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10 BY 10

FLASH FICTION STORIES

SEPTEMBER 2025

ISSUE 32

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Welcome to Issue #32

Six new authors and four repeat appearances and all 10 are fine story tellers. For those who may want to submit for the first time, send only one story that is 200 to 500 words in an attached Word.doc, along with a bio of any length and an attached head & shoulders jpeg photo. That means each submission should have three attachments to send in an email. No PDFs or Google docs, etc. **Please do not submit previously published stories whether hard copy or online**. The same applies to AI. Please send your own work. While reading these stories sit in a comfortable chair or couch, have a snack and an adult beverage or a soda, ice tea or coffee and enjoy these offerings.

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's *Selected & New Poetry* will be published soon by Big Table Publishing Company. His short stories, *Infidelities* will be published in the near future. Sesling lives in Brookline, MA with his wife Susan J. Dechter.

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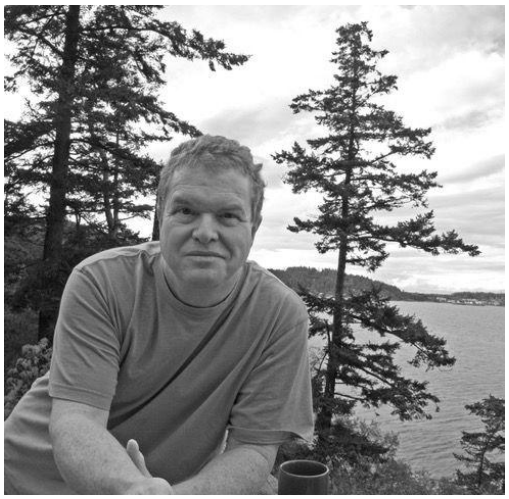

Greg Martin is a retired IT and finance professional who began writing fiction and essays after a 40-year corporate career. A former U.S. Marine Corps officer, he has lived in Miami, Washington, D.C., Northern Virginia, and Canada—settings that often appear in his work. His essays and verse have appeared in *ExPAT*, *MiniMAG* and the *Canadian Poetry Institute. H*e is currently completing a novel and has a collection of short fiction and essays. Martin is also a musician and photographer.

A Ghost in the Men's Room

I was a corporate, white-collar, paper pusher. So, going into the office on a weekend was not unusual. One Saturday, in for some catch up work, there was an incident in the men's room.

My office was in a downtown building. Each floor had cubes and printers and pantries and along with these, four restrooms. Basic corporate landscape.

After a lot of coffee, I was off to the restroom—the sign read *Men*. The restrooms had movement sensors—lights off until you entered or moved around.

I pushed open the door, lights popped on and I entered into a room with several urinals on one side and two sinks on the other. Past these, two stalls. Standard layout, clean but not fancy.

I didn't make it all the way in.

I stopped in my tracks, stunned. In front of me was a woman, standing at the sinks staring at me.

Immediately blurting out an apology— *"Oh my god, I'm so sorry, I'm in the wrong room, sorry, sorry"*—I flash to the trouble of a man entering a woman's

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restroom. I'd be dragged into an HR Inquisition with paperwork and insinuations or get walked to the door in shame.

The woman made no sound, no move, just stared. Her eyes were locked onto mine—a sardonic half-smile—like we were sharing a secret, unspoken joke.

In the few seconds apologizing, I took notice.

Young, attractive—a pretty face. Light brown hair held in a ponytail like she'd prepared to lean over the sink to brush her teeth.

I backed out. She never said a word, just stared with that funny smile.

Outside, I confirmed this was indeed the Men's Restroom. There were guards on the first floor but what would I say? *"A woman is in the men's room, and I feel uncomfortable?"*

Unusual, but she just entered the wrong restroom. She'll be embarrassed when she finds me standing there. We'll both laugh and move on. Probably an intern. Silly mistake is all.

So, I waited to politely ask if she was ok. I waited fifteen minutes, and never once took my eyes off that door. I still had to use the facility myself, by the way.

I eventually got the nerve to go in.

I held my breath, approached, then opened the door, slowly. The lights popped on. Empty. Nothing and no one. Not against the wall, not in the stalls, not on the ceiling as I checked every possibility. I even checked for cameras in case this was some type of hologram. But she was a person, not a vision, not wispy and see-through, nothing ethereal. In the restroom there was nothing and no one.

I left—this was my last day on the job.

