

## What is flash fiction?

Fiction that is brief, typically only a few hundred words or fewer in its entirety.

## How to write flash fiction

### 1. Start in the middle.

You don't have time in this very short form to set scenes and build character. Get right to the problem or situation.

### 2. Don't use too many characters.

You won't have time to describe your characters when you're writing ultra-short. Even a name may not be useful in a micro-story unless it conveys a lot of additional story information or saves you words elsewhere.

### 3. Make sure the ending isn't at the end.

In micro-fiction there's a danger that much of the engagement with the story takes place when the reader has stopped reading. To avoid this, place the denouement in the middle of the story, allowing us time, as the rest of the text spins out, to consider the decisions the characters have taken. Give us almost all the information we need in the first few lines, using the next few paragraphs to take us on a journey below the surface.

### 4. Make your last line ring like a bell.

The last line is not the ending – we had that in the middle, remember – but it should leave the reader with something which will continue to sound after the story has finished.

### 5. Write long, then go short.

Create a lump of stone from which you chip out your story sculpture.

Adapted from;

Gaffney, David. "Stories in Your Pocket: How to Write Flash Fiction." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 14 May 2012, [www.theguardian.com/books/2012/may/14/how-to-write-flash-fiction](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/may/14/how-to-write-flash-fiction).

# Voodoo

by FREDRIC BROWN

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Mr. Decker's wife had just returned from a trip to Haiti – a trip she had taken alone – to give them a cooling off period before they discussed a divorce.

It hadn't worked. Neither of them had cooled off in the slightest. In fact, they were finding now that they hated one another more than ever.

"Half," said Mrs. Decker firmly. "I'll not settle for anything less than half the money plus half the property."

"Ridiculous!" said Mr. Decker.

"Is it? I could have it all, you know. And quite easily, too. I studied voodoo while in Haiti."

"Rot!" said Mr. Decker.

"It isn't. And you should be glad that I am a good woman for I could kill you quite easily if I wished. I would then have *all* the money and *all* the real estate, and without any fear of consequences. A death accomplished by voodoo cannot be distinguished from a death by heart failure."

"Rubbish!" said Mr. Decker.

"You think so? I have wax and a hatpin. Do you want to give me a tiny pinch of your hair or a fingernail dipping or two – that's all I need – and let me show you?"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Decker.

"Then why are you afraid to have me try? Since I know it works, I'll make you a proposition. If it doesn't kill you, I'll give you a divorce and ask for nothing. If it does, I'll get it all automatically."

"Done!" said Mr. Decker. "Get your wax and hatpin." He glanced at his fingernails. "Pretty short. I'll give you a bit of hair."

When he came back with a few short strands of hair in the lid of an aspirin tin, Mrs. Decker had already started softening the wax. She kneaded the hair into it, then shaped it into the rough effigy of a human being.

"You'll be sorry," she said, and thrust the hatpin into the chest of the wax figure.

Mr. Decker was surprised, but he was more pleased than sorry. He had not believed in voodoo, but being a cautious man he never took chances.

Besides, it had always irritated him that his wife so seldom cleaned her hairbrush.

SORRY DAN, BUT IT'S NO LONGER NECESSARY FOR A HUMAN TO  
SERVE AS CEO OF THIS COMPANY  
ERIK COFER

I like you, Dan, I really do. You've been the face of this company for many years, overseeing a period of unprecedented net growth. And on a more personal level, you've become a dear friend. Heck, our wives attend spin class together twice a week! But unfortunately, friendship only means so much in today's cutthroat business environment. We—that is, the board and I—have poured over every possible budgetary alteration, and we just can't conceive of a scenario in which retaining your services makes logistical sense. All the research we've conducted behind your back over the last three years suggests that the position of chief executive officer for our multi-billion dollar corporation can be more efficiently performed by a robot.

Effective immediately, you have been relieved of your duties. ROB-X164, seated to your left, will be sworn in as your replacement, with a formal announcement coming this afternoon. While we're sure this is quite a shock to you right now, we do believe that in time you will accept that this decision is in the best interest of the company.

In your present state of fury, you're probably wondering, "What makes ROB so special?" The short answer? Everything. We see in ROB a more personable, less error-prone version of you. In our trial runs, he's performed admirably, demonstrating unparalleled adeptness in strategizing, team-building, allocating, internally storing frozen foods, and launching fastballs in excess of 200 miles per hour. What we're talking about here is someone who can guide this company to unscaled heights, not to mention its first corporate league softball championship in thirteen years.

He completes tasks at astounding rates—rates you simply can't compete with. Let's say he wanted to make love to your wife, which he most certainly does not, as he's completely devoid of desire, but if he did, he could do so in one quarter of the time it takes you, with half the effort. ROB arrived at these figures in 3.7 seconds, or, approximately the amount of time it takes you to react to the most vanilla softball pitch imaginable.

If you're still not convinced of ROB's utter superiority in every conceivable facet, take a gander at these visual aids:

- Here's a photo of ROB shaking hands with a prominent shareholder. What a grip!
- Here's a chart of our projected earnings over the next five years. Notice the sharp upward spike at the chart's left extreme. That signifies the moment you exit the building, which should occur within the next seven minutes.
- And here's my favorite. As you can see, it's an oil painting of ROB embracing me in his arms, lifting me up to the heavens as I triumphantly hoist the corporate softball league championship trophy. You may have noticed that the year engraved on the trophy is outdated. Unfortunately, ROB was still in beta testing last season.

Look, Dan, this is a tough break for you, no doubt. It's not every day you're told that your job—for which your entire sense of self-worth hinges upon—can be better managed by a series of interconnected chips and wires concealed beneath a shiny, metallic exterior. In fact, it's really only one day that this happens, and that day is today, so things can't get much worse for you going forward. Take comfort in that.

Please be sure to hand your office keys over to HR on your way out. And Dan, lest you suspect that this is some sort of calculated, vindictive act on my part, trust me when I say that this decision has nothing to do with you hitting into a game-ending double play with the bases loaded in the championship game four years ago. Absolutely nothing to do with it at all.

Adapted from:

Cofer, E.; *Sorry Dan but it's no Longer Necessary for a Human to Serve as CEO of this Company*; McSweeneys Internet Tendency, September 6, 2017, <https://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/sorry-dan-but-its-no-longer-necessary-for-a-human-to-serve-as-ceo-of-this-company>