

10 BY 10

FLASH FICTION STORIES



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Welcome to Issue #27

Six of our authors for this issue are appearing for the first time with unique stories that draw the reader in to their world. Four of the writers are returning and providing once again humor and drama that keep us interest to the end of the tale. All ten are fine writers and I am sure you will agree.

So have your favorite refreshment and a comfortable chair. Take your time reading and enjoying these ten fine writers.

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*. Sesling lives in Brookline, MA with his wife Susan J. Dechter.



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*, *Microverses*, *Punk Noir Magazine*, *Roi Fainéant Press*, *Tales from the Canyons of the Damned*, *Yellow Mama*, and many others. Alien Buddha Press published her poetry chapbook, *A Shadow of Your Former Self*. She 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://bsky.app/profile/@amygrech.bsky.social), Medium: <https://medium.com/@crimsonscreams>, X: https://x.com/amy_grech, or visit her website: <https://www.crimsonscreams.com>.

Bitter End

An eight-year-old girl named Ann Duke rides a tricycle in front of her parents' brownstone on Manhattan's exclusive East Side. She is wearing a pink dress. Her curly, brown hair is done up in pigtails. Dr. William Duke watches her from the stoop as she rides up and down the length of the crowded sidewalk, as a steady stream of nannies swiftly wheel their charges safely tucked into high-end strollers homeward bound. He is sipping a dry martini and smoking a cigarette.

Ann pedals over to him and plops down. "Did you see me, Daddy," she inquires, excitedly.

"I sure did, Piggy." He smiles at his daughter and lights another cigarette.

"Why do you call me 'Piggy'?" She admires her purple tricycle and the lavender butterfly decal gracing the seat.

"Because you're hair's in pigtails." William Duke playfully tugs one.

"Oh. What's that?" Ann points to his glass.

He swipes it from the cool, rose marble step and takes another sip. “A dry martini.”

“Can I have some,” she asks, licking her lips.

“No, but you can have the olive.” He plucks it from the frosty glass, hands it to her.

She stares at the big green-and-red slimy thing in her palm and frowns. “What do I *do* with it?”

“Eat it,” her father mutters.

Ann puts the green-and-red slimy thing in her mouth and starts to chew. “Yuck! It’s bitter!” She spits it out and wipes her mouth with the back of her hand.

“So is life.” William Duke empties his glass and rises to refill it.

Ann frowns and watches him go.



Paul Hostovsky's poems and stories appear widely online and in print. He has won a Pushcart Prize, two Best of the Net Awards, the FutureCycle Poetry Book Prize, and the Muriel Craft Bailey Award from *Comstock Review*. He has been featured on Poetry Daily, Verse Daily, The Writer's Almanac, the Best American Poetry blog, and he was a Featured Poet on The Georgia Poetry Circuit. His newest book is *Perfect Disappearances* (forthcoming from Kelsay Books, 2025). He makes his living in Boston as a sign language interpreter and braille transcriber. Website: paulhostovsky.com

Stealing Home

It was a mostly Jewish neighborhood. Down at the schoolyard Billy Schachtel was at bat. Richard Cohen was on first. Jon Winkelried was on second. *Schachtel* means box in German. Little box. A pack of cigarettes is a *Zigaretenschachtel*. But none of us knew that. Because we didn't speak German. And we didn't smoke cigarettes. We were little. We were only in fourth or fifth grade. *Shtetl* means little town in Yiddish, a little town of Ashkenazi Jews in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust. But this was after the Holocaust, about twenty years after, at the bottom of the 9th in the schoolyard of South Mountain Elementary School in a mostly Jewish neighborhood in Millburn, New Jersey, in the United States of America, where Jews played baseball. Jews on shtetls in Eastern Europe didn't play baseball. And they never won. In fact, they usually got slaughtered. Schachtel swung and missed. We pronounced it Shack-TELL. Billy Shack-TELL. Not unlike William Tell, the folk hero of Swiss historiography. William Tell was a contemporary of Arnold von Winkelried, who threw himself on a Hapsburg spear in the Battle of Sempach, which created an opening for the