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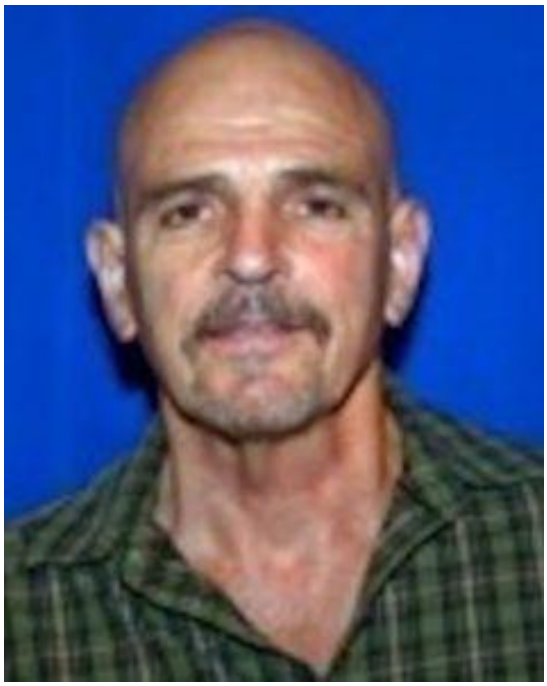

Louis Kummerer is a technical writer working and living in Phoenix, Arizona. His work has been published in *New Delta Review, The Brussels Review, Bristol Noir* , *10x10 Flash*, *Yellow Mama, Punk Noir, Micromance, CaféLit, Bright Flash Literary Review* , *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *The Chamber Magazine*, *Friday Flash Fiction* , and *101 Words*. A collection of his work appears at louk247-fiction.com.

Just Maybe

Today's the day and I don't want to be late because I know how much that annoys you, how that was one of the little things that mattered to you when we both began counting little things (not realizing how quickly little things become big things) until finally we broke up, which neither of us thought would ever happen but did and now, here we are, several years later, emailing again and you tell me you're going to be in town for the weekend so why don't we get together for old time's sake, although I suspect we're both secretly hoping that—just maybe—it'll be more than that and—just maybe—we can resurrect what we once had and make it good again, which is why it's so important that I don't blow it by being late, and it's also why I'm freaking out now, because your flight lands in 45 minutes, I'm a half hour from the airport and I'm still standing here

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by the closet trying to decide what shirt to wear (which was another thing that used to drive you crazy, my inability to make simple decisions) so, finally, in desperation, I grab the blue one because you always said I looked good in blue, and then I rush to the car, still buttoning my shirt, and I'm in such a panic about being late that I back into the street without looking behind me and I drive like a maniac until I finally reach the freeway, where traffic is fairly light, but even so, by the time I get to the airport it's barely ten minutes before you land so I'm running through the terminal, stopping only to check which gate you arrive at, and all the while I'm wondering if this is a bad idea, if maybe this whole thing is a mistake, but it's too late now, because when I arrive at your gate, scattered groups of people have already begun trickling down the walkway, so I pan the crowd looking for you, wondering if you'll still recognize me, and if you'll be disappointed because I'm older, because I'm not as thin as I once was, but mostly because you just don't feel the same spark anymore, and then I see you and as soon as we make eye contact, you break into a bright smile and I'm overwhelmed by how beautiful I still find you, and you walk up and give me a big hug and, while we're waiting for your luggage, we chatter away like old friends, but then as we begin walking to my car, the conversation suddenly dries up and I get an ominous feeling that maybe the initial rush of excitement is all that we're going to get, that what's been tarnished by time can't be made bright again, but when you get in the car, you tell me how happy you are to see me and, on the way home, we're laughing and joking again, and…

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Lori Cramer's short prose has appeared in *Fictive Dream, Flash Boulevard, Flash Fiction Magazine, The Mersey Review*, *Scaffold,* and elsewhere. Her work has been longlisted for the *Wigleaf* Top 50 and nominated for *Best Microfiction*. Links to her writing can be found at https://loricramerfiction.wordpress.com. X: @LCramer29. Bluesky: @loricramerwriter.bsky.social.

A Love Song

Rushing into the rehearsal room, Rex announces he's going to write Cassandra a love song. He's never written one before, he admits, but his bandmate Jonesy cranks out two or three a month, so how tough could it be? After a quick vocal warmup, Rex sings some random phrases: "Your hair's so…. Oh, your eyes, they're like…. Whenever I'm with you…."

"I appreciate the thought," Cassandra says. "But you don't have to—"

"I wanna." He grabs Jonesy's acoustic guitar and starts strumming.

