

## Ten Letters

*By Tina Schmidt, the School for Authors of Children's Literature, Denmark*

"You disappoint me," the desk drawer creaked to its contents, "Life is simple. Either you're in or you're out. And that's it."

The white paper ignored him and continued to twitter about the wonderful printer and all the other things outside the drawer. The red envelope heaved a deep sigh.

"If they could all just be quiet, just for one day," he thought, and felt empty. He longed to contain something special. Something other than the simple white sheets.

"Out!" warned the drawer, who was opened in that very moment. The things inside kept quite still.

Everybody was thinking whether it was their turn to come out, but nothing was taken. Instead, something was put down and the drawer was shut.

"In!"

A delicate new smell filled the drawer. For once, everybody was silent.

"Welcome to the new one," said the drawer, "and who might you be?"

"I am handmade, and my delicate flowers are extremely rare," said the newly arrived paper.

The red envelope blushed and became self-conscious, even though nobody could tell. He knew with every red fibre that she was the one he had been longing for.

"Oh, to feel her fine flowers rustle inside me. Then I would be whole."

He rattled a little.

"Pardon me, Miss, but isn't this the most wonderful day? Almost swelling with happiness?"

The flower paper looked at him, uninterested.

"A happy day? Yes, I suppose for such a dull drawer as this it must be a happy thing that I've moved in."

The drawer groaned angrily in its hinges, and the printer paper worked itself up:

"Dull? You are the one who's dull. You are creased and dented. We are slender and sharp!"

The envelope couldn't control himself:

"Dull," he shouted, "All you white ghosts are. The Flower Paper Miss is true art. We should be happy that she has graced us with living in this drawer!"

The white sheets kept an offended silence.

"Thank you for those nice words!" said the flower paper flattered.

"Nice words are too little for you."

The flower paper gave off a stronger scent for a moment. Then she collected herself:

"I must warn you that I am meant for something bigger than to lie in an envelope. I am to be written on and I am just waiting for the message that I am to bring out into the world."

"Quiet in the drawer!" growled the drawer sourly.

And quiet it became, for the envelope did not dare to speak to the flower paper again.

Finally, on a summer's day, the drawer was opened so quickly that it didn't have time to warn the things. A pair of soft hands with slender fingers took up first the flower paper, then the envelope.

"My message! It's time!"

The flower paper swelled so that the envelope must blush. They were alone at the table.

"Dear Miss, I have always known that we were meant to be!"

The paper merely shushed.

It was a woman who had taken them up. She walked back and forth and bit a poor pencil who screamed and begged for mercy.

"It must be a very special message I am to carry," whispered the flower paper.

The woman stared out of the window. Mercilessly, she continued to nibble at the pencil before it was finally allowed to write. The paper got its message.

"I a-m l-o-n-g-i-n-g," she spelled out, once she was inside the envelope. "Ten letters! That's not a lot."

The envelope was no longer empty. The flower paper filled him up with her scent. Almost dizzy, he began to tell the paper what the woman was now doing with them.

"She is putting on her jacket. Her cheeks are red. She is still holding us in her hand. We're going out!"

"Schhh," said the paper, "I am minding my message. And we're still not a couple. You're nothing but pulp."

"But if you could only see the world, and we're out in it together. Her fingernails are dark red, and, and ... the sun is warming us, there's people everywhere!"

"Quiet!"

But the envelope couldn't stop:

"Her hands are sweaty. And there are big houses and cars ... and trees! What a journey!"

"I don't want to hear anymore," snapped the flower paper in what the envelope thought was a very unsuitable manner.

After many stairs, their journey ended in front of a strange letter slot. The envelope heard someone singing in a deep voice behind the door. The singing stopped when they were pushed through the letter slot and fell to the floor. Broad hands lifted them up and quickly opened the door. The woman's shoes were click-clacking vaguely, far down the stairs.

The man shut the door and took them into the living-room.

"I shall be read, my message shall be known." The flower paper stretched to stand straight.

The broad hands were sweating just as much as the hands that had written on the paper. And read she was. Many times. The envelope feared that it was over, but luckily, the paper was put down into him again in the evening. They were put in a new drawer together.

"Maybe now she has time to hear about our journey ..."

But even after they had been out in the world together, the flower paper wouldn't listen to him.

"I hope I will be read time and time again," she said, "I am really not meant to lying neither in an envelope nor in a drawer. Oh, the hands! The hands trembled when they saw me. And sweated."

The new drawer laughed at them.

"What fools you are, life is simple," he creaked. "My cousin always said: Either you're in or you're out."

"She is in, but I'm still out," thought the envelope and comforted himself that he was close to the fair one. Even though she wouldn't listen. They only saw the hands rarely, when they groped for something as simple as a pencil or an eraser.

"Out!" the drawer coughed surprised, one late hour of the night.

"What is it?" gasped the flower paper.

Before the envelope had time to answer, it had been taken up from the drawer, and the flower paper was pulled out. She thought she was to feel the hands trembling again. And so they did, when they held her over the flames.

"Help me!" she cried out to the envelope, but he had been crumpled up and had landed behind the couch. The flames burned away her message. Then the hands regretted it. The fire was put out, and the flower paper thrown in the wastepaper basket.

"My fair one," cried the envelope from his bed of fluff. The flower paper was never again to fill him out. And if not *she*, then no other paper. Not the tiniest piddling corner.

The dust mice played merrily about him.

"Don't worry, someone else will come along!"

The envelope could say nothing.

"Well, someone is full of their own business," said the dust mice.

"But that's exactly what I'm not," thought the envelope.

"Take it as it comes!" cried the largest of the dust mice, and then they whirled on in the living-room.

Seven times the moonlight shone before the envelope was smoothed out and the flower paper put down in him.

"My own," said the flower paper very quiet, "my message is burned, it's gone, but ..."

She heaved a deep sigh.

"... But it was not until it was gone that I understood what those ten letters mean."

The envelope enwrapped her gently, gently.

"I understood from the moment you were put in that drawer," he whispered.