Swiss Confederacy to rush in behind him and win the day. Winkelried was about to steal third. Cohen was on first, and maybe because the Cohanim were the Jewish priestly class, descendants of Aaron, brother of Moses, tribe of Levi, Cohen was able to judge that Winkelried was about to steal third. So he got ready to steal second. Which is called a double steal in baseball. With a judicious eye, Schachtel let the next pitch go by. Spoiler alert: Winkelried stole third, and he went on to steal home, and he went on to graduate from the University of Chicago, to get a job with Goldman Sachs, to work his way up until he eventually headed the Bonds Department and became richer than Croesus, the legendary king of Lydia, a kingdom in ancient Anatolia. Coney got thrown out at second, which was a kind of sacrifice that allowed Winkelried to steal home, not unlike the sacrifice that Winkelried's namesake made at the Battle of Sempach in 1386. It was the winning run at the bottom of the 9th, so Shachtel never finished his turn at bat. Because we'd already won, unlike the other Jews, the Jews of history, who almost always lost, and never really had a home.



Anne Anthony is a writer and digital collage artist. Her writing has been published in *Third Street Review*, *Bright Flash Literary Review*, *Bull*, *Flash Boulevard*, and elsewhere. She's recently been the featured artist in *Mad Swirl* and *Neither Fish Nor Foul*. She is a senior editor and art director for *Does It Have Pockets*. She lives with her husband and an uncivilized Plott hound in North Carolina. Find more: <https://linktr.ee/anchalastudio>.

Way Back Home

Honeysuckle and poison ivy tangle together like the braids of Mama's hair. At first, the tight mix of vines hides the forest path Caroline once followed as a child, but how could she forget the way back home, having walked it every morning, every afternoon to and from the dirt road she crossed to reach the stone well. Mama taught her to follow the scat. Straw-like clumps from the rich folks' horses pointed the way; hard round pellets left by deer told her the coast was clear; the long tubular droppings from a fox told her she was minutes from home. The musky smell of the fox's den told her where to turn. Each left clues of their dinner — hay, raspberries, acorns, and pomes — which sometimes twisted Caroline's stomach with hunger and she'd stop, strip a branch of its berries, the ones Mama pointed out as safe to eat, and swallow a handful in a single swoop. When the fragrance of Fraser fir mixed with evergreen magnolias, she'd run, hurrying, arms aching from the weight of the bucket filled with fresh water. Splashes fed the roses Mama planted in her garden, alongside tomatoes, eggplant, and corn.

Today, the sweet magnolia scent licks the air and after catching a glint off broken glass from the back of the rusted-out bus, she half-expects Mama inside preparing the lessons for the day. Learning back then filled the day before the pitch black night sent them to bed. Caroline was nine, but read much older. She puzzled over math word problems, explored exotic cultures miles and miles away,

painted with rich vibrant colors Mama crushed from stones and flowers, and she lost herself inside stories where wizards defeated monsters with a wave of their magical wands.

Now, the path ends. Caroline counts the twenty-three windows and the windshield of the Volkswagen bus, all broken, and which never turned over after Daddy disappeared. Mama checked out an auto repair book from the library, tinkered with the engine, but it did no good. She never did return the book.

They settled like homesteaders. No heat. No running water. No electricity. No indoor bathroom. Civilized things she had forgotten until taken into care by the nice lady with the pale pink lipstick and that one crooked tooth that snagged on her top lip when she talked—about her mother not taking care like she should; about not providing a safe home environment; about not doing what a mother should. No one would've known where her family lived if Caroline hadn't found the matchbook by the stone well, been startled by the burst of flame, the stinging burn, jerking them from her hand to the dry pile of leaves aching for rainfall.

Twenty years since the lady gathered her and her younger brother and sent them off to live separate lives. They never found their way back to each other, or to Mama, but here, in these woods, she finds her way back home.



Mathieu Parsy is a Canadian writer who grew up on the French Riviera. He now lives in Toronto and works in the travel industry. His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in publications such as *Nunum*, *Does It Have Pockets*, *FEED*, *Libre*, and *Brilliant Flash Fiction*. Follow him on Instagram at @mathieu_parsy.

Neon Green Decision

“I’m forty-three,” I say. “I think I want to quit my job.”

She looks at me the way our betta fish looks at me sometimes: with concern and calculation and the kind of patience that isn’t really patience but waiting for something—food, movement, a reason to react. Except she’s not a betta fish stuck in an aquarium. She’s my wife (though I guess she studies me just as closely). And here she is, giving me a look that isn’t exactly a no, but definitely suggests I might be a little crazy.