Jonesy storms in from the other room. "What do you think you're doing?" He rips the instrument out of Rex's hands.

"Writing a love song for Cassandra."

"Don't touch my Gibson." Jonesy glares at him.

Rex holds up his palms in surrender. "Sorry, man."

Jonesy gently places his guitar back in its stand. He eyes Rex, then Cassandra, then Rex again. "You're writing a song?"

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"Sure am! It's gonna be great. Biggest hit the band's ever had."

"What've you got so far?"

Rex shakes his head. "Nothing."

"You need a riff to get it started?"

"Nah, I wanna write the whole thing myself."

Jonesy snickers. "All right then. Good luck. I'm going back to watch the rest of the game."

"What's the score?" Rex asks.

"It's 5-5 in the bottom of the ninth."

Rex jumps up. "I'm gonna go see what happens," he tells Cassandra.

"What about the song?" Jonesy asks.

"I'll do it later," Rex calls from the other room.

Jonesy rolls his eyes, then smiles at Cassandra. "Don't worry, Cassie. *I'll* write you a love song—one that's even better than all the others I've written you."

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Sandra Arnold is the author of eight books of fiction and non-fiction. Her work has been published internationally. She lives in New Zealand and has a PhD in Creative Writing from Central Queensland University, Australia. https://www.sandraarnold.co.nz

Rage

Flora straightened up from digging carrots for the soup she was going to make for dinner tonight with that freshly baked bread she'd just taken from the oven. She turned the hose on to water the rest of the vegetable patch and watched the droplets of water sparkle in the evening light. She looked down the garden at the lighted window of the living room and watched her husband, Jeff, playing the piano with twelve-year-old Rachel, while four-year-old Tiffany danced to the music and eight-year-old Jonathan lay on the floor beside the dog, absorbed in his jigsaw puzzle.

She glanced at the sandpit, swings and slide in the garden that she and Jeff had set up soon after they'd bought this house and remembered the bare back garden of her own childhood home before her father decided to plant a lawn.

While Flora and her brother watched him sprinkling grass seeds over the carefully raked earth, he issued instructions to them never play on the new lawn or even walk on it, or they would damage the grass, but one day while he was at work, they played football on the lush green stretch.

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When their father came home and saw the flattened grass his anger manifested in bloodied noses, bruised eyes and split lips.

Forty years later, as the sun set and the sky darkened and the birds sang their evening songs Flora stood in her garden watching her family through the window, and whispered, “Hold this moment, hold it in your heart.”

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Salvatore Difalco writes from Toronto, Canada.

The Garage

My mother had asked my father's cousins Ignazio and Giovanni to tear down his old garage and haul away the debris. It was teetering. She had sold his Pontiac Parisienne the week before to a paisan. She couldn't drive. She asked me to help the cousins. My heart wasn't in it, but I went out back with them and watched as they took sledgehammers to the sides of the garage, reducing it to a heap of rotting timbers and insulbrick.

As they gathered the debris and dumped it into the pickup truck they parked behind the garage, I moved in to help but—disgusted by the mushy wood and scattering bugs—froze.

"Don't get your hands dirty," Ignazio said, winking at Giovanni.

"You're wearing gloves," I said.

"Go get gloves, then," Giovanni said.

I returned to the house. Dressed in black, my mother stood behind the screen door, arms crossed, jaw set.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"I need gloves," I said.

"Go check the workroom."

I went downstairs to my father's workroom, untouched since he passed away six months ago, a blueprint left unrolled on his worktable, tools gathering dust. A red plaid work shirt still hung on a chair. For some reason I leaned down

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and sniffed the collar. It still smelled of him: tobacco, borotalco, and a hint of sweat. A quiver of sadness moved through me, but I fought it back. My mother didn't have the heart to go down to my father's workroom anymore. Felt weird for me. I'd say sad, if that were true. I felt more numb than sad. Things were just happening. I had no say in or control of anything. Found a pair of work gloves, stiff as boards. Managed to stuff my hands into them and went up.

My mother still stood at the screen door, arms crossed.

"They left?" I asked, not seeing the cousins at work.

"I told them to leave," she said.

"Why?" I asked.

"They can come back another time."

"When?"

"I don't know. Another time."

"Look," I said, showing her the gloves.

"Take them off," she said.

"Why?"

"Take them off!" she snapped.

"Ma—"

She slapped me across the face.

