

SLEUTH

Ronna Wineberg

She had given herself to him in a way she had never done with anyone before. Completely. A kind of surrender. He didn't know it. He would never know, and it didn't matter. This was a gift Helen gave to him and herself. A gift that went nowhere, she sometimes thought. What use were such gifts?

He was married, and Helen used to be married. There had been a kind of parity in their relationship then. Neither of them had wanted to leave their marriages, but even so, they wanted to be with each other. Helen had thought that perhaps her relationship with Edward had even sustained her marriage. But the marriage had ended three years ago. It had been a difficult divorce. Now she was on her own.

She lived in New York, and Edward lived in Ohio. She taught history at a college, and he taught at a law school and ran the immigration legal clinic there. They were in their sixties and saw each other when they could. It still

felt startling to her that she was divorced at this juncture in life. She'd imagined that with their children grown, she and Philip would feel liberated and would travel and enjoy one another. But instead, she felt adrift, constructing a new life, facing the visceral realization that there was more time behind her than ahead.

Helen was tall and slender with wavy brown hair. She walked and jogged to keep in shape. She missed the steady companionship of marriage. She had told her childhood friend Erin this. Erin lived in Boston, and they kept in touch by phone. She encouraged Helen to go on a dating site. Erin didn't know about Edward. Helen hadn't told anyone about him. Some of her friends weren't happy in their marriages, as if marriage sometimes became a truce between two hostile countries, a truce you lived with because of the honor involved in fulfilling a commitment or the fears and complications of unraveling a shared life.

Helen had considered looking at the dating sites herself, not to replace Edward; that wouldn't be possible—they had a long history together, and, in truth, she was in love with him—but to find a companion here, in New York, a connection. She had finally gone on Match.com, really dabbling in it, and gone on dates, with a veterinarian, a medical researcher, a teacher, a business

professor, a dentist. She thought of them in this way—an aggregate of attributes—because she hadn't met anyone she was really drawn to. She felt like a sleuth as she perused online photos and profiles, went from man to man, looking for someone who seemed appealing, trying to extrapolate the hidden meaning in the words each man had posted about himself online. Who was this man? What could he give her? What could she give to him? Was there a chance they might like each other, even fall in love?

There was something dispiriting about looking at the photographs, and also something hopeful, seductive, as she studied the faces of these men. Some were smiling, some serious, total strangers to her, as if choosing a date was like choosing a shiny product on Amazon. Some men looked ragged and worn. Sometimes photos were snapped from odd angles—you knew these were selfies—others had been taken years ago and posted on the site with the misleading caption: “I look about the same way now.”

Helen had always been able to set her mind to a task and complete it. She decided to approach dating in this way. She would be systematic, methodical. She posted a short profile of her own, saying she taught history and was a mother. “I love adventure, the outdoors, music, art, travel, movies, books.” She

was upbeat in the profile and sounded breezier and more daring than she actually was. She found two recent photos of herself that softened her wrinkles and posted the photos, too.

Suddenly, there were possibilities. Men contacted her from New York and even Minnesota, New Mexico, and Boston. They had screen names like Infinity, The Real Deal. The Cool One. Ageless. Some were in their sixties or seventies. One man was forty-two; another was eighty.

She discovered considerations she hadn't anticipated. Was she willing to travel for a relationship? No. Did she want to meet a man who'd never been married? Someone who didn't seem to read? Who'd "had some college"? Most weren't worth meeting. Their profiles or photos didn't appeal to her. Some sparked her interest.

Each time she went on a date, she tried to gather clues, data about the man's essence, just as he was gathering information about her. But Edward was still always in the back of Helen's mind. Was he getting in the way? She didn't know.

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Her date, Andrew, was sitting at the dining room table in her apartment. It was a Saturday in June. This was their second meeting, and she had invited

him over for a glass of wine before they went to dinner at a nearby restaurant, but she realized now that inviting him here was a mistake and would give him the impression that she was ready to sleep with him. She was still learning how to navigate the dating world.

He had thinning gray hair, a gray beard, was a little bulky, and wore a neat navy blazer. He owned an art gallery. He was in his late sixties. He was telling her about the art business when her cell phone rang. She went to the kitchen counter and glanced at her phone. Edward's number flashed on the screen.

"I have to take this call," she said. "I'm sorry. I'll be right back."

"No problem," Andrew mumbled and pulled his cell phone from his pocket.

