

A Story About You

by Alisen Eiland

She said there must be a meaningful reason for their connection. He implied she was delusional. She became defensive, then accused him of trying to change the subject after he shifted the conversation to her children, the mermaids covered in sand with the green eyes, the tanned skin, their hair saturated with sea water, sun bleached and drying in the sun. He remembered the three of them: the mother, the teenage son and daughter, posed in a beachside photograph.

“I wrote a story about you today.”

“Really?”

“I hope it's a good one, one that does me justice.”

“I don't know if it's any good or not and I'm certainly not willing to vouch for it doing you justice.” The tensions of the previous conversation had lifted. They were on the phone but she could tell he was smiling.

“I wrote it last summer when I was obsessed with you. I read it again after my obsession had passed. I realized it then: the story might very well be redeemable.”

“I realized, too that my feelings for you may very well have been valid. Because when I feel something real for a woman I generally want to photograph them, pay tribute to them, mythologize them. But I didn't want to photograph you. Instead I wanted to write a story about you and your gem encrusted children, who posed beside you in that photograph taken at the edge of the seashore.

I wanted to write about you because I know I'll never have you.”

He thought about her over the past few days, the way she'd stood over him in that café, the way she'd taken off her glasses on their third meeting and looked at him, as if for the first time. He thought about how very undone he had been by the power she wielded over him. He thought about the flirtatious confrontational nature of her stare.

He left the café. In a fury he stalked off. She had power over him and he didn't like it. He didn't like the sense of expectation, desperate, the desperate sense of expectation which had bloomed in him over night like an underwater sea flower.

After their first meeting (unexpected), it happened on a Friday, shortly before the noon hour and he'd been so stimulated by that first encounter that he went home, reached into his pants and did something he had not done since he was a teenager. He stood and jacked off before the full length bathroom mirror. He watched himself as he did so, caught the emission in the palm of his hand and stood there for a long time, breathless.

Then he thought about her husband. It was obvious: they were unsuitable for one another.

He also thought about ageing. He would be fifty in November. He thought about her ageing and her desire for a final child, a child she did not wish to have with her husband. He thought about his own fear of children. He thought about his ex-girlfriend, a woman he still loved. She was single (again) and had a small child with a man with whom she'd had a fleeting affair after their demise.

His ex had known he absolutely did not want children. Now he and his ex were speaking regularly. She was lonely. It was obvious; she missed him. But he did not wish to be responsible for a small child, especially one which was not his own. At least Ellen's children were teenagers.

He wondered if Ellen might be able to convince him to do what Lauren could not. He wondered if she could sway him, convince him to have a child with her.

This is what he thought as the days became weeks and the weeks became months. The months were caught up in the coagulation of his desire for her, a desire which shone black, like oil pooling on the surface of sea water. His love for her was an oil spill. It was a contaminant, poison.