I stood there shocked, my cheek and nose smarting where her palm struck, my chin trembling as my eyes welled with tears. It had been a long time since she hit me. It had been a long time since either of my parents hit me. I fought back the tears and shook off the gloves.

My mother exited the kitchen and went upstairs to her bedroom, where she'd been spending a lot of time.

I returned to the workroom and put the gloves back where I found them.

I could hear her screaming from down there.

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Ann Kammerer lives in the Chicago area, and is a native of Michigan. Her poetry and short fiction have appeared or are forthcoming in *Fictive Dream, One Art, Open Arts Forum, Bright Flash Literary Review, Chiron Review, BlazeVOX, The Broken Spine* and elsewhere and in anthologies by Workers Write!, Querencia Press, and Crow Woods Publishing. Her chapbook collections of narrative poetry include *Yesterday's Playlist*, *Beaut*, *Friends Once There*, *Someone Else* and *At the Cleaners* (Bottlecap Press, 2025). You can find her here: annkammerer.com

Big Dates, Little Dates

Mom got sick during the time I worked as a secretary and rented a tiny house behind a furniture store. She lost weight and threw up a lot, and couldn't walk without hunching. She was in the hospital, but wouldn't say what was wrong, only that she'd get better since she planned to die from something else.

"Don't bother to visit," she said. "You're too busy anyway."

I told her I'd come when I could, that the hospital wasn't far from my office at the insurance agency and on the bus line.

"Well how convenient," Mom said. "Whatever you do, don't put yourself out."

My boss let me leave a little before 5 to catch an earlier bus.

"Big date?" Gary looked me up and down, saying he guessed I was going home to change.

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“No,” I said. “I’m going to see my Mom. Like, I haven’t in a while.”

He offered to give me a ride. I said no.

“OK then,” he winked. “Don’t forget our big date—back here—tomorrow—at 8 a.m.”

Mom didn’t talk much when I got there, saying she was sick of nurses.

“Go home,” she said. “I don’t need you to come stare at me.”

I left and walked two blocks to Fitzpatrick’s. Men from the GM plant smoked and laughed near the jukebox. A guy in a red shirt and ball cap came to sit next to me at the bar.

“My name’s Scott,” he said.

I told him my name. We chatted and he bought me a beer.

“Help yourself to some smokes.” He slid me a pack of Marlboro’s and a Bic lighter.

“Thanks.” I lit a cigarette. Scott lit one, too, and chuckled at the TV.

“That was funny,” he said. You know. This show.”

I exhaled as credits rolled on “Eight is Enough.”

“I guess,” I said. “I don’t watch TV a lot.”

He rested his arm on the back of my chair.

“Yeah, me neither,” he said. “Just here.”

We started meeting on Tuesdays and Thursdays, sharing fried mushrooms and pitchers of Bud. He always asked if he could drive me home. I’d say no. One night it rained so I let him.

“Kinda like a real date,” Scott said. “I promise. I won’t do nothing weird.”

We ran through the rain to his pickup, our shoes soaked from puddles. He opened my door, and I climbed in.

“Wanna sit in the middle?” Scott swept fast-food wrappers from the cracked vinyl seat. I scooted over as he extended his arm over my shoulders, steering with one hand.

When we got to my place, he shifted into park, leaving the radio on to some Styx song, the windshield wipers squeaking with light rain.

“I’ll see you later.” He didn’t kiss me but leaned close so I could smell the sweat and grease on his shirt.“OK then.”

Hopping out, I waved, his muffler rattling, his cracked taillight flickering as he pulled into the street.

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Pamela Painter is the award-winning author of five story collections. Her stories have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, and have been included in Best Micro and Best Short Fictions, and received four Pushcart Prizes. Painter's stories have been produced by Word Theatre in LA, London and New York.

That Old Desert Island Question

Afterward, we are side by side, sheets on the floor next to hastily discarded clothes, wine glasses empty. We're talking about our previous married lives. The good. The Bad. The sad, real sad. And happy. He chooses "the bad," saying that at first it was "good" but then turned "bad" but he doesn't go into detail. I go with "happy" then "sad"--willing to elaborate. I say it took my late husband and me one whole week listening to our vintage vinyl to choose the musical instrument we'd take to a desert island. "We finally settled on a clarinet."

He taps his approval on my ribs. "Yeah. Benny Goodman. Artie Shaw, Pete Fountain."