She hurried to the bathroom, shut the door. A few weeks ago, she and Edward had had an argument. They'd resolved it, but she wanted to avoid any misunderstandings. She'd tell him she'd call him back.

"Edward," she said. She pressed the cell phone against her ear.

"Anna found your name on my calendar, that I'd planned to see you last month. I'd written the conference dates, the extra days I stayed, your name, the hotel. She said: 'Why were you there so long after the conference ended? Did you meet Helen? Are you involved with her? Sleeping with her?'"

“Oh, God, no. What did you say?”

“I told her no.”

“That’s terrible,” Helen whispered.

“Yes. Then we could never see each other. Or talk to each other.”

“Oh.” Her heart sank.

“I told her your brother lived there. You were visiting him. I stayed to meet with colleagues. Write to her and tell her you’re sorry about her son, that he broke his leg. Say I’d mentioned it. Will you do that? Do it now.”

“I will.”

“I’ll be right there, Andrew,” she said, opening the bathroom door. She hurried to the computer and wrote the message.

This was bound to happen, sooner or later, she thought. People were ambivalent. Sometimes they wanted to be discovered. No, maybe Edward had just been careless. She took a deep breath, shaken, and went back to the dining room, relieved she would be distracted for a moment from what Edward had told her.

“So,” Andrew said. “Anything important?”

“One of my kids.” She took a gulp of wine. “I had to do something on the computer for her.”

“It gave me a chance to answer an email from work. You know, we didn’t talk about this the last time.” He eyed her intently. “I’d like to be with someone four or five nights a week. How was your sex life with your husband?”

She stared at him, taken aback. “Fine,” she said curtly. “How was your sex life in your marriages?”

“Not so good with the first. Very good with the second. I’m blunt, I know.”

“You are.”

“I like to be direct. I’ve had a prostatectomy. But I can do other things.”

He spoke as if he were negotiating a business deal. She took a sip of wine, considering his words.

“I don’t know that I’d ever marry again,” he said.

“You’d have to be divorced to get married,” she said. His profile had read: “currently separated.”

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“I never put your name on my calendar,” Edward said the next night. He and Helen were talking on the phone. “I did this time. It was a mistake, a stupid accident. I wasn’t thinking. She was looking on my calendar for a phone number from the bank I’d written there.”

“Are you worried?” Helen asked.

“No.”

“I am.”

“Don’t be. If... I think a marriage can survive an affair,” he said, his voice trailing off, as if he were talking to himself.

But can an affair survive a marriage? she thought.

“I know you’re worried,” he went on. “Put it out of your mind.” He paused and then said quietly, his voice unsteady, “You can stop this anytime you want. Though it would be painful for me. I don’t want to lose you.”

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That night, Helen lay awake. She thought about Edward with longing. She felt lonesome for him. She didn’t allow herself to think about his wife often. She had met Anna almost thirty years ago, and they had begun a kind of friendship when their children were young. Or maybe she had met the woman through Edward. Helen didn’t recall.

Their children were in the same gymnastics class, and they saw each other in passing. She knew Anna before the woman married Edward. He had a first wife then, and Helen and her husband had socialized with them once or twice when parents gathered at the gymnastics school to retrieve their kids. Edward was finishing his PhD in history at Northwestern, and Helen was working on

her PhD in American history. They'd been in a class together. He was tall with dark hair, intense brown eyes, and an angular face. He was quick to smile, quick to become angry. He was older than she was, by four years: it felt as if they were contemporaries.

They hadn't become involved with each other then. She had been happily married, or thought she was, and assumed he was too. They discussed history, the Civil War, the ancient world, Epictetus, and the university bureaucracy. They went jogging together along the lake some afternoons when classes ended for the day. Edward was from Michigan and Helen from Chicago. His family had vacationed in the small town near Lake Michigan, Union Pier, where Helen's family had spent time when she was young. Sometimes when they talked, it felt as if they would never stop.

She remembered when he and his first wife had separated. He didn't mention it other than to say, "It's a difficult time for me now. Personally, that is." Then he'd asked to meet Helen for coffee, which wasn't unusual. But this time, he had said, his voice steady, "I wanted you to know I've been seeing Anna Kramer. I wanted to tell you myself. I didn't want you to hear it from anyone else."

Helen had been surprised he'd told her, but when she thought about it,

she understood. Anna Kramer had left her husband. Helen had told Philip, “I wonder if Edward and Anna have been seeing each other for a while.” Philip shrugged and frowned as he often did in what seemed like perpetual disapproval. “Don’t know,” he said. “We’ll probably never know. And it’s not our business.”

