

NC WRITERS' NETWORK: WRITERS' MORNING OUT

August 14, 2026

FLASH PROSE

FLASH

John Dufresne defines flash fiction as “a narrative...that is

distilled,

cogent,

concentrated,

layered,

allusive,

textured,

insightful,

and unpredictable.

It's short but not shallow;

it is a reduced form to represent a larger, more complex story...

it offers the essential truth...”

From: *FLASH!: Writing the Very Short Story*

“For sale. Baby Shoes. Never Worn”

(Often attributed to Hemmingway, various versions appear as newspaper ads before he started writing and this story was attributed to Hemmingway after his death.)

Gardening Tips from the Great Beyond by Lisa H. Owens

Gramps stops digging, gazes skyward, eyes squinting against the morning sunlight. His lips move, and though I can't hear, I know he's arguing with Granny. She had (has) an opinion on... everything.

Storm clouds loom.

“Fine!” Gramps shouts, cheeks reddening. “Two feet apart, my foot,” he mutters, resetting holes, nevertheless, and the sun reemerges.

From Press 53.

<https://www.press53.com/>

Notes from Vegas Strip by Sebastian Matthews

... a land of canned music seeping nostalgically out of every bush. Young women wanting to accompany you in a photo, naked for pasties, a pair of panties, and a set of bunny ears. Elvis impersonator riding around drunk in a scooter cart and insulting passers-by. Ernest men dressed all in black broadcasting the word of Jesus on street corners. Yellow minis, giant hair, and his and her T-shirts, announcing “King” and “Queen.” Billboards like movie screens. The glitter and glare glancing across glass buildings backdrop by sure-bet blue. Overweight adults, lugging flagons of fluorescent Mardi Gras-style hurricanes. Freshly washed cars, passing dignified under a giant looping rollercoaster. Eager and desperate young men passing out flyers with a signature flare. A storm trooper next to a ninja turtle next to a Transformer next to a man sleeping on the sidewalk, his cardboard sign smudged, and illegible. A single, dancing blue M&M. And the grimy old man in the bright, orange T-shirt, announcing GIRLS GIRLS GIRLS GIRLS...

From Beyond Repair: A memoir in essays.

The Weight of Things by Kate Maruyama

I was 102 pounds when I went to my Junior Prom. I was 103 when I lost my virginity. I was 130 when I graduated college. I was 128 when I got married and 135 on my honeymoon. It was in Tuscany. I was 156 when I was five months pregnant. I was 156 after I lost the baby. I thought the hole left in me would have weighed more. I was 140 when I got pregnant again. I was 190 before I gave birth to my first child. I was 165 for the longest time. But I was all the way down to 150 when he left me. I was 140, a lovely, slim, but supple 140 when my daughter went off to college. I was 130 when they diagnosed me.

I am 102 pounds again, and still, he won't call.

From: *Gemini Magazine* 2009 Flash Fiction Contest Honorable Mention

<https://gemini-magazine.com/>

Lipstick by Sarah Freligh

We learned to paint our mouths kissable, but were taught not to. By the parish priest, by our mothers, by Seventeen magazine. Never on the first date, never more than one boy at a time, never below the neck. We practiced on the mirror and at slumber parties. When boys scratched on the window, we giggled and shivered. Only Lana slipped out, came back smeared and tight-lipped, full up with stories she wouldn't tell us. At school on Monday, we lipsticked the mirror in the third-floor girl's room: LANA SUCKS. Later we all learned. Later we all did it.

From: 100 Word Story

<https://100wordstory.org/>

Rain by Daniel Wallace

We live near the edge of a town near the edge of the sea far away from the wide world. The town is called Rain. It is a place beyond the progress of most, but for others merely a point of departure: this was the common wisdom. Our house was at the very last on the mainland, a lone brown stone cottage, slate shingled with big picture windows on the sunny sides, bright as changed, the light is thick as butter all morning and afternoon. It was dark at night, though, so dark we were told that in the old days blind men worked as guides, but I don't think this was true. It was truly dark, though: the sea was not far, and at night the sea was even darker than the sky. Lovers and suicide from town walked past our house on the way to the cliffs: my father stayed up late nights reading, and they followed his light. Between the sound of the waves breaking below us, we could hear them tread the gravel in our drive—on their way, yes, but on their way to what we wouldn't know, not until the next day when someone's mother might come by weeping, throwing a bouquet of flowers off the cliffs into her child's wake.

The bodies of those who jumped were broken on rocks directly below, swept out to sea with the tide, and later washed ashore, horribly battered, on the islands to our west.

The people on the islands often complain, but there was nothing we could do. In a town of so many thousands there were bound to be a few unfortunate and hopeless, and we couldn't stop them from jumping. We couldn't make them want to live, nor could we change the currents that washed them to a certain shore every time they jumped. This became an issue every few years, a point of contention between those of us on the mainland and those of us on the islands to our west. Nothing was ever done. A law was passed forbidding lovers from kissing on the precipice, but I believe that was all. And while the rest of us huddled alone in our dark rooms, my father always read very late into the night.

