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## FLASH FICTION STORIES



Number 38, April 2026

Welcome aboard for Issue 38 loaded with quirky stories (you decide which are quirky) and the usual coterie of truly wonderful writers, including a number of my personal favorites: Huina Zheng, Eileen Tabios, Tim Gager, David Henson and six new comers who I hope rock your boat as well. So, as I often say, find a comfy place to sit, grab something cold to drink, sit back and enjoy this issue.

*Zvi A. Sesling*

Editor



**Zvi A. Sesling**, Brookline, MA Poet Laureate (2017-2020), has published numerous poems, flash fiction, science fiction, crime and other short stories. He is a five-time poetry and flash fiction Pushcart Prize nominee. He has published eight books of poetry. Sesling edits *10x10 Flash Fiction Stories*. His *Selected and New Poetry* will be published in 2026 as will his short stories *Infidelities*. He lives Brookline, MA. with his wife Susan J. Dechter.



**Huina Zheng** holds an M.A. with Distinction in English Studies and works as a college essay coach. Her creative work has been published in *Baltimore Review*, *Variant Literature*, *Midway Journal*, and other literary journals. She has received multiple honors, including nominations for the Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, Best Small Fictions, and Best Microfiction. She lives in Guangzhou, China, with her family.

### **This Time She Didn't Cry**

Lan gripped her shoulder bag tighter. Recently, motorcycle thefts had become rampant, with riders speeding past and snatching anything within reach. Three years ago, when she returned to this city, she had been robbed.

At that time, after she had walked in on her boyfriend in bed with another girl in their shared single room, she was heartbroken. She dragged her suitcase to the bus station, heading to Guangzhou, the city where she went to university. When she stepped out of the bus station, someone snatched her handbag from beside her. She was pulled to the ground, scraping her knees and arms. The person sped away on a motorcycle. Her ID, bank card, and phone were all gone. She couldn't help but cry at the police station, but the officer coldly said, "Be more careful next time." That night, she sat in a McDonald's and slept, hugging her suitcase close to her chest.

She walked on the inner side of the sidewalk, close to the buildings. Under the dim streetlights, she watched her shadow lengthen and shrink. This street was relatively safe, with surveillance cameras. She let out a small sigh of relief.

A young man walked toward her. He was tall, with a sharp nose and long legs. She thought of the boy she had once loved, and a fluttering feeling stirred in her chest. That boy had been her college classmate. When he smiled, his eyes shone like a horse's, and whenever she missed class, he would lend her his notes. After returning to Guangzhou, she had dreamt of him several times. In those dreams, she would tell him that she loved him, and he would look at her with his horse-like eyes.

The man walked toward her, his eyes never leaving her face. She boldly met his gaze, and for a few seconds, the sound of car horns and passing motorcycles seemed to disappear. She felt her fingers unconsciously loosen the strap of her bag, even lowering her head, like all the shy girls would. She thought, maybe this city was finally going to give her something.

She didn't even see how his hand moved. Suddenly, a force yanked on her bag strap, pulling her forward. She wanted to shout, but the sound got caught in her throat. She saw his chiseled profile, the man who had been looking at her just a second ago, now leaving only his

indifferent jawline. He jumped onto a motorcycle that had stopped just in time, and they sped away.

Her bag didn't contain her ID or much cash. She had learned to accept that. But her house key, phone, a bank card, and a lipstick she had just bought last week were all gone. She stood still, watching the direction where the motorcycle disappeared. Passersby walked past her, some looking back, but no one stopped. It was the same as three years ago at the bus station. This city never asks why you cry. But this time, she didn't cry.



**Swetha Amit** holds an MFA from the University of San Francisco and is a member of the Writers Grotto. She has authored a memoir and three chapbooks. Her stories have appeared in *Bending Genres*, *Ghost Parachute*, *Gone Lawn*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, and others. They have been nominated for the *Pushcart Prize*, *Best of the Net*, *Best Microfiction* and *Best Small Fiction*.