It doesn’t help that we’re at a rooftop bar when I say it. Surrounded by people who are too young, drinking cocktails that are too colorful. I didn’t know neon green could be a drink. I didn’t know people still took pictures of their drinks before taking a sip. I imagine all the photos stacking up in some forgotten digital graveyard, never looked at again.

I wish we were anywhere else: in some cabin in the mountains where the air smells like pine and the Wi-Fi doesn’t work. I wish I had already quit my job. So we could avoid the whole talk of quitting my job. The talk of quitting my job

means admitting I am just a normal man who doesn't know what he wants. Means me thinking about all the years I've already given to this career I don't really like. I don't want to work exactly: meetings and deadlines and the same polite small talk. But I also don't want to be useless. I want and don't want. My body wants to rest. My mind wants to stop waking up dreading the next eight hours.

She takes a sip of her drink. She has said: "Do you want another beer?" (distraction). And "I think we should order food" (avoidance). And "The city looks different at night" (observation?). But nothing about my job.

I watch the ice melt in her glass, and I brace myself for whatever she's about to say.

"I think you should," she says finally, simply, as if it's just that easy.

The bartender laughs too loudly at something behind us, and the noise almost drowns her words out, but I hear them. And in those four words is either everything I want or everything I don't want: the permission to leave or the challenge to prove I'm not afraid.

The wind picks up, and she shifts closer to me, pulling her coat tight. I start to speak again, but she grabs my arm and squeezes it. I exhale. And for a moment, I don't care one way or another about jobs or decisions or what comes next. I hold onto her and feel everything I need to feel about cold air and city lights and the way the world tilts and spins, carrying us forward,



Benedict Pignatelli is a twenty-nine year-old writer from Dublin, currently based in Paris. He has written for Chelsea Magazine, the Literary Review, Injection Magazine, New Sounds Press, and Distilled Post (editor). He has had short stories accepted by CafeLit, Stray Words and the Bull Magazine, and has been longlisted for the Bridport Prize (2021), the Masters Review Winter Short Story Award (2023-24), and the Fish Short Story Prize (2024). He is the current Editor in Chief of the Menteur Magazine.

Oversleeping in Paris

This was the fourth boulangerie Marc had been to, and the only one open. Was it a Feast day he was unaware of, some bank holiday he'd forgotten about?

The queue was enormous. He was sweating. He was late. A horrible muggy feeling enveloped him. The air felt hot and thick and all encompassing, a million people's mutual breath slowly being recycled. Marc hadn't showered yet and felt yesterday's socks clinging to his sweaty feet. He felt itchy.

He checked his watch. Today was the day he was going to see her; the first time since the divorce. He'd had it in the calendar for weeks. She was still the love of his life. Still, always. And, Marc well knew, she had specific tastes. A pain au chocolat wasn't going to cut it. She didn't like madeleines. Hence why he would buy up half the shop if he ever got to the front - best to keep on the safe side. Marc wanted everything to be just as she liked it.

Breakfast finally in hand, he meandered home through the tourists. He pushed through the overweight Americans as they halted inexplicably in the street to take photos of the Moulin Rouge.

He was nervous. Six floors with no lift, he'd be a sweaty mess by the time he got to his door. He wondered if she was still as beautiful as he remembered. More so now, surely. How long had it been? He wasn't sure. Too long anyway.

To his surprise, as he climbed the final steps, he saw she was there already, waiting. Sitting politely on his step, drumming a beat with her little ladybird light up shoes. She beamed at him, hopped up and launched herself into his arms, attacking him with little pecking kisses on his cheeks, complaining in a giggling way about his stubble. His hedgehog, she called it.

Inside, Totally Spies! backpack on the floor, Bratz doll tightly under one arm, they maneuvered to Marc's little terrace for breakfast. Orange juice - with bits - bread and butter and jam, Coco Pops, and, finally, the mountain of pastries. Eclairs, cakes, citron tarts, pastries galore. Enough sugar to fuel a riot at a nursery. They were laid dramatically in front of her like a sacrificial offering. She bit into the pastry and beamed across the little table. Marc beamed back.