From Beneath the Moon and Long Dead Stars

Autumn Sonata by Robert F. Huttle

An October night. Rams on the tube. Cold cuts and beer for the guests, who banter about football and food.

Three hours ago, we buried my cousin, 23, needle-tracked arms and all. Hail Marys all around. Now the roar of the crowd drowns the gathering. The autumn moon will go soon.

From *The World's Shortest Stories*

Wave by Sebastian Matthews

The boy who lives up the hill won't look at me, can't look at me, at least not for more than a second before turning away, back to his private world I glimpse only in the fluttering of his hands and the quiet word he speaks to himself and only himself. I call out *Hello!* and wave just the same, giving him a quick smile then looking away myself, out of respect. I know what he lives with it, know that I don't have access to his world and don't need to. His mom has thanked me for this ritual. *He likes being outside*, she says. I ask after him when I see her on her own. *This new school he's going to helps*, she says. *He's a good boy*, I say, hoping that my interest is seen less as nuisance and more as neighborly good will. I don't see him this evening as I stroll with the dogs down the hill. There's a chill in the air and the wind rustled the trees, especially the small Japanese Maple that stands in their yard, as if a small squall has dropped down and brought the tree to life. As I pass by closer, I spy the boy inside the tree, sitting amongst its nest of leaves. He is shaking the branches lightly, causing the young tree to undulate all around him. I don't call out—don't have to—just a small smile. For tonight, it is he who waved to me.

From: *The Patient Body: A personal Narrative*

Away by Sarah Freligh

We spent our last three bucks on a tallboy that we passed back and forth through most of Iowa. Twenty-four hours we'd been driving, away from the sick and the sirens and the smell of the dead in the streets. Truckers honked around us, past us. We waved to the cute ones, hiked our skirts higher on our pale thighs. We were down to warm suds when the needle scraped "E" and we pulled into a Mom and Pop station at the next exit. We sat on the curb out front and discussed what we were willing to do for a gallon or two—steal? sell ourselves?—and laughed until our pants were damp. The owner called us Sweetheart and gave us coffee and a couple of stale doughnuts before he shut off the lights and headed home. I'd never seen so many stars. Sitting there like that, I was sure I could feel the earth turn but you said no, it was probably the grumble of trucks on the interstate. Still it was nice to think we were moving forward, away from ourselves, even while we were stuck.

From *Wigleaf*

<https://wigleaf.com/>

Bath By Amy Lowell

The day is fresh-washed and fair, and there is a smell of tulips and narcissus in the air.

The sunshine pours in at the bathroom window and bores through the water in the bathtub in lathes and planes of greenish-white. It cleaves the water into flaws like a jewel, and cracks it to bright light.

Little spots of sunshine lie on the surface of the water and dance, dance, and their reflections wobble deliciously over the ceiling; a stir of my finger sets them whirring, reeling. I move a foot and the planes of light in the water jar. I lie back and laugh, and let the green-white water, the sun-flawed beryl water, flow over me. The day is almost too bright to bear, the green water covers me from the too bright day. I will lie here awhile and play with the water and the sunspots. The sky is blue and high. A crow flaps by the window, and there is a whiff of tulips and narcissus in the air.

From: *All Poetry*

<https://allpoetry.com/>

Festival by Sebastian Matthews

Black Mountain, NC

The opening night campers were settling into their end-of-the-evening modes. I'm lying to my tent; Avery and his pal, one tent over, whisper of late night escapade. Someone starts pounding on a board. A man chants loudly in what I presume to be Cherokee. He knocks on the board and chants. Quiet.

I can hear a guitar faintly playing a folk, music tune; laughter further up the field. I'm on my back, looking through the mesh at the top of my tent. Now someone started telling a story, slowly, earnestly. I can barely make out the words, but imagine listeners circled around a fire.

A couple of plows close to our tent, drunk. One says to the other, "Camping is cheating, but a cabin is extra cheating."

A tent neighbor coughs the first of a night's worth of coughs. Then the knocking board. Then the chant again, each word phrase enunciated with precision. To me, a mixture of pride and sadness. Then back to the story.

As I listen, understanding little, taking it all in, my body slowly releases the various tightness of the day, and my breath, garage car, ticks down to sleep.

From *Beyond Repair: A memoir in essays*.

The Falling Game by Jessica Klimesh

There is only one rule: when the car turns, stops, or starts again, no matter how gently, no matter how jackrabbit hard, you are to let your body fall as though you were a rag doll, limp; as though your skin were fabric, supple, soft and smooth, without gently budding curves or awkward angles; as though your hair were yarn, unable to be brushed or altered; as though you were small enough to fit in crevices, cracks, small enough to get lost under a seat, amid discarded candy and Cheerios, so small that an adult or young child will cease looking for you if they don't find you right away; as though your body could be squeezed without breaking, yielding but seemingly impenetrable; as though you were filled with spare scraps, batting, or cotton, without a mind of your own, without lungs, without a heart; as though if one of your seams were to burst open, you could simply be stitched up, no one the wiser, your laughter and your smile sewn on, your expression never changing.

