bank. I've never had more, never dreamed I'd have that much. It's been a good season writing papers for the rich losers in my Comp. Class. Only the semester's over and budget cuts wiped out summer session. Nick's on his own.

Seven days, like any week, but this one is flying. It's like when you're chilling on spring break, or worse, desperate for a ride that doesn't include your brother. Good news, he said he's not coming. Bad news, neither is his truck. The odds we pull off this trip? Stinko.

"Six Days on the Road," blah, blah, blah. I remember my Dad playing Taj Mahal all the time, especially in the backyard with the speakers stretching from the kitchen, those long orange extension cords. I always loved that line: "I'm gonna see my baby tonight." Now I'm thinking of Jane.

Five of us were going until Albert dropped out. I knew he would. That leaves three, 'cuz Nicky's otherwise booked – sorry, Dude – just me and Joey and Jane. Without Albert, maybe sweet Jane'll give me a chance. "Take a chance on me," I'll say to her (I cannot sing).

Four days. One thousand and one miles, according to Google maps, and just over fifteen hours driving time. Hard to drive without a car. Damn that Nicky. Should we hitch? Dad used to tell me about thumbing his way across the states. Endlessly. I'm not up for that.

Three lost souls, we sit on my steps, ringing our hands. What the hell does "ringing our hands" even mean? Now Joey's getting cold feet. Thing is, he might get a job that starts next week and he's afraid of not getting back in time. Cold feet, worried hands.

"Two for the road," I whisper to Jane, when it's just us, Joey gone home. "What do you think?" She smiles at me, almost kisses me, and my body quivers. Then she does kiss me. Holy, holy, they ought to write songs like this. Then I cut the thinking.

One day, Jane and I will get to Texas. We kept the tickets, never used, for *Philosopher Turtle* at The Curtain Club. The band broke up after that Dallas show and two of them joined the seminary. We're still here, playing old people music and loving it. We're almost fifty.



Gary Fincke's latest flash collection is *The History of the Baker's Dozen* (Pelekinesis 2024). His newest book is *After Arson: New and Selected Essays* (Madville 2025). He is co-editor of the annual anthology *Best Microfiction*.

Dentistry

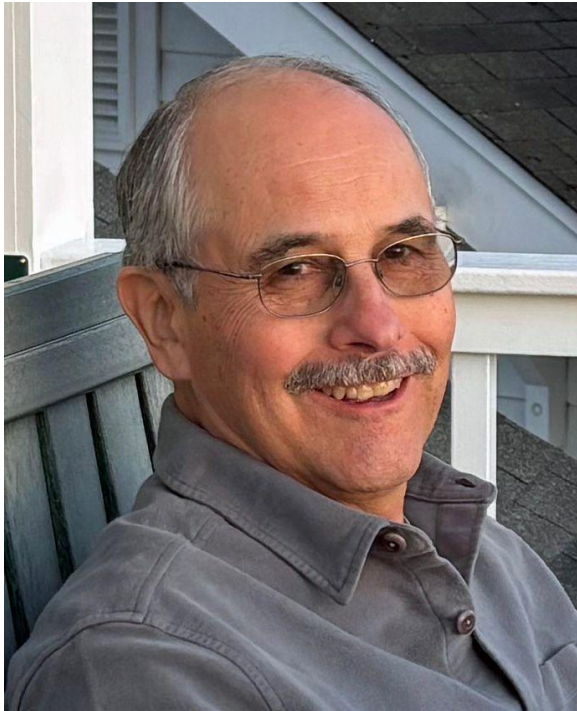
During first grade, even the Gebert twins, who lived without electricity, woke to quarters, baby teeth gone to heaven as the second chance for our mouths began. We heard canines and molars, their places reserved like the spaces for teachers' cars.

Those teeth were our first priced parts to vanish, following our clipped hair and nails to where the sum of us was stored like secret sins. One of us loved the wound that never scabbed, his tongue turned left and up. Beside him sat a girl who used one finger to explore each damp bruise.

Miss Hessek, our teacher, brought her mother's tooth tales to school like pretzels, passing them out while we waited for the final Friday bell. There was a woman, she said, who lost teeth during the births of each child, their fortunes foretold by the size of her cavities. Our mothers, we said, had full sets of teeth. Flossing would save us. Fluoride. Dentists.