Once, Helen went to dinner with Anna. Helen had arranged this, she supposed, out of kindness to Edward, a friend. She and Anna met at an Italian restaurant on Michigan Avenue. Anna was petite and slim, with blue eyes, bouncy blonde hair, smart and talkative, a lawyer and the mother of two sons. Anna talked about Edward, tilting her head to one side. “I can’t believe it,” she’d said. “I almost fainted one day in the hallway outside of the courtroom. I’m like a woman who loves too much.”

Helen had nodded, thinking this was an odd comment—she didn’t know Anna well enough to be her confidante—or maybe the comment reflected a dependency, a neediness, or really, Helen decided, it was a feeling to be envied. What did it mean to love too much? She had realized she didn’t know.

Since then, Anna had been absent from Helen’s life. Or on the periphery. Helen had finished her PhD, and she, her husband, and their two children

moved to New York. He was in finance and had been hired by a large insurance company. Edward had gone on to law school after the PhD. He'd combined the two fields, but in the end, law was more practical, he said.

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It wasn't simple to navigate a long-distance love affair. Helen was surprised to find herself in one, as if she had wandered into it, taken a detour that led in the wrong direction. She was usually adept at controlling her emotions. There was no duress involved or pressure. Edward had married Anna; they shared a blended family. She had lost touch with Anna, and in truth, the woman had become an uncomfortable, troubling fact for Helen.

She had become involved with Edward during her first separation from Philip fifteen years ago. She loved Philip, but he'd become cranky and critical. She never knew if when he came home from work he would smile or yell. He finally told her he was in love with someone else. She was devastated. They had gone to counseling and eventually reconciled.

Edward came to New York for a conference during the time Helen was separated. She was shattered by the split from Philip, a little desperate and ashamed even. Ashamed of the depth of her disappointment, anger, and sorrow. She went to lunch with Edward and told him, "I'm a mess."

“You don’t look it,” he’d said. “Messy inside?”

“Yes.”

They had gone for a walk in Central Park, and it was a comfort to be with him, a good friend. She had been faithful to Philip, but she said impulsively, “We could meet a few times a year. Wouldn’t it be nice if you and I were... involved?” She knew Edward was attracted to her; she thought you could tell those things. At least, she imagined he was—the way he listened with interest, it seemed, and peered into her eyes. She was attracted to him.

“It would be romantic to think that could be so,” he said. They walked in silence, and then he’d kissed her.

What had begun with Edward as a need, a distraction for her, had grown into something more.

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It would be easy to piece things together, Helen knew. You didn’t have to be a sleuth. If you looked at what happened around you, you would see the clues. She had once called him back in a fit of anxiety—she always reacted to Edward’s anger—and he’d answered and was curt. Later, he’d telephoned and said, “I was in the car. With Anna.” Helen was embarrassed she had called, to be in this situation. Maybe if she were tougher, she might not feel the guilt she

did, the moral confusion, or maybe if she were more practical. Yet she knew the devastation of betrayal. Of deceit. She did not want to do anything to jeopardize the relationship with Edward, though she understood, in the end, if he had to choose, Helen was dispensable.

And she'd sent gifts, sometimes a card; once after he'd broken his arm, she'd sent a card with hearts, flowers, and a sentimental Hallmark message. She was trying to make up for the times she disappointed him, or couldn't call, just to talk or say, "I love you." To be connected. That was not possible. He said to her once, "There's a saying my grandfather told me: the glass can be half empty or half full. Can't you look at this, us, as half full? Can't you be happy with what is, instead of thinking about what isn't?"

It was very full when they were together. "I am happy," she said, and she was. She loved being with him. She didn't admit it to herself often, but at one time she'd hoped they might travel or live together.

The clues were everywhere. Once, years ago, they'd all been at the wedding of a mutual friend in Chicago. Philip wasn't able to go; the marriage was rocky then. Helen was uneasy about seeing Edward's wife. Anna had walked into the hotel lobby. Her blonde hair was cut in short waves and pressed against her head. She wore a light blue dress and dark sheer hose. There was

something off about her, Helen thought, unfinished. Helen stood straighter and tried to banish the tension she felt, though she wished she were anywhere but here.

At the dinner, Edward had sat between his wife and Helen. He said something to Helen. She replied, and Anna said to her, “You and Edward have a strange, but wonderful relationship.” The woman had noticed something about Helen and Edward, as if Anna had stumbled on data, evidence, was collecting clues, perhaps unconsciously, Helen thought. If Anna stopped to think carefully about the interactions she’d witnessed, the relationship between Helen and Edward would become clear.