### **The Opossum in the garden**

Ma shakes her head at me when I tell her the possum in the garden is my dead grandma's spirit. "Stop whispering to the trees and air," she scolds, her cheeks flushed like hibiscus petals, and her brown hair pulled into a tight braid. But I can't help it. The possum in the garden, crouched near the rose bushes, has round, beady black eyes glinting in the sun. The way it twitches its whiskers, blinks slowly, and tilts its head the way Grandma wanted me to notice little things—like the cracked paint on the fence, the way the wind rustles fallen petals of luminous pink roses, or the scent of wet mud after the rains.

"It is Grandma," I insist, my twelve-year-old voice sounding suddenly squeaky. Grandma, who fixed peanut butter toast every morning for breakfast. Grandma, who slipped me chocolate chip cookies when Ma wasn't looking. Grandma, who treated me to ten dollars when Ma refused my pocket money. Ma said I need to stop holding on to the thought that she'll return. Ma also said I was allowed to cry. Boys can cry, she reiterated. Ma said I never let the tears flow down my face,. Not when I heard about how Grandma fell down the stairs. Not at the hospital, where she was surrounded with monitors clicking and beeping like they were counting time,. Not when Ma clutched Grandma's wrinkled brown hands, shaking and sobbing. Not when the monitor stopped beeping, and Grandma lay as still as the sheet.

That morning, before grandma fell, I had an argument with her about picking pink roses from the bushes. She instructed me not to, saying the thorns would prick my fingers. I argued, saying I was a big boy—aren't I?—reminding her of the times she said I must behave like a grown man after pa abandoned me to pursue his career dreams. I argued that it doesn't matter if the thorns prick me and that I wouldn't die. She asked me to apologize for my tone, but I didn't. I ran to my room and locked myself in a huff. I never heard her calling me. I

never heard her falling down the stairs until it was too late. Until the sound of sirens echoed in my house. Until ma banged the door.

Ma stares when I leave a plate with a few jaggery pieces and some chopped apples. The possum approaches, sniffing each item before nibbling. Like how grandma stirred and sniffed her ginger tea before sipping it. The possum, after finishing, pauses and looks at me, gaze steady, eyes filled with warmth and recognition. It feels comforting, as if it were saying I am always here.

Ma says Grandma has blessed and forgiven me. I let the tears finally roll down, imagining her warm hand patting my hand, humming that old tune, and the lingering scent of lavender.



**Eileen R. Tabios** has released books of poetry, fiction, essays, art and experimental prose from publishers around the world. Recent publications include the novels *The Balikbayan Artist* and *DoveLion*; the poetry collections *Engkanto in the Diaspora* and *Because I Love You, I Become War*; an autobiography *The Inventor*; the short story collections *The Erotic Space Around Art Objects* and *Getting To One*; and an art monograph *Drawing Six Directions*. Forthcoming in 2027 will be her *Collateral Damage Blues*, a combined novel and poetry collection. More information at <https://eileenrtabios.com>

### **Eliding Autocoprophygy**

During the journey of adopting a child from an orphanage, someone on the planet was taken aside by an adoption adviser. She was a mother of three children, two of which she'd adopted. She whispered, "They'll be pushing well-behaved and obedient children at you. Most people prefer the docile. But you want the rebellious ones. Rebels understand something is wrong and so they protest."

The future father nodded—he'd learned not to cancel any seed for the bromide of "peace" (or the illusion of the "sublime"). "

Later," she added after she saw his comprehension, "these rebels are more likely to survive when they look back at their beginnings. They'll understand they were born into an enforced negativity against which to be a child was to be helpless. They'll learn they were not at fault. They'll learn it was fate, and that fate is amoral."

He nodded again: he'd long understood gods—or lack thereof—were formed in childhood. Rebellion required thoughtfulness—privilege the rebels. To be born is to begin an inherited life. Inheritance always comes with crap. To privilege the rebels is to treasure the thinkers.

"Otherwise," concluded the experienced mother, "we'd end up raising creatures who'll eat their own shit."