It gets him thinking. And I wonder if he's thinking what I'm thinking: the two of us, stranded together on that desert island. Choosing our very own musical instrument, though of course the clarinet has been usurped by my previous, happily married life.

"Well," he says, plumping his pillow, next to my flat one. He says, "Okay. If I was stranded on a desert island…"

I'm disappointed. He is clearly not thinking "us." But still curious, I prod his naked knee.

"Right. Right," he says. "A desert island. In the middle of the ocean." His eyes narrow in future pleasure. "Hey, yeah. I'd take a pipe organ. A double or triple keyboard. Surely there's enough wood in a pipe organ to make a boat."

I flounce out of bed to retrieve the dregs of the wine. Why do I suspect, or rather how do I know, he sees himself as the only sailor on that boat.

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Robert Garnham's short stories have been published widely in magazines such as *Stand, Defenestration, Flash Fiction Magazine, Ink, Sweat and Tears* and my poetry has been published in *Acumen, Tribe, The Broadsheet*. In 2021 and 2022 I was nominated for the Pushcart Prize. I write a humorous column every two weeks in the Herald Express newspaper, and as a comedy performance poet, I have performed all over the UK at festivals, fringes, radio and TV.

The Seal

She said there was a seal down in the harbour. It was a cold day and I didn't know if I wanted to go all the way down to the harbour just to see a seal. And yet, what other chance of seeing a seal would I get?

'Did it look like it was staying?', I asked, 'or did it look like it was just about to leave?'

'I have no idea', she replied. 'What a stupid question. I can't read the mind of a seal'.

'Maybe. But sometimes you can tell by body language'.

'I have never', she said, 'read the body language of a seal'.

I lingered near the door of our rented flat and I thought about going down to the harbour to see the seal. Sure, it would be nice to see the seal, and to tell my friends the next day at work that I had seen one, and thereby, demonstrate to them how idyllic it was to live near the harbour, that I was fully embracing life in a fishing village. I'd never lived near a harbour before.

'Well?', she asked.

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It would also show them that I wasn't quite as one-dimensional as they probably believed me to be, that there was more beneath the surface than I normally let on.

On the other hand, I could easily go online and look at videos of seals, I thought. But that wouldn't be the same.

'Were people taking videos of the seal with their mobile phones?', I asked.

'Yes', she replied.

It was getting dark. If I prevaricated any longer then it would be too dark to see the seal.

'Perhaps they might upload the footage online', I said. 'And I can just see the seal that way'.

She didn't say anything for a while, but the next time she spoke, she did so to tell me that it was moments like this that made her regret deciding to live with someone so damn unadventurous that they'd rather watch a video of a seal online instead of walking a short distance to the harbour and watching a seal for real with their own eyes.

'I'm not unadventurous', I pointed out. 'I live in a town with a harbour'.

'That's true', she said.

Other things distracted us and we didn't talk about the seal any more but later that night when we were in bed I remembered our conversation, and it was quite a comforting thought that the seal was out there, in the harbour, so close to where we now lived, so snug in bed together, in our town with its harbour.

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Kitty Beer's stories and articles have appeared in print and online in the U.S. and Canada, including her work as an environmental journalist. She grew up in New England and raised her two children in Canada, Germany and upstate New York. She holds her B.A. from Harvard University, and her M.A. from Cornell University. Beer's series of novels about climate change is titled *Resilience: A Trilogy of Climate Chaos,* reflecting her emphasis on the courage of overcoming disaster. The novels are *What Love Can't Do*, *Human Scale*, and *The Hampshire Project*. Her most recent book is titled *Marriages and Other Dilemmas: Collected Stories and a Memoir.* Currently she's writing and publishing short stories, the most recent of which appeared in the literary magazine *Constellations* and online at *TheRavensPerch.com*. Her short story "Don't Ask" is included in *Best Climate Change Stories.* Beer is loving and tolerant, but she likes to speak truth to power.

The Deal

During the height of the climate migrations in the 2080s, I was traveling north from Hartford with my friend Eleanor. She was a stolid woman of forty and I just a slip of a girl at eighteen, but we bonded because we both had heavy baggage that made it hard for us to get rides. At first we were lucky to find a horse-drawn pickup truck with room in the back. But the next day the driver announced he'd be heading west, so we opted to join a northbound group as we both had dreams of reaching Vermont. That evening we got off the truck staggering under our ridiculous burdens. Besides my backpack stuffed with essentials, both my arms were needed to grasp the ceramic urn with my parents' ashes. Eleanor's treasure was her twenty-pound sewing machine.

