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# 10 BY 10

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Flash Fiction Stories



NUMBER 1

**Welcome** to the inaugural issue of *10 By 10, Flash Fiction Stories*. As the name suggests, there will be ten outstanding flash fiction writers, each contributing one story to *10 By 10*. The authors are as varied as the stories ranging from the humorous to the unexpected.

The writers: Paul Beckman, Jayne Martin, Robert Scotellaro, Renuka Raghavan, Michael C. Keith, Phil Temples, Francine Witte, Niles Reddick, Kathy Fish and Tim Gager, are all accomplished and well published in the flash/micro fiction genre.

In *10 By 10* all stories are five hundred words or less. But do not let brevity fool you. These stories all have deep meanings for the reader to discover. Each author's story is accompanied by his/her photograph and self-written bio.

This is an exciting new publication for readers of all genres both as an introduction to flash fiction and to the writers who produce these enjoyable tales. I hope you enjoy the stories and delve further into each writer by reading their other works be it novels, short stories, memoirs, creative nonfiction, flash or micro fiction and poetry. The work by these multi-talented writers provoking and entertaining.

So, enter these pages and read the first ten writers in *10 By 10*.

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. He is a five-time Pushcart Prize nominee. He lives in Brookline, MA with his wife Susan J. Dechter.



## **Paul Beckman's**

latest flash collection, *Kiss Kiss* (Truth Serum Press) was a finalist for the 2019 Indie Book Awards. Some of his stories appeared in *Spelk*, *Connotation Press*, *Necessary Fiction*, *Litro*, *Pank*, *Playboy*, *WINK*, *Jellyfish Review*, *The Wax Paper*, *Monkey*, and *The Lost Balloon*. He had a story selected for the 2020 National Flash Fiction Day Anthology Lineup and was shortlisted in the Strands International Flash Fiction Competition. He was nominated for 2021 Best of the Web and Best Micro-Fiction. Paul earned his MFA from Bennington College and has his next collection of connected flash stories coming out with Cervena Barva Press.

## **Once Again It's Award Season and My Mother's a Red Carpet Afficianodo**

Good morning. Before I start would someone please pass an everything bagel, some lox, and a slice tomato. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my family, (except for my brother Solly), friends, acquaintances, and those of you who know me by reputation and those of you whom I do not really know. This award for a Critical Statue is something I have not even allowed myself to consider and now I'm standing on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty which most of you consider being a New York Wonder of the World, but in all actuality, it is in New Jersey waters.

I would like to thank you all, especially my family, for nominating me to be “Critical of the Year.” I learned criticism from my mother and she, from hers. Without further ado, I will thank those who have accepted my criticisms in the spirit for which they are given.

I’ve been allotted eleven minutes and eleven seconds to give my speech. The Critical Award Committee should realize that to do this award justice the award winner should be given unlimited time or at least one hour and eleven seconds but that is an issue I can take up later since I imagine, like Miss America, I will be traveling around the country giving speeches, criticizing, answering questions, and selling my new and first-ever chapbook:

*“Wrong? You Want to Know What’s Wrong? Okay, I’ll tell you.*

*A Loving Mother’s/Sister/Friend/Neighbor/Stranger on a Bus’/ Guide to Criticism.”*

“To my devoted daughter, Sandy. Yes. I think that skirt makes your tuches look big. But that’s your taste; all of your skirts add ten pounds to your tuches. It’s the stripes, you should try paisley.”

“To my loving son Morton: You went to med school to be a pediatrician. You could have been a radiologist and made real money.”

“Now to my daughter-in-law, Marsha. You could have pushed Morton to be a real doctor, but you said you wanted him to be happy. Good. Is he happy? Are you? I’m not an I Told You So, but . . .”

Molly, my older sister: “I told you not to marry the bum. You’re still working, and he retired when he turned fifty but, remember, he practiced retiring for ten years before that. Feh!”

“To my five grandchildren. Using the F-word at the dinner table does not make you seem like adults; you sound like hooligans.”

“Rabbi Hoberman, stop flirting with all the women and give your wife money for a makeover and some fashionable clothes. Have her call me and I’ll take her to my stylist, Carlos, and please shake loose some money from the pushka, and I’ll go with her to Bergdorf’s. You? Your taste is all in your mouth.”