Anna had said later, disparagingly, during dessert, “Edward is always working, on a case, a legal brief, a paper, or a committee.”

“But he’s productive,” Helen said. “He’s helping people.”

“Yes, no question, but my father spent time with the family. That’s the model I’m used to. I put limits on my work.” She had sighed and probably had had too much to drink. She looked at Edward. “If I’d known the problems we’d have with our kids, I don’t know if I would have gotten divorced.”

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Helen had wanted to be a musician when she was young, but scholarship

and history had taken precedence. She still played the piano. Since the conversation with Edward about his wife, Helen played the Beethoven sonata she was working on with vehement concentration as if this could ease her misgivings about what he'd told her.

It was June, and she was on vacation from school. Mornings she walked or jogged in the park. She liked to go when the sun was shining but before the heat of the day, walk away from the congestion of the streets, into the cool green shade of Central Park or Riverside Park, away from the jumble of humanity that hurried along the sidewalks.

She planned to teach a segment on reparations in the fall and was working on that. Reparations given to Japanese Americans who had been interned during World War II, and the possibility of reparations for people whose ancestors had been slaves before the Civil War. She liked to discuss ethical and moral values in class. The subject had always interested her: what does a nation owe to people it has wronged? What does a person owe to someone he or she has wronged? Can reparations ever really correct an injustice? What does it mean to live an ethical life?

She'd heard from Andrew, her date. He was going out of town but wanted to get together with her again when he was back.

She had done what Edward asked, writing to Anna, and this, for the moment, allayed Helen's fears. The next week, she sat at the computer to check the dating site, but first looked at her emails. There were messages from the bank, Bloomingdale's, from her kids and friends, one from Erin, and three from Match.com: "Smile! James just liked you! Send him a message!" "Romantic Singer likes you! Send him a note!" "You have 24 new matches!" Her emails were like a traffic jam.

A new message popped up. Anna's name was in the address. Helen's heart sank. She opened the message.

Dear Helen,

Thank you for your kind note about my son. He's had so many issues, and now a broken leg. Sometimes I am beside myself about how he is living his life, not married, not attached as I would like him to be. Your words meant a lot.

Love, Anna

Helen took a deep breath. The last thing she wanted was an email exchange. She felt weak. Maybe this was a test. If she passed the test, she didn't

have to worry anymore.

She replied, writing she hoped the injury would heal quickly.

She didn't receive more emails from Anna, and she was relieved. One night, though, a few weeks later, Helen was listening to the voicemail messages on her landline. She immediately recognized Anna's voice. "Hi, Helen. It's Anna. I thought I'd try to catch you via phone. I know how busy everyone is. My other son, Todd, is coming to New York in the fall for an internship. Would you know of a room or apartment sharing arrangement? And do you have thoughts about a surgeon, in Chicago? I know your brother is a doctor there. If you have suggestions, please call or just shoot me a quick email or text. I'd appreciate it so much."

Now, in the last weeks, she'd had a few exchanges with Anna. Helen didn't think she was central to Anna's thoughts, but she didn't want to have any more interactions with the woman. She would quickly collect information and send it in an email. She didn't know how Anna had gotten the phone number, and it didn't matter. She didn't tell Edward. What could she say?

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Today, she was meeting him, against her better judgment. Her better judgment told her to go online and meet one man after another until she found

someone with whom she felt compatible. It didn't have to be love. But she never listened to her better judgment. She said to herself, "One more time." But it never was the last time, no matter how many months elapsed between meetings.

She often went to meet him in Chicago if he was there for work. This time, he was in New York for two days, at a conference again.

Edward's thick dark hair was gray now. He was still handsome, solid and fit. He swam, worked out, and used to do triathlons. These were just an aggregate of attributes. What she loved about him was the way they talked. How they listened to each other. The way they made love. Without artifice. Without introduction or inhibition, as if they were resuming the last conversation they'd had, the last encounter.

"You must have a lot going on," he said. He looked at her with affection, and his eyes seemed to bore into her. They were in bed in his hotel room.

"I do."

"I can usually tell what you're thinking," he said.

She nodded.

