

“Romantic *ideas*?” Ellie asks, a little confused. She slows as she walks.

Charlie nods, and smiles sheepishly.

“You want *romantic ideas*...for a *short story contest*?” Ellie looks at him sideways, her eyes narrow.

Charlie shrugs. “Yeah. There’s, you know, a few bucks involved. Not... not that I plan to *win it*—” he quickly adds. “-but...you know.”

Ellie smiles. His pen, thankfully, is a bit smoother than his tongue.

“So...” she says, “You brought me *here*—” She gestured grandly with both hands. “-looking for inspiration for a short story?”

“*Really* short,” he replies. “Like, three pages.”

She nods, gives him a quizzical look, then scans the beach around them. Not exactly those amorous shores of *From Here To Eternity*, to be certain. She imagines Burt Lancaster embracing Deborah Kerr, sweeping aside the rotting kelp and battered lobster pot before falling into the throes of passion.

“It’s *nice*,” Charlie continues. “The sun, the waves...”

“*Me*...” A voice from behind them.

“Ah yes,” Ellie looks at Charlie, and takes him by the arm. “Don’t forget your girlfriend’s teenage son. Fair warning, Ben,” she calls back. “Things could get pretty steamy around here...”

“Gross.”

She sees the deflated look on Charlie’s face, and shoves him playfully. “Alright, fine. Romance. *Romance*.” She drums her fingers on her chin. “Where’s the romance?” She looks around, sees a kid digging a moat around a sand castle. “There,” she says. “How about something medieval? The prince storms the castle, rescues his lady fair, rides off into the sunset... that kinda thing.”



“Chivalry is dead,” Ben mutters behind them.

“Not really.” Ellie taps the picnic basket Charlie carries. “My knight here braved the perilous aisles of Costco to get all the fixings for lunch, *and* made the sandwiches.”

Charlie winks at her. “Extra pickles.”

“Gross,” Ben says as he shoves his hands deep into the pockets of his shorts. “Besides, your idea just perpetuates gender stereotypes.”

Ellie stops, turns to her son with arms folded. “Alright, what better ideas have *you* got churning in that shaggy head of yours, Casanova?”

“Uh, yeah, I don’t even know who that *is*, but...” Ben looks around, brow furrowed. “There.” He points to the sand.

Dead fish. Capelin, more precisely. Ellie’s eyes narrow. “And *that* is...?”

“Sacrifice,” Ben scoops a handful of spawn, and tosses it into the sea.

“Sacrifice is melodramatic,” Ellie responds.



Beside her, a capelin twitches.

Ellie looks from the fish to Charlie. “You taking notes or what?”

He taps his temple. “I got a rough draft.”

Ben snorts.

Ellie laughs. “Rough draft, my *ass*, Charlie Boland.” She tucks blond ringlets behind her ear, puts her hands on her hips. “C’mon then, let’s hear it. Romantic ideas. What have *you* got?”

Charlie surveys the sandy shore, takes a few steps, and stops. He turns, spots something and moves toward the water. Bending, he retrieves a piece of discarded plastic; six-pack rings, an unfortunate fixture on any Newfoundland beach.

“Environmentalism.” Ellie purses her lips. “That’s sweet. You trying to woo Jane Goodall?”

Charlie snaps one of the rings, and grins. “Think of the lives I’m saving.”

Ellie puts a hand to her heart. “Thank Jesus. The beloved Lark Harbour Leatherbacks are safe once more.”

Charlie folds the remaining plastic into one ring and begins to tug. “No, really...” He grunts. “It’s a...” He continues to pull, his face turning red with the effort. The plastic ring refuses to give.

“My God, *seriously?*” Ellie turns with a smile, and winks at Ben. “The hands of a *writer*. Here, pass it over Hercules.”

Charlie sighs, and offers her the plastic. With a self-satisfied smile she takes it from his hand, and, in doing so, reveals a ring of an entirely different variety, sitting on his palm.

In the afternoon sun, the diamond sparkles.

Her mouth falls open as Charlie kneels in front of her.

Ellie’s left knee buckles.

She looks at Charlie, then Ben. She shakes her head slowly, unable to believe what’s happening.

“You *wooded* yet, Jane?” her son asks.

She gapes. “You...You *knew?*” Her voice is a whisper.

Ben shrugs. “Course. Charlie asked for my blessing.”

Her right knee buckles.

She inhales, slowly, and looks down at Charlie.

Her tears sparkle like the ring he slides on to her finger.

Through the tears, she begins to laugh as she shakes her head again. “Rough draft, hey?”

Charlie winks.