“Time is running short, so I’ll double up with my neighbors on each side. Bea or Joan, would it kill you to make the latkes or the birthday cake one year?”

“Okay, Solly, now you.”



## **Robert Scotellaro's**

work has been included in W.W. Norton's Flash Fiction International, Maryland Literary Review, Gargoyle, Matter Press, New World Writing, Best Small Fictions 2016, 2017, and 2021, Best Microfiction 2020, and elsewhere. He is the author of seven chapbooks, several books for children, and six flash fiction collections. He was the winner of Zone 3's Rainmaker Award in Poetry and the Blue Light Book Award for his fiction. His flash collection, *What Are the Chances?* (Press 53) was a finalist for the 2020 Big Other Book Award for fiction. A new chapbook of flash and micro stories, *God in a Can* (Bamboo Dart Press) is scheduled for release in 2022. He has, along with James Thomas, co-edited *New Micro: Exceptionally Short Fiction*, published by W.W. Norton & Co. Robert is one of the founding donors to The Ransom Flash Fiction Collection at the University of Texas, Austin. He lives in San Francisco. Visit him at [www.robertscotellaro.com](http://www.robertscotellaro.com)

### **Ledge at the Edge of the World**

I pull into a rest stop at the edge of the world. Who knew? My GPS has been acting up for weeks. But who could have anticipated this? There are people with their bare feet hanging over the edge, wiggling their toes in outer space. Lovers hugging and gazing out as if at a drive-in movie, families bunched

together ... All the “wrong turns” people are here, inadvertently brought to this spot where land ends. Is extinct. And there are no horizons. Only the universe to ponder without a road, a field, a mountain to landmark the transition. There is no floor like the Grand Canyon. There is only outer space. That star-bright dappled panoply. A road ending at the edge of all that vastness. All roads ending: paths of preconceptions, trails of mollifying knowns ...

I don't smoke (quit years ago) but go into the lone convenience store at the world's end and buy a pack and a can of beer. Sit on the ledge with the others. No one speaks. It's dark now and there are stars top and bottom. What else is there between them, other than the black spaces? The cigarette smoke burns my throat. The beer never tasted better. But there is no distraction capable of topping this. No grand notion. No presupposed meanderings. There are lights along the edge. There is an infinity of lights beyond that. I guzzle. Watch the cigarette smoke sail off into the unknown.



## Jayne Martin

is a Pushcart, Best Small Fictions, and Best Microfictions nominee, and a recipient of Vestal Review's VERA award. Her collection of microfiction, *Tender Cuts*, is available from Vine Leaves Press. Just released from Whiskey Tit Books and written in flash segments, is *The Daddy Chronicles-Memoir of a Fatherless Daughter*. She lives in California, but dreams of living in Paris. [www.jaynemartin-writer.com](http://www.jaynemartin-writer.com)

Twitter: @Jayne\_Martin. Facebook: Jayne Martin-Author

## Lost and Found

### Wedding Album

In the photo, you are all lime and ruffles, heels dyed to match, slumped in a brocade chair near the banquet hall door. On the floor, an empty champagne bottle overturned at your side. A moment someone thought fun to capture.

Months later, you sip wine in the apartment of the newlyweds, flip through the wedding photos and force yourself to join in their laughter. You remember how you'd left your eyeglasses on your bedstand that day, how the marriage of your sister to the man you loved remained a blur.

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"Stick around for dinner," they say, still dumb to your desire.

## October Leaves

give up their grip, leaving branches naked and vulnerable to cracking in the growing chill. You push the cart with the wonky wheel down the narrow store aisle. Halloween costumes already half-off. “Jingles Bells” on the sound system. Thanksgiving forgotten before it arrives. In the cosmetics department, faces of 20-year-old models touting potions that promise to restore your youth. Under a three-ply mask, your thinning lips crave kissing. You desire the fire of a fresh love exploring your body like a newly-discovered island, ache to hear someone whisper into the nape of your neck, “You’re such a dirty girl.”

## Lost and Found

Let’s say that same crooked smile that had once been directed your way erupts across his face when he sees you again. His hair, streaked with silver, retreats from his brow. But his eyes, still the color of a late summer sky, submerge you in their gaze. Your breath catches like a bird entangled in wire when he slides your mocha latte across the counter.