They were careful with the data they shared. Helen didn't have to be a sleuth to know something might be missing from his marriage. Was it sex? A

need for variety? Was he a man who just couldn't be monogamous? Maybe he and his wife had a contentious relationship. Or perhaps they weren't emotionally connected anymore. Maybe he was drawn to qualities his wife didn't have now. Or maybe nothing was missing from the marriage. If he had been married to Helen, would he have been faithful? These were the questions she didn't allow herself to think about often. It was part of the bargain she made with herself.

"My cousin died," he said when they were lying side by side. His arm was around her, her hand resting on his shoulder. They had made love and now they talked, as they always did.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"I hadn't seen him for a while. I told you about him before. He had been sick for a long time. It's sad for him."

"And it reminds you of your own mortality," she said.

"We're all getting closer to that."

In the hotel room, mortality seemed a distant concept, inconvenient, irrelevant, even obsolete. The hotel room was like their home. There were no children, no marriages, no obligations, no illness, no drama, no loneliness. Just the two of them in a functional space. The surroundings were plain, as if all

else receded to make room for what mattered. For passion. For desire. For comfort.

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The next day, at home, after Edward had left the city, she made a list.

Pros: What I love about Edward

1. *Almost everything*

2. *Who he is in the relationship—intimate, direct, perceptive, loving, sexual. A comfort.*

3. *Who I am in the relationship—the part of me he taps into.*

I'm most myself when alone or with Edward. I can be myself with him, discover things about myself. Uninhibited, alive, loving, valued, sexual. Complete.

Cons: What I dislike about the relationship

1. *Who I am in the relationship—dishonest to friends and family, capable of deception. Living a public life and a secret one. Taking what doesn't belong to me. Does anyone really belong to another person?*

2. *I have become both betrayer and betrayed.*

3. Who he is in the relationship—capable of deception, compartmentalizing two lives, the truncated secret one with me and his real life.

4. Anna

She made a list of the times she had seen his wife. She didn't remember the conversations, except the words at the wedding. She compiled these lists to pull the thoughts out of her mind.

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In August, she received a package in the mail. Inside the box was a beautiful blue silk scarf and a note from Anna, thanking Helen for the help with her sons.

Helen dropped her head in her hands. Then she wrote a thank-you note on a piece of plain beige stationery. She labored over the wording: It was wonderfully kind of you to send it. No. It was thoughtful of you. No. Maybe, "It wasn't necessary, but I appreciate it. It's a beautiful scarf. I'm thrilled to have it." Thrilled was overly enthusiastic. This is beyond what I can do, Helen thought. She used another sheet of stationery and went back to the original wording: thoughtful, kind. And it was.

She put the scarf back in the box and set it on a shelf. She addressed the envelope, attached a stamp, and mailed the note.

She felt restless and decided to walk in Riverside Park, to try to regain perspective. It was a warm day, but the air by the path along the Hudson River was breezy and cooler. Helen remembered once reading a book by William Maxwell. He wrote about the strength of erotic attachment. He based the novel on an actual experience, an early friendship and its demise.

When Maxwell and a friend of his were in their twenties, they'd slept in the same bed. Sometimes men did this then, Helen knew, even if you were heterosexual. She'd read a history of the era. Sometimes men used each other sexually, for a release. Maxwell and the man had a woman friend; eventually, his friend married her. Maxwell was so upset about the marriage that he slit his wrists. A character in the novel did this, too. It was an extreme reaction, Helen had thought. Later, Maxwell married and had a family. Helen had been struck by how the experience with his friendship had affected Maxwell and that he wrote about it decades later. The characters in the novel followed the same trajectory as real life.

Some experiences shape you, Helen thought now, never leave you, live

inside you, in your emotions, your imagination. She had never really understood that until she met Edward. The strength of erotic attachment. Emotional attachment. This is what she fought against in herself.

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That night, Helen's friend Erin called. Erin asked how the online dating was progressing.

"Slowly," Helen said. "It's an education."

"I think it's a numbers game. You have to meet a lot of men before you find someone you like." Erin told Helen about her sister, also divorced, who had finally met a man online.

"They have so much in common," Erin said. "I feel like I'm in college when I see them."

She listed the different attributes and coincidences: he had gone to the same college as her sister, lived near their brother, and was from a large Catholic family like hers. "I know you'll find someone too. Someone just for you."

"I hope," Helen said. "Thanks."

Once, after her divorce, Helen had confided to Erin that a friend, a married friend, wanted to become involved with her. She didn't mention names. She didn't mention that she was already involved.

“That’s a dead end,” Erin had said, practical as always. “Not weird. People do it all the time. I guess you just can’t judge these things. You never know what really goes on in someone else’s marriage.”