He thought of lighting a cigarette, adding another stub to the pile in the ashtray between them. He'd been smoking a lot lately, close to two packs a day. He decided not to set a bad example. He didn't need them with Marie here anyway. He leaned back, feeling the heat from the chair burn into his back slightly. The stress from the morning began to recede. He breathed deeply. Contentedly.

Marie went on munching away and Marc leaned back further, accepting the warmth of the chair. He closed his eyes and let the late morning sun wash over him and into him.



When **Kathy Haynes** retired from a career as a corporate writer and editor in 2020, she knew she would continue to write. She published her first novel, *The Missing Years: A Novel* in November 2024. She is a mother of two and a grandmother of two. As an outdoor enthusiast, she enjoys walking, hiking, kayaking, and gardening. In addition to writing, her other creative pursuit is making watercolor and mixed media paintings.

Ruts

The atmospheric river looming in the sky produced unprecedented rain, causing floods and mudslides. *Please let there be a clearing today*, I thought, checking the weather app on my phone. Just for an hour—that’s all I needed to shake off the stir-crazies. It was going to be dry for the next two hours. I grabbed my backpack, a few of her belongings, and headed out for the first time in two weeks.

I began walking up one of the many unpaved streets in my neighborhood. Every step was a slog. My head swam with all the tasks I needed to do: sort through her documents, call a realtor, call her bank, request her death certificate. My foot slipped a little in the mud, and I looked down at the road. The constant flow of rain had carved pits and channels. Water overflowed the puddles and streamed through the ruts, leaving a trail of debris in its wake. I reminded myself to take short and careful steps. Already entangled in grief, even a sprain would feel like a compact fracture.

Stopping just before the cul-de-sac, I took long breaths, taking in the view, catching my breath. To the west, estates dotted the hills, and rows of vineyards crisscrossed in a predictable pattern, creating nature’s own piece of Zentangle art.

It takes us away from the high rises, traffic, and constant encroachment of technology (civilization as we know it) into a serene wildness. I

“Here’s the payoff,” she used to say when we reached the top. “No traffic, no high rises, no technology, just nature.”

Pressure built up in my throat and worked its way into my sinuses. I tried to focus on the beauty, but like the rain, the tears were an unstoppable force. *Keep this up and your face will be scarred with ruts.*

Inside my backpack was Mom’s address book. I had found it a few days earlier while sorting through her desk. She had written her name on the inside cover. I laughed remembering how she labeled everything. I flipped to the “A” page and saw the entry for her best friend, Betty Anderson. Mom had used a red pen to cross out her name and address. Next to Betty’s name was a date: June 13, 2015. I flipped through the rest of the pages. She had crossed out all the names and added dates to every entry.

“All my friends have died,” she used to tell me, and I thought she was exaggerating.

A sudden flash of light and a boom of thunder startled me. I shivered and looked up. A band of black clouds had consumed the sky, warning me to get moving again. I grabbed her address book and red pen. I drew lines through her name and address, and wrote April 21, 2022, next to her name. “I’ll bring you back here tomorrow,” I said. I hugged the book to my chest, closed my eyes, and swayed. “You and all your friends.”



Rebecca Klassen is co-editor of *The Phare* and a Best of the Net 2025 nominee. She has won the London Independent Story Prize, and was short/long listed for Oxford Flash, Laurie Lee Prize, Alpine Fellowship, Bath Flash Fiction Award, Flash 500, and the Quiet Man Dave Prize. Her stories have featured in *Fictive Dream*, *Msllexia*, *Brussels Review*, *Toronto Journal*, *Flash Frontier*, and have been performed on BBC Radio. Her story, “Coattails,” was shortlisted for the 2024 Bridport Flash Prize.

Coattails

You’re at my door, cinched waist, familiar feline eyes, a sombre *hi, can I come in?* but I can’t place you. Disguising my menopausal memory, I usher you in and offer rooibos. You say *with milk*. I salute, say, ‘Roger that,’ and ponder if I know you from my YMCA yoga class. You nest in my sofa throw while I make our tea, then it clicks. No wonder I didn’t recognise you. You’re out of context, three-dimensional, and you don’t know me. I’m no one; you’re someone. So why are you here with me in my home?