Let’s say you hand him your business card and instead of dropping it into the “Win A Free Java” jar with all the others, he slips it into his shirt pocket with his left hand, a fading tan line all that encircles his ring finger now.

Let’s say later you meet at the bleachers where you watched him run track in high school, his initials and yours still carved into the bench where your thighs now press again his, your head resting lightly on his shoulder.

Let’s say he says, “I should have married you.”



## **Phil Temples**

resides in Watertown, Massachusetts. He's had five mystery-thriller novels, a novella, and two short story anthologies published in addition to over 170 short stories online. Phil is a member of New England Science Fiction Association, the Mystery Writers of America and the Bagel Bards. You can learn more about him at <https://temples.com>.

### **The Power to Heel**

Sidney was resting on the park bench minding his own business when a woman approached walking her dog. The canine was some sort of mixed breed. He was large and quite unfriendly. When their eyes met, the dog began tugging at his leash in an effort to approach Sidney. The woman held on with all her strength to keep the dog in check. Suddenly the canine began to snarl viciously at Sidney. The woman's shouts were having no effect on the animal who now seemed hell-bent on attacking Sidney.

Sidney leapt up from the bench and began waving his arms wildly while shouting, "BOOGA BOGGA BOGGA! The dog immediately retreated back to his master, whimpering, his tail tucked between his legs. The woman shot Sidney an icy stare and continued walking.

Now that Sidney possessed a power over wild beasts he wondered if it might work on his wife of forty-two years.



## Renuka Raghavan

is an Indian-American author who writes short-form prose and poetry. Renuka is a Pushcart Prize and Best Small Fictions nominee, , She is the author of *Out of the Blue* (Big Table Publishing, 2017), *The Face I Desire* (Nixes Mate, 2019), and most recently *Nothing Resplendent Lives Here* (Cervena Barva Press, 2022). Find a complete list of all her previous publications at [www\(dot\)renukaraghavan\(dot\)com](http://www(dot)renukaraghavan(dot)com). Follow her on Twitter and Instagram @RenukaRag.

### What Goes Up

I'm pushing the cart out of the grocery store, rolling through the automatic doors, when I decide I want a cigarette. No, I need a cigarette. I've been good for the past six months, ever since the OB-GYN said smoking and drinking could hurt my chances of conceiving. I didn't believe her, but Vic insisted, promising he'd lay off too and join me in solidarity. So, we poured out all the wine, cleared the pantry of all processed, sugary snacks, and began a regimen of vitamins. It seemed like the right thing to do at that point, but suddenly, here in the Kroger parking lot, I'm thinking, Fuck that, it's just one smoke.

The problem is no one smokes in the suburbs. I'm there ten minutes waiting for somebody to come out of the store and light up so I can bum one,

and I finally end up paying a homeless woman a dollar for a crappy off-brand. She strikes a match with her bony, grimy hands and we talk about spy satellites as I lean on my cart, desperately puffing away. Her name is Gladys, and she tells me she used to be a teacher, but she quit because of the new technology that allows people to look inside your house from way out in space, and I'm wondering, Should I pretend to care? Because I really don't.

The cigarette gives me a headache making me slightly dizzy, the weather making things worse. The kind of heat we're having sucks the sweat out of you even if you're only going a short distance. Walk to the corner Starbucks, and you're completely dehydrated by the time you get there.

Also, Vic's parents are coming up for the long weekend. That's why I'm here in the first place, to buy all sorts of expensive stuff that we never spring for when it's just us. Lobster, fancy coffee, organic vegetables, ground lamb, saffron. I didn't put up a fight when Vic proposed the weekend's menu. I could see how nervous he was when he helped me spread clean sheets on the bed in the spare room this morning. Lately, he always looks anxious, like he's shocked to find himself here at this stage in his life. Living in a rented two-bedroom apartment, instead of paying mortgage on our first house. Buried with work at all hours for a thankless mid-management job, struggling to keep himself in the running for that ever-elusive promotion.

I smoke the cigarette down to the filter, drop it to the pavement, and twist it out. Then, reaching into one of the grocery bags, I grab whatever comes to hand first.

"You like smoked Alaskan Sockeye salmon, Gladys?" I ask.

She grimaces. "Smoked salmon?"

"Yeah, it's good," I say. "Here," and I give her the pack.

She shakes her head. "Don't you have any cookies?"