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Helen sat at the piano and played the Beethoven sonata over and over. It calmed her, even when she made mistakes. She shut her eyes and thought about when she and Edward parted this last time. She hated for him to leave, but felt almost relieved, too. For the first time, she thought: *Maybe he should go back to his life, and I will go back to mine.*

They had left his hotel room, had lunch, and then walked together along Central Park.

“I don’t want to have a problem,” Helen had said. They were talking about Anna. “For us to have a problem.”

“What about me?” he said.

“I know. I don’t want you to have a problem.”

“I don’t. And it’s not your problem.”

“But—”

“Nothing is going to change. I don’t want anything to change between us.”

They walked in silence for a while; then he took her hand and said, “Helen,

don't worry. I'm sorry, I have to go. I'll call. I need some time to think."

He kissed her, and she hugged him and said, "Goodbye, Edward." Then he turned away and began to run. He must be late, she thought, or worried. She didn't know which. He had to give a presentation at the conference that afternoon. She watched him bounding away from her, and she was cheered by the sight of him. Why on earth had she said goodbye in such a dramatic, final way?

She didn't know. Was she trying to see what it might feel like to say a final goodbye to him? Or confirming aloud what she already knew, what was painful to imagine: the relationship could suddenly end?

Whenever they parted, she worried this might be the last time they'd meet.

He looked like a young man as he ran, determined, agile, and love for him swelled in her. She watched until he was almost out of sight. Then she turned and hurried along the park in the opposite direction, away from him. A warm breeze blew. The sun was shining like a beacon of light. She looked straight ahead and retraced her steps home.

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By the end of August, there had been no more messages from Anna. But Anna could call or send a message again, Helen thought. She did not go to see

Edward when he next had the time. He planned to be in Ann Arbor to consult on a legal case. She had a work commitment she could not change.

This felt like a punishment to her and to him. And perhaps it was a way to do penance, to make temporary reparations to Anna, paltry ones. But there was no way to really make sufficient reparations. It was too late.

Helen played piano and prepared for her teaching for the fall. She perused Match.com. She went on a few dates, and to dinner with Andrew again, the man who had asked about her sex life, just to be sure she hadn't judged him incorrectly. After the dinner, though, she knew he wasn't for her. She'd Googled prostatectomy. This was part of her education, she thought, about dating at this stage of life. She didn't know if he'd had a radical one or standard.

She had told Andrew she enjoyed meeting him, but they weren't a match. The next morning, he sent her a text:

We need to have a talk, he wrote.

There's nothing to talk about, she texted back.

If you choose not to speak to me, that is a BIG MISTAKE! Make time to see me.

She didn't reply.

U will REGRET this!!! he texted again.

She deleted his number and the messages.

One man had kissed Helen and whispered in her ear, "I have erectile dysfunction. It doesn't have to be anything fancy. If we plan, there's Viagra." Another man had been married three times and told her he used to be monogamous, but he probably wasn't anymore. "I take precautions," he said. "There are diseases out there. Every man has a woman on the side."

A third said he'd been divorced twenty-five years and on the dating site for twelve. He'd fallen in love three times since then. The relationships had been long ones. Two or three years each. That didn't seem long to Helen. "And you?" he asked. "How many times have you been in love?"

She thought for a moment. "Four times," she said. "In high school, college, with my ex-husband, and..." She paused and forced herself not to show any hint of emotion. "Someone else, in between." That was the only way she could describe Edward. But he wasn't "in between."

"Now that sounds interesting," the man said, taking her hand. "I want to be with a sensual lady."

These were the currencies of the dating world, in the online profiles, in what men said: I like to snuggle. I like to hold hands. I like a good long kiss. I can do things. I'm a nice guy. No one said it directly: I like to fuck. I want a

sexual partner. I want sex. I want adventure. To live before time runs out. No one said: I want comfort.

Ronna Wineberg is the author of *Nine Facts That Can Change Your Life*, a collection of short stories; *On Bittersweet Place*, a novel, winner of the Shelf Unbound Best Indie Book Competition; and a debut collection, *Second Language*, winner of the New Rivers Press Many Voices Project Literary Competition. Ronna has been awarded a fellowship in fiction from the New York Foundation for the Arts, a scholarship in fiction from Bread Loaf, and residencies to The Ragdale Foundation and Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. She is the founding fiction editor of *Bellevue Literary Review*. Her website is: www.ronnawineberg.com