Your phone rings and you cut the call while my radio reports of frenzied teens outside the stadium where you should probably be sound checking about now. I turn the volume down and stir oat milk into your tea; your vegan chocolate brand is iconic. Your phone rings again. ‘Not him,’ you mutter. It vibrates as you turn it off. I had a *him* once.

Now you’re crying like I did when Mark left, and teaching became too much, and I just needed a damn break! Your tears aren’t desperate though, like the ones that spatter my *payment overdue* notices.

I bring in our mugs and you clasp your tea and sniff. I pocket my phone and fetch you some tissues. Resting my hand on your delicate wrist I say, 'It's okay, sweetheart. I know heartbreak. I know burnout.' My eyes well up, and it works. You spill it all. The boyfriend you've cheated on, the tour you want to abandon, the tedious, relentless fans you hate. My phone records it all, the whining of an apex multi-millionaire disturbing a stranger's afternoon.

I'll be able to pay my bills this month.



Keith Parker has been publishing flash fiction since the 1990s. His latest piece appeared in the March 2025 edition of *Flash Phantoms*. He was a featured writer on science fiction and fantasy for *JustUsGeeks.com* in the 2010s, and won the Freshly Pressed Award from *WordPress.com* in 2012. His short fiction has also appeared in the *Stories: One anthology*, *Aim Magazine*, *The Fifth Di--*, *Zone 9* and on WLRH public radio. He's married to his college sweetheart, who works in eyecare. The couple met at Birmingham-Southern College, a small liberal arts college, where they studied physics, history and beer. They have two kids in graduate school and a very crotchety cat. To pay the bills, he is employed as a modeling and simulation analyst at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center.

Herbert

I leaned back and stared at the ceiling and said that I was pretty sure that I was living in a parallel universe and even though what I said was rhetorical it still caused Herbert to hum and give off a puff of steam. A pair of cogs clicked into place. He said that I actually *was* living in a parallel universe, which made me sit up and knit my brows and tell him that I was not being serious, that it was a rhetorical statement meant for the ceiling fan and not for him.

Herbert's engine whirred. He repeated in that deep, received pronunciation that he brought with him from the 1890s that I was indeed living in a parallel universe, a world much like my own but quite different in its own way, especially the geopolitics and the way football overtimes are handled. This gave me pause. I sank back into the couch again. I was in an alternate reality? I must've said that

part out loud because he said yes, I was living in a parallel universe, one that was lined up, side-by-side, with my own. Parallel, in other words.

I rolled my eyes. At this point the conversation was becoming a bit too circular for my taste, not to mention a bit too run-on, and so I told him that I didn't want to argue and he coughed out some vapor and moved one of his pulleys and said that he didn't either.

I sprang up, leaned forward and put my elbows on my knees.

"If I were in the right universe," I said. "Would I still be bickering with you?"

"No," he said. "You would be arguing with an A.I."

"A what?"

"A construct. A large language model. It is --."

I put up a hand to stop him. I didn't want to hear it. I did not want to hear the details about some kind of abstraction of reality that I would never have a chance to visit. Instead I simply puffed my cheeks and then exhaled slowly. I would take arguing with my time machine any day of the week.



R.S. Nelson (she/her) is a Latina writer who lives and finds inspiration in Southern California. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Flash Fiction Magazine, Every Writer, Spillowrds, SciFiSat, Every Day Fiction, Twin Bird Review, and elsewhere. She is also currently shortlisted for the spring 2025 Women on Writing fiction contest.

In a Denny's at 8:00 a.m.

The waitress places the stack of salted caramel banana pancakes in front of Susan, but she looks away, arms crossed over her chest, lips in a narrow line. When the waitress leaves I say, "Please, Suzy, let it go." Her forehead wrinkles, and the frame of her thin, frail body pushes against the chair. She throws darts with her eyes toward the woman sitting a few tables away from us.

"She didn't know—" But the look on her face makes me stop. "How about we go outside and slash her tires? I know her car," I add, in a feeble attempt to make her laugh.

It doesn't work.

I take a sip of coffee because I don't know what else to say. I want to entice her with the smell of the buttery pancakes in front of us. I want to tell her today's itinerary: mani-pedis, a relaxing facial and a massage in the spa. I want to grab her hand and give her the things I think will make her happy. But how can mani-pedis compete with your hair falling in clumps? How can she enjoy the pancakes when they might end up in the toilet? A spa won't return the looks she once possessed either.