Rebellion: such is how one transcends the unequivocal "Yuck!" to end the story with *Grace*.



**Pablo Libedinsky** is a retired computer programmer living in San Francisco, California. He wrote a few stories when he was 12 years old and then stopped, later returning to writing as an adult. One of his stories has been published by *Down in the Dirt*. One story will be published by *Let Me Tell You a Story*, and another one by *Academy of the Heart and Mind*.

### **Point of No Return**

“Remember,” the instructor had said. “Count to ten and pull the ring on your right side.”

“One... two... three... four...” Mark was touching the harness very lightly, looking for the ring. He was beginning to sweat. After all, it was the first time.

“Nine...” He found it.

“Ten!”

He pulled the ring, waited a second or two—nothing happened.

“Remember,” the instructor had said. “If the first ring doesn’t work, pull the ring that’s on your chest.”

Mark, now in a panic, rubbed his chest with both hands, looking for the ring. When he found it, he pulled hard... but still nothing happened.

“What now!” he yelled, as the ground kept coming up to him faster and faster.

He closed his eyes—and then felt the pull of the parachute.

Later, after Mark had stopped shaking and both were sitting on a bench drinking coffee, the instructor asked:

“Did you remember what I told you?”

“Yes,” Mark said. “Pull the right ring first. If that doesn’t work, pull the ring in the front.” Mark stopped.

“Yes?” prompted the instructor.

“You didn’t tell me what to do if the second ring fails. So I panicked and blanked out, but now I know.”

“Right. The parachute will open automatically,” the instructor said, and then he added with a smile, “Actually, the rings are not attached to anything.”

Mark sat silently. Finally, he said, “That was a rotten thing to do. I could have had a heart attack.”

“I’m sorry. I apologize. Just so you know, we always do this to the first timers. It conquers their fear of jumping.”

“Really? Well, there won’t be a second time. With you.” Mark said, getting up. “There are other parachuting clubs in this area, you know.” He added, heading for the exit.

A week later, Mark went over the instructions that the new instructor had given him, which happened to be identical to the first ones.

After he jumped, he counted, touching the harness very lightly, looking for the ring.

“One... two... three... four...”

“Nine...” He found it.

“Ten!”

He pulled the ring.



**Debra Myers** was published as a first grader in *Children's Digest* after her teacher sent in her story, "What's Above the Clouds?" Debra is married, a mama to five, and a Nana to ten. She acts and directs in community theater and judges high school theater and cheerleading competitions. In 2016, Debra was diagnosed with Primary Progressive Multiple Sclerosis, and she slipped into depression. Writing about her disease and her feelings became her salvation, providing an outlet and giving her a sense of purpose. Debra has self-published three novels. She's had many articles published online and in print, most recently, an article in *Reader's Digest* and in *Arts Midwest* about her childhood experiences in her hometown's amateur circus.

*Mrs. Beasley*

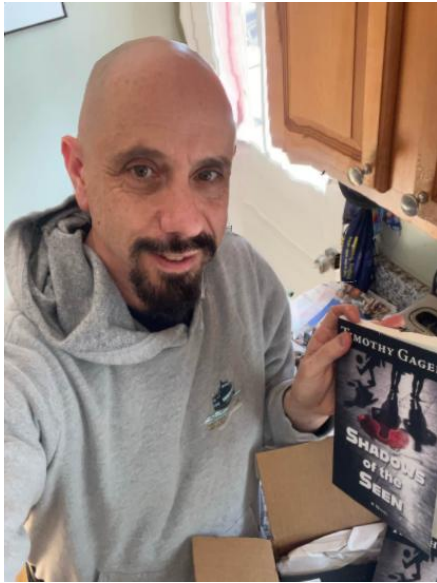
My favorite meal was a fried chicken TV dinner. Remember when they came in an aluminum compartment plate? Second choice was Salisbury steak. Then, I'd run to meet the neighborhood kids. We rode our bikes all over town. We'd go on the dirt trails, play in the empty train cars, go down the high slide at the park, wade in the creek, and play red rover. When I saw the street light flickering. I jumped on my banana seat and raced home. After a bath full of Mr. Bubble, mama braided my hair, and I grabbed my Mrs. Beasley doll. Only my best friend Julie knew that I slept with Mrs. Beasley.