But all of us wanted our mouths to empty after we listened to Miss Hessek's mother's story about a boy from Silesia who, when he lost his last tooth, grew a golden one. Hope, she told us, lay under the gums like a buried treasure. Each night, before bed, mothers examined their sons and daughters, prospecting for gold, and those children held their mouths wide open like nestlings as if they contained something as coveted as flight.

At last, she told us the stories she'd heard from her grandmother, who was born in a country whose name was impossible to pronounce. Miss Hessek said that her grandmother insisted protection is what children need. Burning the tooth, her first story said, shields us from evil curses. When we laughed, saying nobody believes that now, she said, "Listen, there's more. It's not witches that curse you, it's those you love." When the room went quiet, she said, "Your teeth, those ancient stories say, need to be buried for you to be safe in the afterlife." We asked where that country was, but Miss Hessek refused to spell it. Hope or money, she said. Choose.



Edward Ferri, Jr. lives near where he grew up on a "non profit" farm on the dry side of the Santa Cruz Mountains in California when bailing wire, gumption, and spit were the "apps" of the day. He is a tribal member of **the** Citizen Potawatomi Nation of Shawnee, OK and is a strong believer in the spirit of Boo Radley. His poetry has been published in multiple journals and anthologies. He is the author of *GLASSY AIR*, *Poems Kindled in the Long Shadow of a Lone Motorcycle* and *The Essential CAFÉ EDMOVIA*, *Cup of Joe Poetry for Cup of Joe Folks*. He enjoys riding a Triumph motorcycle between stanzas.

Luck

Did I ever tell you about back in '67 when my old clapped-out motorcycle's lights went out on a rainy black night coming down the twisty Hecker Pass in the Santa Cruz mountains? I was headed for a mountain tavern that we called **Mom's** run by an older lady named Loraine. We all affectionately called her "Sweet Loraine" after a song by *Country Joe and the Fish*, but mostly because she served us beer, with a two beer limit, before we turned 21 if we had a draft card. And of course, behaved ourselves.

Anyway, I was going downhill into that top tight switchback just below the summit a little too fast and I, a totally inexperienced teenager, locked the rear brake on the slick pavement and the engine quit, which meant that the generator quit spinning and therefore it quit producing electricity and my lights went totally black. Instantly, I was riding blind in cave like darkness with my engine eerily dead silent and the locked rear tire making some sick skidding sound on the wet pavement. Fortunately, overcoming my knee-jerk braking panic, I took my foot off the rear brake, the wheel started to spin, the engine fired up and my lights came on just in time to avoid going into the ditch now illuminated straight in front of me. Somehow I managed to stay on the road and continued on. Pure young dumb luck that incident was.

I guess that scary event was a combination of rider skill... or the lack of it and a lot of luck. I always remember after surviving that tunnel of darkness thrill that life on a motorcycle was full of variations and more complicated than just riding skill. I began to grasp that there were other nebulous factors in life... or death, with contributing factors including luck. And having an occasional warm tailwind of good luck was a wondrous and beautiful thing, almost spiritual, when it blew your way. Especially, if you owned an old clapped-out motorcycle and had that riding across America with a sleeping bag fever and a draft card stamped **1-A** smoldering in your wallet during the Vietnam War. For starters, I was lucky **Mom's** had a two beer limit, but *really* lucky to have drawn a barely high enough draft lottery number during my **1-A** year of draft exposure and not get drafted. That was pure luck, lottery luck.

The Sheriff eventually got wise to Sweet Loraine's underage draft card drinking exceptions and **Mom's** was shut down before the war ended. Later, I learned that our "**Mom's**" tavern was **The Whitehurst Inn**. Long gone now, but for the few of us two beer limit draft card holders who are still around, it is still **Mom's** to us and we remember our "Sweet Loraine" and the beers shared with our draft card buddies who drew the unlucky lottery numbers and never came home to **Mom's**. We remember them the most... the unlucky ones.



Robert Gordon Spencer, MS, MBA, EdD, is a U.S. Navy veteran, higher education scholar, and children’s book author from Jackson, Tennessee. His fiction and essays blend humor, faith, and family life with lessons learned from service and everyday moments.