She glances in the direction of the acquaintance who had asked the wrong questions, a scowl on the face I've known since high school. She blinks,

fighting back tears. “I know I am too skinny, and I know exactly what happened to my body ... but I don’t need anybody pointing it out.”

I look at her slouched against the chair, the cells inside her body metastasizing while her anger slowly dissolves into despair. I have to do something, say something. “You can’t let one stupid idiot’s comment ruin our trip.”

We’re quiet for a moment, the silence filling out all of life’s blank questions. Then she sighs and sits up. “You’re right, I shouldn’t let a stupid idiot ruin our trip.”

“I know. I’m always right.”

She gives me the start of a smile and I return it with a wink, then push a fork in front of her.

The whipped cream, and salty caramel melting over the buttermilk pancakes finally catch her attention. She takes a bit and closes her eyes. The corners of lips lift up and her face relaxes in a nirvana state.

I take a bite too, hoping that she won’t hear my heart thumping, that she won’t catch the fake bravado in my voice, or notice the tears threatening to flood my eyes. I don’t know how much time we have, but this exact moment will play on repeat for the rest of my life. I grab one of her hands ... and I don’t let. Go.



Paul Germano lives in Syracuse, smack dab in the center of New York State. He rarely leaves the Syracuse city limits, but his fiction gets around. More than 60 of his stories have been published in magazines in the United States, Canada, England, Scotland, Hong Kong and India, including *Blink-Ink*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Bright Flash Literary Review*, *The Dribble Drabble Review*, *50-Word Stories*, *Friday Flash Fiction*, *The Hong Kong Review*, *A Thin Slice of Anxiety*, *Vestal Review*, *Voices in Italian America* and *Word City Literary Journal*, as well as previously appearing four times in *10 by 10*.

Mets Ballcap In A Kosher Deli

Joel Rabinowitz, 53 and twice divorced, struts down the block, proud of what he has to offer. He's wearing tight dark-wash jeans, trendy name-brand sneakers, a tank top that shows off his flat stomach and muscular biceps and a Mets ballcap that hides his receding hairline. He's confident that his ballcap makes him look far younger than his 53 years. Two women chatting up a storm are heading his way. As they pass by, one of them flashes a smile, the other one gives him a flirty wink. He resists the temptation to look over his shoulder, but he's certain if he did, he'd see them looking back at him. "Nice ass," one of them says in a whisper that's loud enough to hear. He rounds the corner with an amused smile on his face and makes his way into the kosher deli. There's someone new at the counter. He flashes a winning smile and orders his usual. "I'll have a Pastrami on Rye, a side of slaw and a Dr. Pepper to wash it down."

She nods, says “coming right up sir” and flashes a genuine smile when he compliments her earrings. He sizes her up. She’s petite and attractive with dark brown hair, light brown eyes and a sweet voice. Her hands are ring-free. He assumes she’s Jewish, it’s a kosher deli after all, but he second-guesses himself and thinks she could be Italian, Dominican or Puerto Rican. He makes an educated guess that she’s in her early-thirties and he’s hopeful that with his ballcap doing its job of hiding his male pattern baldness, she might think he’s 41 or at the most 42. Not much of an age difference between them, based on his own convoluted math.

They converse in small talk and mild flirtations and she reveals that she’s Greek and Serbian on her father’s side and Jewish with Russian roots on her mother’s side. She points to his ballcap and says, “Our family is split down the middle.” He raises a confused eyebrow. “Oh, not the Jewish part, Dad converted. I’m talking about baseball. Both of my sisters like the Yankees. But my brother and I are true-blue Mets fans.” He gives her a thumbs-up. “Good for you and your brother,” he says. “And your parents?” he asks. “They only watch football,” she says with a dismissive wave of her hand. He’s not sure why, but he finds this utterly amusing and she laughs right along with him. He fidgets with his ballcap and tells her that he and his buddies drive down to Queens at least twice during the season to watch the Mets play, which seems to impress her. “The rest of the time, I watch the games right here in Syracuse on my big screen TV.” She laughs a sweet laugh and they make direct eye contact. He fidgets again with his ballcap, absolutely certain that if he dares to take it off, it’ll ruin everything.