Mama didn't work then. Home was my safe place. Until it wasn't. There was turmoil building between my parents. Although I was too young to know it then, it stemmed from my daddy's drinking. He worked third shift in a factory and would sleep all day while I was at school. Mama woke him up to have supper with us. Two nights a week he took me with him to the bowling alley. I would play in the game room or hang out at the snack bar. In the summertime, he took me to the softball park, and while he played, I was at the playground or basketball court nearby.

It was when mama stopped waking daddy to have dinner with us, and he stopped going to bowl or play ball, that I felt my world shifting. I would ask mama where daddy was, and she would angrily tell me he would rather go to the bar with his friends than be with me. I didn't believe her. He probably left because she was yelling.

One day I came home from school, and he was gone. Mama said he wasn't coming back. She would be going to work. My childhood took a hard left turn. I became a product of my environment controlled not by me, but by my parents.

I was ten, and a "latch key" kid. Mama didn't take me to school anymore. I walked twelve blocks. I had all the outdoor gear imaginable. Puffy coat, scarf, mittens, boots, umbrella, and raincoat. After school, I came home to an empty house. Mama gave me my own key, and it was hidden under a shrub. At first, I thought it was cool. Until I realized she wouldn't be there with a kiss and a snack. Daddy wasn't there sleeping. I wasn't allowed to play outside. I had to stay inside until mama got home. I still had my TV dinner, bubble bath, and Mrs. Beasley. Yet I didn't have my daddy and not really my mama either. I was alone. Just me. I had to grow up. I became fiercely independent, resilient, and defiant. As sad and unfair as it seems, it made me the strong, confident woman I am today. Now I don't eat TV dinners or take bubble baths, but I still have Mrs. Beasley.



**Timothy Gager** is the author of 20 books of fiction and poetry, which includes his fourth novel, *Shadows of the Seen*, and his most recent collection of poetry, *Almost Bluing for X-Tra Whiteness*. 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, 19 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.

### **Kooshioning The Blow**

Frank informed the police that he was a koosh. It wasn't a fetish, or anything of the such, but Frank was wearing a human rubber suit, with harder rubber spiked extensions and became a human squeeze ball.

Hilary was down for that. She had anxiety and being able to squeeze Frank anytime she wanted was so relieving. She was with Frank at the station. Sometimes she said, she would grab his face, and others it might be his forearm. Sometimes she would squeeze the soft, giving suit, two-handed on his chest.

Frank liked it, she said.

What she didn't say was when she was extremely anxious, maybe something other than the outfit could relieve her stress. She had squeezed the suit right at the koosh balls.

It was on a bus.

Frank liked it, she didn't say.

This was their story. Hilary was also prone to motion sickness, so they sat in the front seat right behind the driver. Frank, not an exhibitionist turned away,

so that he faced Hilary. The driver used his rear-view, which had three mirrors attached to the main one, to get a better look. He pushed a button on the dashboard. It was located below his gearshift.

Within minutes, without any warning, siren, or lights, the bus pulled over. Officer Johnson came aboard, which increased the pulse of Hilary's hand, which continued.

Frank knew it was therapeutic.

Officer Johnson didn't know anything.

Frank liked that too.

Off to the station they went. Hilary in the front seat, and Frank in the back of the cruiser. They were not finger-printed, or read their rights, as Frank reached into his rubber suit, and pulled out a psychiatrist's recommendation for what they were doing.

Frank was her psychiatrist.

"It's a pretty kooshy job," Frank said.

Officer Johnson didn't see the humor in any of this.