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Our new group made camp near a stream. We had a leader of sorts, a scruffy, thickset man in his thirties named Lev, who bossed everybody around. Some just ignored him, but most obeyed for lack of energy. At that time numbering about twenty people, all of us were punchy with loss and fear.

Eleanor and I spread our sleeping bags together on a slope near spindly bushes giving us a hint of privacy. Then we helped gather sticks and branches to feed the common fire, and carried water from the stream in whatever containers we could find to fill a hefty pot boiling over it. Thirsty as everyone was, nobody streak, Eleanor and I settled wearily and gratefully into our little nook. From here we could watch the sturdy fire glow and the darkening ripple of the stream.

"Apples were good," she remarked. She was sitting cross-legged on her sleeping bag, dark blond hair awry. "Bread not."

"Supposed to be a bakery coming up at Sturbridge. That's the rumor anyway."

"We could be there tomorrow."

"Not unless we get a ride," I noted gloomily.

Lev was lumbering around the encampment giving out orders and advice. When he stopped by us, he snorted at Eleanor's sewing machine.

"You'll never get anywhere lugging that around. What'cha want that for?"

Eleanor arched her eyebrows at him. "I'm a seamstress."

"Hah! Is that so?"

He squatted down and peered at her closely. "Well then, can you repair this?" He pulled his coat open to reveal a jagged tear in the lining.

"That's easy," she said.

"Done. You do this for me, I'll give you a ride in my wagon."

Eleanor gave him a sunny smile, shaking her head. "But I never go anywhere without my friend here."

"This little twit carrying dead ashes around?"

"Try to be polite," she chided.

Lev stood up, managing a swagger. "Not used to that. Be ready to leave at dawn. Both of you."

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Paul Goodwin lives in Somerset, England, where he writes fiction and non-fiction. His stories have been published by *Literally Stories*, *CommuterLit*, *Five Minutes*, *CafeLit, Marrow* and *LitBreak* magazines, among others. His books include *Forewarned (*Biteback Publications) and *Something Doesn't Add Up* (Profile).

The Squawker

I turn right at the crossroads and wait for the inevitable: “What are you going this way for?” The squawky voice rises to top gear. “This road is too busy, and there’s school buses to hold you up.”

I point to the satnav. It’s showing my route to be the best. “I never trust algorithms,” he squawks. “Never have. Never will.”

We’re off for a day’s hiking in the hills with a group. The early sun dazzles through the windscreen, and I make the mistake of saying I’ve drowned myself in suntan lotion.

“You don’t need that. By this time in the year, you’ll be brown enough to be protected. Waste of money.”

At the car park, he eyes me closely through round metal-rimmed glasses. His wild curls frame his circular face and red cheeks. He looks like a mannequin from 1950s children’s TV.

“New boots?” he says. “How much?”

“150 quid,” I say. “What! Got mine for half that and they’ve lasted me ten years.”

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We join the rest of the party, and I rush ahead to converse with someone else. But all the way up the valley, the squawker's voice can be heard pronouncing his solutions to the world's problems.

We reach a grassy upland area and stop for a coffee break. This time I make a point of sitting by him as I soak in the view. Far below, a vintage steam locomotive drags its load along a narrow precipice. There's a precious moment of quiet as he sips from his flask. I seize my chance.

"It's lovely up here," I say, "and that railroad- the Dillon Valley line- is most scenic in the country."

He pulls the flask away as if he's about to choke. "Nonsense," he snorts, "there's plenty better than that."

"That's odd," I reply.

"What's odd?"

I shuffle inside my rucksack and draw out a crumpled newspaper.

"You're a big railroad enthusiast." He nods in a rare moment of agreement.

I open the paper. There's a picture of him dressed in a railroad uniform, blowing a whistle. An antique locomotive polished to perfection stands behind him. The report is five years old, but he hasn't changed much. His curls spring in profusion from under a porter's hat. I suspect he's told the photographer they've got the wrong aperture.

"Read the caption under the photo," I say.

He pulls his glasses to the end of his nose.

The caption reads 'Train aficionado pronounces Dillon Valley railroad the most scenic in the country.'

He huffs and stands up, eager to get away with a dismissive wave.

"You shouldn't believe what you read in newspapers, " he shouts "By your advanced age, you should be savvy enough to know that."

He strides toward the walk leader, head tilted back, and breaks into the woman's conversation.

"You could have chosen a better place for coffee," he snarls.