## **Michael C. Keith's**

latest book is *Quiet Geography* published by Cervena Barva Press.

See his author's website for more information: [www.michaelcketh.com](http://www.michaelcketh.com)

### **Wet**

When he was a kid, Alvi heard if you put a sleeping persons fingers in warm water they pee themselves. The idea amused him to no end, and he decided he had to try it. His parents became the obvious targets, since he lived alone with them. He decided against trying the prank on his father, because he knew if he got caught he'd get a lashing. So, it came down to his mother, who might rebuke him but not lay a hand on him. The idea, of course, was not to get caught, and Alvi had a plan for that. After performing the trick, he would hide under his parent's bed until the coast was clear and then make his escape. He finally decided to take action and when he knew his parents were fast asleep, he

took a plastic bowl from the kitchen, filled it with water, and slipped into their bedroom. He then got under the bed and placed his mother's dangling hand into the container. It took only seconds for the desired effect to occur and his mother woke with a soft rapturous moan. At that point Alvi and the bowl were well secreted under the bed, and he could see her legs move across the floor to the bathroom. It was all he could do to keep from laughing out loud. During breakfast the next morning, his mother announced she'd had a very stimulating dream the night before, but when asked about it, she refused to give details.



## **Timothy Gager**

has published 17 books of fiction and poetry. He hosted the successful Dire Literary Series in Cambridge, MA from 2001 to 2018, and started a weekly virtual series in 2020.

He has had over 1000 works of fiction and poetry published, 17 nominated for the Pushcart Prize. His work also has been nominated for a Massachusetts Book Award, The Best of the Web, The Best Small Fictions Anthology and has been read on National Public Radio.

Timothy is the Fiction Editor of [The Wilderness House Literary Review](#), and the founding co-editor of [The Heat City Literary Review](#). A graduate of the University of Delaware, Timothy lives in Dedham, Massachusetts with some fish and a rabbit, and he is employed as a social worker. *Joe the Salamander*, his third novel, was released in July 2022.

## Beloved Do Us Part

The day my father crashed through the windshield was the day which changed everything. That happened when I was driving him to his funeral. Life is confusing enough without dissecting that statement.

It was windy springtime when the porcelain struck the pavement, shattering, the ashes blowing across Route 3, ending up in the cattails. If some stayed on the highway I couldn't tell where the ashes began and the liter soaking up the oil ended.

She was late going to the church. She hadn't noticed passing me, or my car while engulfed in a parade of constrained traffic, which felt more like the participants waiting at the starting point for the parade to begin. Either way she hadn't noticed the scene. She hadn't paid attention to me much when I was preoccupied recently either. She was attending only because of my father. We were both pretty sick in different ways she said, the day I told her he had left his body.

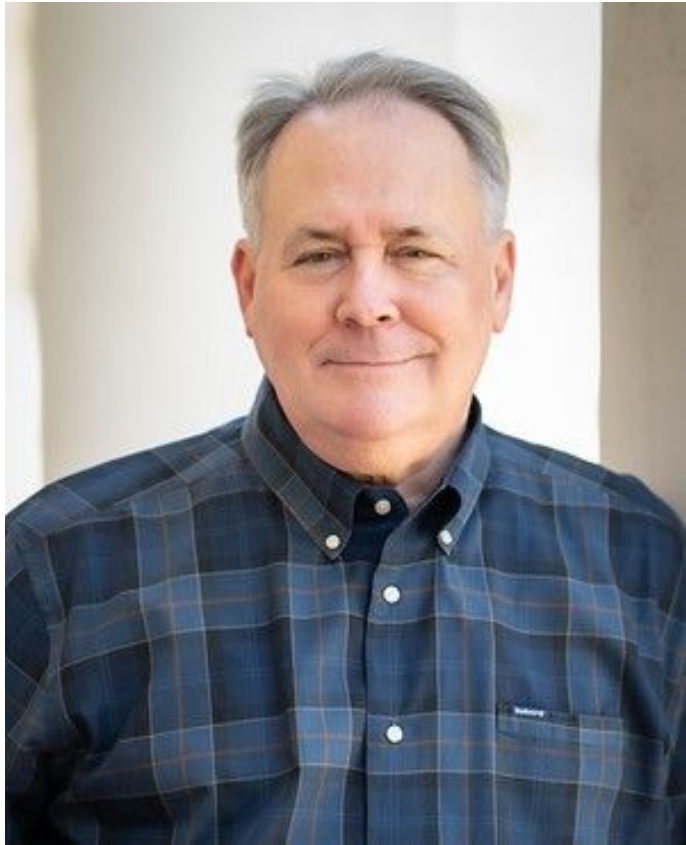
I was a bit banged up, but I wasn't as bad as dad. He suffered. Even after death the entirety of his being was scattered. This was pretty metaphoric if it weren't so shitty. For a guy that retained everything he didn't remember much this year, his thoughts becoming the brown leaves gusting uncaught in early winter. Occasionally he remembered it being winter, but he couldn't recall fall even if he'd spend the entire last autumn with a rake in his hand.