**Joan Leotta** plays with words on page and stage. Internationally published in English, Italian, Romanian, Arabic, and Urdu, as essayist, poet, short story writer, and novelist, she's a multiple nominee (fiction, non-fiction, and poetry) for Pushcart and Best of the Net and has won other prizes. Among her recent publications are, *One Art*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*, *Yellow Mama*, *Ovunque Siamo* and *Lothlorien*. As a performer she offers folktale programs highlighting food, family, and strong women. Her one woman show "Louisa May Alcott" focuses on Alcott's development as a writer and how the Civil War changed her writing and life. <https://www.facebook.com/joanleotta> or contact at [joanleotta@gmail.com](mailto:joanleotta@gmail.com)

### **Snow Bunny**

Last week my husband had a sudden need for medicine in the middle of the decade's biggest snowstorm. I donned boots, coat, hat, and gloves and set out along the main street in the whiteout, instead of taking the shortcut through the park. Orange scarf pulled up, I trudged along, mostly in the road—sidewalks, curb, invisible.

Mission accomplished, I threw myself back into the weather to return home. Snow was falling even harder, faster. I could barely discern the blinking red lights on the snowplow a bit away. It was for a second pass to further widen this road. Then I heard a faint yip- yip from the snowbank the plow would flatten on its return.

Straining my eyes, I discerned a black spotted tiny creature with big ears struggling in the piled-up snow. Stepping quickly but carefully across the icy street, I pushed aside blocks of ice and snow and plucked up a small spaniel pup. Holding it close, I used my scarf to warm it, inhaling the pungent scent of wet dog as I hurried back to the side of the street. Moments later, the plow erased where the pup had been trapped.

After the storm, we circulated the dog's picture, laughed over his long ears, took him to the vet to check for an ID chip. None found, but health confirmed as good in spite of the pup's snow adventure. Once the snow melted, I began the routine that showed he was already becoming the center of our lives. I walked the pup daily along the park path. We blended into

the landscape, my brown coat like the leaves, his black spots like the damp leafless trees. Nose down, dragging those long ears, he explored every pile of dead damp leaves we passed, giving his white fur a fog gray sheen. As we walked I thought about possible names for our new, tiny, family focal point.

Yesterday, as we walked along, two little girls in pink coats with striped caps and gloves appeared and began to run toward us shouting, "It's Bunny!" The pup strained at the leash trying to reach them. The girls' mother explained: "At the height of the storm, the girls opened the front door to catch snowflakes on their tongues. The dog ran out. We've been hunting him, but until today found no sign of him."

The girls hugged the pup and he licked their faces. They promised to bring him to visit me. The next day they delivered a picture of me and the dog to thank me for rescuing their "Bunny" from the snow.



Cosmic Xposure

**Robert David Garnham's** short stories have been published widely in magazines such as *Stand*, *Defenestration*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Ink Sweat and Tears* and his poetry in *Acumen*, *Tribe* and the *Broadsheet*. In 2021 and 2022 he was nominated for the Pushcart Prize. He writes a humorous newspaper column in the *Herald Express*. He performs comedy poetry all over the UK at fringes, festivals and TV, and had one of the funniest one-liners of the 2018 Edinburgh Fringe. He was recently featured very briefly on Britain's Got Talent. In 2024 he won the Wergle Flomp poetry competition. He has a phobia of sofas.

### **A Sudden Shower**

It's a small chain coffee shop, right there on the beach, and it's just started raining, and now everyone on the beach has decided to go into the coffee shop and get out of the rain, get themselves a hot drink, and I've been sitting here since before it started raining.

I'm at a table for two next to the plate glass window looking out at the terrace, and I'm glad I got served and found somewhere to sit because it's getting full in here and people are queuing at the door, holding the hoods of their raincoats over their heads and looking concerned that there might not be any seats.

A man has come in with a big dog. Honestly, the dog is the size of a horse, it's like a fluffy Alsatian or a small bear, his owner looks around for a table but there are none, he's bypassing the queue with his big hairy dog and when he sees that there are no tables he has to turn around and go out, and the dog is so big that it has to do a three point turn.

