

Scrabbled Sensitivities

by Fred Osuna

She was forward, even though they'd met anonymously via the website's algorithm. Perhaps she just felt safe behind the monitor. She'd chatter like a nervous schoolgirl, not the sixty-year-old woman that she was. He'd win a game, then she would; he'd clear his tray and score two bingos one round, she'd produce oddities like *squeg*, *zoftig* and *exosmic* the next. It was fun, until he started winning every time.

Then, she'd disappear for months. During each hiatus, she played friends and new strangers. Once she regained confidence, she'd send a message. Meg has invited you to a game, the pop-up would read. He'd always reply Yes. He enjoyed playing her, and expected he'd learn some arcane words.

She became increasingly fragile with each loss. She'd title their games "I'm Feeling Brave Tonight" or "I Must Be Crazy." He thought she was just being funny.

The Saturday night in question, he led by 143 points. He rose and mixed himself a cocktail. When he returned, she'd canceled the game.

Why'd you quit? he wrote.

I can't handle this massacre.

He criticized her form. You don't invite someone to a game and quit because you're not winning, he wrote.

She exploded. You might quit, too, if you were waiting to find out that your mother could die at any moment.

He extended his sympathies toward her mother's condition. Then he matter-of-factly unfriended her.

The next morning, she drove to the cemetery to clip the grass around her mother's gravestone.