I missed the service, arriving at the Moratorium empty handed. Everyone was milling around waiting, and the stone wall where the urn was to be placed was open like a welcoming door where you could enter a friend's house without knocking. People comfortable with each other would do that.

I remember the days in our courtship when she left the wood door wide open and all I had to do was open the screen. Today I had nothing to offer.

I couldn't even explain what happened in any way which made sense. Seatbelts don't hold urns and arms cannot wrap a heart up into a hug...as she was there, and people were there, and no one knew what to do or say, but all our hearts were all still beating. Someone should say *something* so I whispered that to Father David, and he started honoring my father immediately, without a skip, as if he had all the words memorized. Then he shut the door, empty as if he never existed, all that was left was the name and date. I stood there until everyone had left for the lunch and it was just she and I.

Touching the inscription, she traced his name without looking at anything but the placard, "I think I'm going to stay down on the Cape for a while." It was as if her door was locked, and the locks changed. The outdoors was lonely, and I was alone with the gusts which blew the thin, barren, branches up and do



## **Niles Reddick**

is author of a novel *Drifting too far from the Shore*, two collections *Reading the Coffee Grounds* and *Road Kill Art and Other Oddities*, and a novella *Lead Me Home*. His work has been featured in over 450 publications including *The Saturday Evening Post*, *PIF*, *New Reader Magazine*, *Forth Magazine*, *Citron Review*, and *The Boston Literary Magazine*. He is a three time Pushcart and two time Best Micro nominee and works for the University of Memphis.

## **RFID Wallet**

My first run in with fraud was when I reconciled my debit charges online (Yes, I really do reconcile them because every dime adds up) with what I'd recorded in my checkbook Yes, I still keep an old school checkbook for a handful of bills I don't want to pay online). I called the bank and told the assistant the five-dollar charge to a Venmo account in New York was bogus, and she removed it and told me to sign a form next time I come. The next fraudulent charge was a ten-dollar one to a company I'd never heard of in California, and I double checked with my wife to see if it was one of her online purchases. It wasn't, and since I hadn't gone by to sign the first form, I stopped

by at lunch and asked them to remove this charge as well. They complied and I signed both forms.

When Harry, one of the vice President's I knew from the Lion's Club, saw me with the administrative assistant at her round desk near the entrance where the tile merges into carpet, he left his maroon leather rolling chair behind his desk and came out to say hello.

"You know what you need, don't you?" he asked.

"What?"

"One of those RFID wallets."

"What's that?"

"It's a wallet that protects your credit card and other info from being scanned by radio frequency identification."

"Never heard of it."

"That may be how you've been charged twice against your debit card. It started as a way for businesses to track inventory, but it morphed into all these other uses and is used by criminals. The RFID wallets block and protect your credit cards, among other things."

"Where did you get yours?"

"Got mine at The Men's Shop in the mall. It's nice-looking, high-quality leather. Soon, they'll be mass produced in all the stores."

"I appreciate the tip."

On my way home from work, I stopped by The Men's Shop. I was flabbergasted the wallets were one hundred fifty dollars, but I bought one anyway, told the clerk it was high tech snake oil, and he'd half-smiled. I assumed Harry had probably invested in wallet stock, and as soon as criminals realized society was onto their scams, they'd hopscotch ahead to the next new trick to steal.