From: *Complete Sentence*, August 26, 2023

<https://www.completesentencelit.com/>

Give It Up by Franz Kafka

It was very early in the morning, the streets clean and deserted, I was walking to the station. As I compared the tower clock with my watch I realized that it was already much later than I had thought, I had to hurry, the shock of this discovery made me unsure of the way, I did not yet know my way very well in this town; luckily, a policeman was nearby, I ran up to him and breathlessly asked him the way. He smiled and said: "From me you want to know the way?" "Yes," I said, "since I cannot find it myself." "Give it up! Give it up," he said, and turned away with a sudden jerk, like people who want to be alone with their laughter.

From: *Description of a Struggle* and Other Stories

Running by Daniel Wallace

The next morning he went for a run. He'd never spent the night with her before and wasn't familiar with the neighborhood, and running was the way, he learned about a place. The man had done this on business trips in Iowa City, Boise, Des Moines, working for a small company selling genetically modified corn seed. He had done it after being with other women too—not all that often, but often enough. He was thirty-four years old and strong with a great mane of black hair and thought he might be the freest person who had ever.

He stretched and worked up a little sweat by sort of hopping, sort of dancing on the street corner. He glanced over his shoulder and wondered if he could see the window of her apartment, if maybe she was watching him now. He couldn't see her. Then he took off. The first two blocks were all retail: jewelers and Chinese wholesale and flower shops and tobacconists. But after taking a right, three blocks straight on, the crumbling city seemed to disappear behind him. Around him now, were weed-choked lots, an abandoned home, cement blocks, and old car tires stacked in unsteady towers. Then he took a left down what appeared to be an alley. There was a dog there, a perfect, terrible monster of a dog, black and thick shouldered. It seemed to be grinning, grinning with its sharp teeth barred as it approached, tentatively at first, but then leaping, just missing the man's left arm.

The monster growled in a low rumble. It launched at him again, and then again. It came so close the man could see its teeth, its dark pink gums, and he drew back a step, and another. Then he remembered that an animal would see this as a sign of weakness, so when the dog came at him again, the man stood his ground and growled himself. Still the dog charge at him so he kicked it hard, just under the right eye, and the dog retreated, but not so far that the man could get past it. The man turned and went back the way he came. He could feel his heart beating in his ears. He ran back to the city. He passed the woman's apartment building. But something made him stop and look. This time he saw her clear as day at the high window, smiling at him broadly. It must've been the light. He could see her hair, her eyes,

the curve of her cheek. He could even see her teeth. Had she been there all this time, waiting for him? She waved, and he lifted his hand. He saw that he had been cut—bitten. The blood ran across his palm in a shallow stream and left a rusty trail. The sight of blood made him lightheaded. Still, he took the stairs to her apartment two at a time and ran to the open door and surprised himself by almost falling into her arms. He showed her his hand.

“Oh, baby,” she said. “Let me fix it.”

He hadn’t known he needed fixing, until then.

From Beneath the Moon and Long Dead Stars

Crippled by Sebastian Matthews

“The last time we saw you, you were a cripple.”

This from the wife of an old writing pal. She was right about not seeing each other for some time - going on four years - but it was the crippled part that turned my head.

Later, at the conference reception, she seemed open, friendly even. Had she just been stating what she saw as the plain truth? “We weren’t sure you were going to get out of it,” she said. Get out of what? The rut I was in or the wheelchair? “Here I am,” I said, meaning for better or worse, like it or not. “You would like family,” my pal said later, when I confided how much their hospitality had meant to me back then. Past tense. The last time we saw you...

I was saved by an old student - kindred spirit, was how he put it. There was a look of genuine worry on his face, forward looking questions. And so, thankfully, I leaned into those.

From *Beyond Repair: A memoir in essays*

The Big Curve by Daniel Wallace

The last time I saw my dad he was wearing a toupee that looked like a year's worth of dryer lint, a Dallas Cowboys T-shirt, green golfing shorts, and penny loafers with actual pennies in them. No socks. He was waving at my wife and me as we drove away in the car he had just given us; he said he wouldn't be needing it anymore. I watched him in the rearview mirror down the long driveway and into the street, until he stopped waving, his arm slowly dropping to his side, and then watched him watch us as we disappeared around the Big Curve, the hairpin, where who knows how many lies have been lost—*lost* we called them, as if they might be found again one day. I told my wife, *When I was a kid we weren't allowed beyond the Big Curve on our bikes; he thought it was just too dangerous. Always had to turn around when we got here, go back home.*

He watched us go. He waited for our return.

From *Beneath the Moon and Long Dead Stars*