There are tables on the terrace but the tables are getting wet, except for those that have sunshades. People are wiping the seats of the tables where they are about to sit, and the man with the big dog is standing out there surveying the situation.

And I'm inside and I've got my pot of tea, and I'm at my little table which I had managed to get before it started raining, though I must admit that I do feel a bit guilty, having this table all for myself. Everyone else has got family members with them, spouses and children and dogs and I'm there on my own because that's how life has been, and sure, I've been here before with my sister and my nephews, but right now, right at this very moment I'm going through life solo, just me.

Incredibly the rain has intensified. It's dripping from the door frame of the coffee shop. A family has grabbed a table on the terrace and their daughter, who's only young, she's dragging a sunshade over in its heavy moulded plastic base, she's using her initiative and going through all of this just to make sure that the whole family is dry, and you know, I could easily surrender my table, but I'm so cosy and my tea is long finished and I just don't want to go out and get wet.

I didn't realise how long I'd been staring out the window at the rain and all the beachgoers. I could imagine one of them, a mother, possibly, leaning in to me and saying, 'You know what? You're really selfish'. I could just imagine that happening.



**Austin Alexis** has published work in *Flash Boulevard*, *Home Planet News Online*, *Rattle*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *The Westchester Review* and elsewhere. His second full-length poetry collection, *The Whirlpool Bath*, was recently published by Kelsay Books. He has published two chapbooks with Poets Wear Prada.

### **The Steam Room**

was empty when Elise entered it, except for a heavy-set woman who avoided eye contact with Elise. The steam was set on “low,” so it was easy to peer across the chamber.

The woman looked familiar to Elise, but Elise hesitated to say “hi” since the lady clearly wanted no engagement. None. About twelve seconds after Elise had entered the steam room the hefty lady rose from the tile bench she’d been sitting on and left the rectangular room.

After fifteen minutes, Elise left the steam room and entered the interconnected locker rooms where she saw the woman again. Dressed for the street, the weighty woman headed for the exit, her face turned away from Elise.

Three days later, Elise and the woman were again alone in the steam room for ten seconds, before the lady got up to leave.

Their aloneness emboldened Elise to speak. “Hi, don’t I know you?” Elise asked.

“No, I don’t think so,” the woman muttered as she tightened towels around her body and treaded for the door.

“Oh, you’re...Nadine. We used to take dance classes together. At the Paul Taylor Studio.”

Now, standing at the glass door to the room, the woman gazed downward. “Don’t remind me of those days, that time when I used to dance. I was limber and toned then, like you are now.”

“Don’t be ashamed of the person you are today. You’re...you’re still attractive.”

“I wanted to be happy and successful like you.” The woman now faced Elise, staring at her as if assessing a dress for sale in a department store. Her voice sounded hot with anxiety.

“What? How much do you know about me?”

“You perform in a good dance company. I’ve seen your picture in dance posts.”

“You don’t know everything about me,” Elise said. “My life’s far from perfect.”

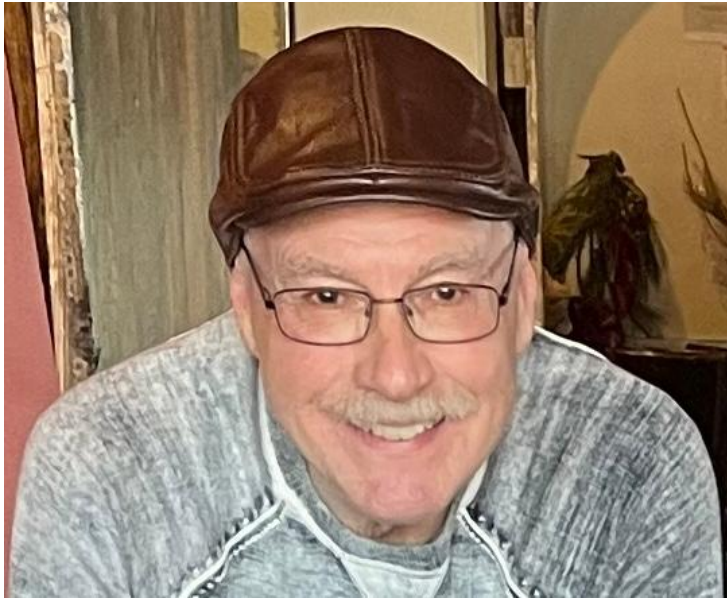
“Don’t try to make me feel better, Elise.”