## Francine Witte's

poetry and fiction have appeared in *Smokelong Quarterly*, *Wigleaf*, *Mid-American Review*, and *Passages North*. Her latest books are *Dressed All Wrong for This* (Blue Light Press,) *The Way of the Wind* (AdHoc fiction,) and *The Theory of Flesh* (Kelsay Books) She is flash fiction editor for *Flash Boulevard* and *The South Florida Poetry Journal*. She is an associate poetry editor for *Pidgeonholes*. Her chapbook, *The Cake, The Smoke, The Moon* (flash fiction) was published by ELJ Editions in September, 2021. She lives in NYC.

## Lovertrees

The forest knows all about them. The forest being the other trees, the scampery bunnies, the rock knots sitting by the gurgly streams. The forest knows about the lovertrees smack in the middle that somehow stay rooted but move towards one another at night.

The whole forest knows, but not the people. The people who wander through each day and scatter home before the lowering sun cut spatters of light through it all.

An owl shows up, perches itself nearby. Hoots its owly warning as the lovertrees inch towards one another. *They'll cut you both down*, he warns the lovertrees, *or put you together in a museum*.

The lovertrees need each other too much to listen. They whisper

comfort. Say things like *we didn't do anything*. Their barks against each other now, their leaves mingled, their branches entwined.

But then, one day, a hiker. Tired and wanting to feel the nightgauze of the forest. He uncurls his bedroll right between the lovertrees before they've had a chance to move. *What a spot*, the hiker says into the air. The lovertrees look at one another. *I could come here every night*. The hiker continues, *maybe even build a tiny house*, The hiker smiles and beds himself down.

Above all this, the stars. Around all this, the forest. All of it watching the lovertrees, separate and still, their pain breathing into the sky



## Kathy Fish's

stories have been widely published in journals, anthologies, and textbooks. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Ploughshares*, *Copper Nickel*, *Best American Nonrequired Reading*, *Washington Square Review*, the *Norton Reader*, and *Norton's Flash Fiction America* (2023). Honors include the *Copper Nickel* Editor's Prize and a Ragdale Foundation Fellowship. The author of five short fiction collections, Fish teaches a variety of creative writing workshops online. She also publishes a popular monthly craft newsletter. Subscribe here: [The Art of Flash Fiction](#).

## Devotions

He's retired now, but his wife still works. He's settled into a routine, waking up and pouring a Dr. Pepper and sipping it while his old dog limps around the back yard and sniffs and poops. He likes the murder shows and Judge Judy and sports. He has three women he talks to online, all in different time zones. One is a former student, a nurse. One is a history professor he met on Facebook. The third is the mom of one of his daughter's friends who'd moved to California. He writes to them from different email accounts and never addresses them by name. There are things he's learned the hard way.

Afternoons, he settles on the couch in his boxer shorts and writes to the woman of the day. They are all crazy in love with him. He knows they just want a little goddamned romance. He calls them sweetheart. He tells them they're beautiful and sexy. Eventually, he asks for photos. Eventually, he gets them to understand what *kind* of photos. The professor takes the longest to catch on, but that's part of the challenge. He likes getting them to do things they've never done before.

He sends them photos of himself. Sometimes he fucks up and sends the same photo twice. The former student and youngest of the three finds this endearing. She never suspects, never questions anything. Some days she's his favorite, but some days she pisses him off. There is such a thing as being too easy.

When he craves a little drama he'll turn suddenly aloof. He'll be too busy to chat on their scheduled day. He might casually drop the name of another woman. They'll ask, *what's wrong? What did I do?*

One day he writes to the woman in California. He opens with his usual: *Hi gorgeous*. Though it's their scheduled time, she takes a full six minutes to reply. He sets his laptop aside and goes to the kitchen. He fixes a tuna salad sandwich with tomato and extra mayo. He sprinkles it with salt and pepper. He opens a beer. He settles back on the couch and after seven minutes have passed he clicks and reads. Her note is rather terse. She says, *Sorry, sorry*. She says, *Busy day*. She says, *I'm having lunch with Rick. Chat tomorrow?*

Rick is a "writer." In his headshot, he's standing on a moor gazing directly into the setting sun, his scarf and his luxurious hair blowing behind him. *Oh right, Rick the Insufferable*, he types, but deletes it. He types a few more things and deletes them too. Finally he says sure, even though it means cancelling on the history professor.

That night, he tosses and turns until his wife banishes him to the hide-a-bed. He opens his laptop in the dark. The woman in California may still be awake. He types: *I love you, I love you*. He types: *You're the One*. This time he may even mean it.