

Scrabble Match

by Ken Kaye

Leonard, a widower in his 60s

Sarah, divorced, 60s

Chris, coffee bar manager, 30s (any gender; here written as “she”)

Time: the present

At rise, one corner of an independent neighborhood coffee house: two or three small tables, each with two chairs; a bulletin board with typical neighborhood notices. We see the end of the counter with a cash register and a price list on the wall behind it. Familiar, homey, lit only by late afternoon light from outside. Sara, the only customer, sits at a table in the midst of a Scrabble game with Chris, standing.

SARAH

Ow, you’re taking my place!

And you have a bingo? For a fifty point bonus?

CHRIS

Sorry.

SARAH

ILLFATED. Wow, that’s a good one. With the F on a Triple Letter square, how many is that? One, two, three plus twelve is fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, twenty, plus fifty. Seventy points.

She writes on score pad.

CHRIS

Sorry, just lucky letters.

SARAH

I should be so lucky. Let me see. Maybe I can use that triple word square, at least.

Leonard enters from the street side, surveys the empty tables, puts his coat on the back of a chair and starts to sit down. Sarah notices him, but returns to her game.

CHRIS

Hello.

LEONARD

Hi.

CHRIS

Can I make something for you?

LEONARD

(still standing) Uh, yeah, let me see. I'm waiting for someone but, let's see, how about a cappuccino?

CHRIS

You got it.

Exits offstage behind bar.

LEONARD

Scrabble! Hm. Who made *ILLFATED*?

SARAH

She did.

LEONARD

It's not a word. You should have challenged.

SARAH

"Ill-fated" is a word.

LEONARD

With a hyphen it is. No hyphenated words allowed.

SARAH

It's a friendly game.

LEONARD

It's okay, you're early in the game yet. At least she left you that opportunity for a triple.

SARAH

Uh huh.

LEONARD

You two play regularly?

SARAH

Kind of. I live around the corner, Chris is teaching me when they're not busy. She's already whipping me as usual.

LEONARD

Not yet. You're about to pass her.

SARAH

You think?

LEONARD

Look at your rack.

SARAH

I'm looking.

LEONARD

Keep looking.

CHRIS

Here you go. You wanted it for here, right?

LEONARD

Right, good.

Places the cup on his table and returns with a five dollar bill for Chris, who goes to cash register behind bar.

Look at the *I-L*.

SARAH

(waving him off) I am.

Leonard stands over her, inappropriately. Chris returns with his change and resumes standing across from her. Fifteen seconds of silence.

Oh, aha! *(Places a tile on the board and starts to take another from her rack.)*

LEONARD

Whoa! What are you doing?

SARAH

Making a triple word! *QUILT*.

LEONARD

Not that triple word. That's only forty-five points.

SARAH

"Only" forty-five! That's a lot, for me.

LEONARD

Not when you can make eighty. Look horizontal. You don't mind if I give the lady a little help, do you? She says you always whip her.

SARAH

That wouldn't be fair.

CHRIS

It's okay, Sarah. It's just for fun.

LEONARD

Especially when you got away with "ill-fated."

CHRIS

Why, does it have a hyphen?

LEONARD

Certainly.

CHRIS

Then I should take it back.

LEONARD

No way. The lady has an eighty-point word.

SARAH

But this lady doesn't see it.

LEONARD

Okay, in general you're going to do better running a word alongside a previous word than merely crossing it. Like in this case a word under I-L-L will hit that same triple word square if you can make a two-letter word vertically with the *I* and another triple word with the *L*.

SARAH

I'll settle for forty-five.

LEONARD

That's okay, take your time and look for the best word. See, you never want to waste your *Q* on an ordinary space – least of all if the word's gonna be tripled.

SARAH

I thought—

LEONARD

You didn't think enough. Look at that big fat double letter square, that's where you want your *Q*.

SARAH

(sigh) (pause) Q-U-I-L-T. It doesn't work there.

LEONARD

QUILT doesn't, but try another *Q* word.

SARAH

QUIT. No, that doesn't reach the Triple Word.

LEONARD

You have other vowels.

SARAH

Oh, *QUOTA!* Yeah, that would have been better. I wish I'd seen it.

LEONARD

You saw it eventually. This is good experience. You just need to be more competitive, don't play the first word you see, always be looking first for bingos, then for doubling and tripling when you can, and never make only one word unless there's absolutely no opportunity to get points for new words crossing yours.

SARAH

Okay. Thanks for the lesson.

Chris, I've actually gotta go.

(to Leonard) Why don't you take over my side and give Chris a challenge for a change?

Abruptly picks up her purse and heads for the door.

CHRIS

See you soon, Sarah.

Exit Sarah

If you want to bring your coffee over ... we can start a new game, competition rules if you like.

LEONARD

Uh, we could although ... I was supposed to meet someone. I don't know if she's late, or ...

CHRIS

A friend, or ...?

LEONARD

It's a first meeting, actually. Match dot com.

CHRIS

Oh, okay. Someone who lives in the neighborhood?

LEONARD

Could be, because she picked the place. This your place?

CHRIS

Yeah, my partner and I.

LEONARD

Nice. *(pause)*

That was my date?

CHRIS

'fraid so.

LEONARD

Seemed like a nice lady.

CHRIS

She is nice.

LEONARD

Too aggressive for her, huh?

CHRIS

Well, you know. Gotta be yourself.

LEONARD

Thanks for saying that.

New game?

BLACKOUT