The Lesson in Line

Saturday lunches were their tradition. Just Dad and Emma. No siblings, no work calls—just fries, milkshakes, and “life talks,” as he liked to call them.

Today’s talk was supposed to be about *patience*.

The line at the counter stretched halfway to the door. Emma bounced on her toes like a jackhammer in sneakers. “Why can’t we just go somewhere else?”

“Because patience,” Dad said, “means waiting calmly for something you want.”

She stared up at the menu. “I want a cheeseburger. And I’m not calm.”

He smiled. “That’s why we practice.”

Two minutes later: “Dad, I think I’m done practicing.”

He checked his watch. “It’s been two minutes.”

“Yeah, that’s a long time in kid years.”

The man ahead of them kept changing his order—first no onions, then extra onions, then something about “half ketchup.” Dad felt his own patience thinning like an old credit card.

Emma tilted her head. “Is this part of the lesson?”

“Yes,” he said tightly. “Real patience means not letting little things bother you.”

The man in front dropped his wallet. Twice.

Emma whispered, “You look upset.”

“I’m *demonstrating* patience,” he said through a smile that looked like dental pain.

When they finally reached the counter, the cashier asked, “Sorry for the wait! What can I get you?”

Dad exhaled. “Two cheeseburgers, one small fry—”

Emma cut in. “And a large chocolate milkshake, please. He earned it for not yelling.”

The cashier laughed. “Long day?”

“Just a lesson in patience,” Dad muttered.

They carried their tray to a booth. Emma unwrapped her burger with surgical precision, taking forever on purpose.

“You know,” she said between bites, “I think patience is kind of like ketchup.”

He blinked. “How’s that?”

“It comes out slow when you want it fast, but if you hit the bottle too hard, it makes a mess.”

He stared at her, speechless.

“Pretty good, right?” she said, grinning.

He nodded, smiling now for real. “Better than anything I said.”

“Don’t worry, Dad. You’ll learn.”

She slid the milkshake toward him. “Here—patience deserves a sip.”

He raised the straw like a toast. “And next week,” he said, “we’re learning silence.” “Good luck with that,” she said, slurping loudly.



Madeline Salocks lives in California, has had careers in music and in software and has always enjoyed writing and has been doing more of it recently. Her pieces have appeared in *Musical Opinion Magazine*, *TrailGroove*, *California Community Health and Education Initiative*, *East Bay Magazine*, and other places.

Side Performance

Sitting in an intimate and elegant recital hall, I've been enjoying an evening of chamber music where the final piece on the program is the Shostakovich Piano Trio #2. The violinist, cellist, and pianist walk out on stage, take their seats, tune for a moment, and then no sooner do they start the first movement than I notice a man sitting in the middle of the second row waving his arms around. *Oh dear, is there a problem?* No, I almost immediately realize there isn't, at least not for him. No, he's decided to grace everyone with some air piano--and to the hilt, "playing" in the most flamboyant manner, with gestures that couldn't be more exaggerated, gestures that the actual pianist on stage doesn't even remotely begin to approach. Hammering down on "chords" from great heights and flying through "passagework" to such an extent that he seriously encroaches on the space of the people to his left and right and I wonder if he might inadvertently take a swipe at someone. Tossing off ends of "phrases" with abandon, swaying and writhing, and throwing his head this way or that to coincide with "sforzandos". *OK, OK, we get it! You know the piece! Good for you, but we're here for the performance on the stage.* A woman seated directly behind him taps his shoulder, and when he turns to face her, she puts her index finger to her mouth with an angry "Shhhhhh!" *Well, he hasn't in fact made any noise, although there's certainly the concept of visual noise.* He ignores her though and continues the histrionics. Occasionally he takes a break from the "piano" and "conducts" for a while, but he doesn't miss a beat, and his "performance" doesn't end until the real performance ends.

When the concert is over, I happen to find myself walking out of the hall next to the air pianist and I can't help myself. "That was some excellent playing from all three musicians, and they kept their focus so well, unruffled by distractions. Great performance of the Shostakovich, wouldn't you agree?" "Thank you!" he replies.

Not what I expect, and I'm glad he's received a compliment.