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# 10 BY 10

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FLASH FICTION STORIES



NUMBER 20  
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**W**elcome 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.



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](http://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."