Elise smiled when she heard Nadine call her by her name. Elise sighed.

“Listen: I got fired from the Chris Yang Dance Company. That devastated me. I continued taking daily dance classes of awhile. But now I’m about to stop altogether.” Elise creased her brow in surprise at what she heard herself say. She hadn’t planned to quit dance completely until she’d said those words.

“Welcome to the club,” Nadine said.

“Now you can look me in the eye, without embarrassment. Without shame,” Elise stated.



**David Henson** and his wife have lived in Brussels and Hong Kong and now reside in Illinois. His work has been selected for Best Microfictions 2025, has nominated for four Pushcart Prizes, and has appeared in various journals including *10 by 10*, *Maudlin House*, *Gastropoda*, *Literally Stories*, *Ghost Parachute*, *Gone Lawn*, and *Moonpark Review*. His website is <http://writings217.wordpress.com>. His Twitter is @annalou8.

### **Death's Door**

The man starts to pull out the chair for the woman, who, looking at her phone, scoots the seat back with her foot.

The man sighs and sits. "Nice view," he says and waits for a reply, drumming his fingers.

"I heard you." The woman puts down her phone. "Work...The scenery belies the name."

The restaurant patio is near the water, which is choppy. In the distance are several islands. "Name?" the man says.

The woman removes the upside-down water glass from her napkin. When it starts to fly away, she thuds the glass down. "Death's Door. I read there've been lots of shipwrecks over the years."

"Edmund Fitzgerald?" He sings softly, *the great lake they call Gitche Gumee*. Always makes me think kitchy kitchy koo.

"That's Lake Superior. And kitchy kitchy koo is a stretch even for you."

The man lifts his water glass, jerks out his napkin, and tucks it into his waistband.

"Eat inside?"

"More privacy out here."

“I don’t want to talk about it anymore.”

“You can’t”...the man lowers his voice as a waiter approaches ... “go back on what we always planned.”

“Afternoon, folks. Something to drink?”

The man and woman order sweet tea. The waiter leaves menus.

When the man starts to speak, the woman nods toward the water. The man follows her gaze. “Cranes, I think... We always said—”

“Here are your drinks, folks. Ready to order?”

“A few more minutes. We’ve been admiring the cranes.”

The waiter smiles. “Sandhills. Occasionally we get whooping cranes.”

“I thought they were extinct,” the man says.

“Not yet. I’ll check back shortly.”

The couple watches the cranes for several minutes. “We always said it should be a mutual decision,” the man says.

“Our order?”

The man lays his fork beside his knife, which he nudges to make the utensils parallel. “You know what I mean.”

“Agree with me, and it’ll be mutual.”

“You have all the power.”

The woman gazes toward the water. “That’s an odd way to look at it, but I suppose you’re right.”

“Marriages have ended over this.”

“Careers, too. Here he comes.” The woman orders the house salad.

“I might as well get the same,” the man says. “She calls the shots.”

The waiter arcs an eyebrow and goes back inside.

“Embarrass me like that again, and I’m leaving.”

The man gulps his tea. “Maybe I’ll get a bloody Mary.”

The woman picks up her phone.

“Will you just think about it some more? About starting to try?”

“I don’t have to. I love you. We can still be happy.”

The waiter serves their salads. “Something else to drink?”

“No, thanks,” the woman says.

“Bloody Mary. Put a celery stalk in it.”

The man and woman eat their salads. The man barely touches his bloody Mary. As he reaches for his billfold, a gust of wind whips away his napkin. It’s out of reach before he can stand.

“Best to let it go,” the woman says.

(end)