

Two Stories

ELLEN WILBUR

Honesty

“Just take a left at that white church up there, then drive about a quarter mile. Stillman Road is the first right after the post office. Follow it all the way to the end and you’ll be at the beach.”

“Thanks,” said the blond girl in the convertible. The top was down; she was wearing shorts, and her long, slim legs were almost totally revealed. She smiled up at the young man who had spoken to her. She’d seen him come out of the Shore Diner. Now he was standing close beside her car.

“I’m sure I’ll find it,” she said, “though I’ve had some bad experience asking for directions.”

“You have?” the young man looked surprised.

“Someone I knew once sent me on a wild goose chase. Every turn I took was wrong. He thought this was a pretty funny joke. It still annoys me when I think of it.” The girl frowned. Then her face brightened as she met the young man’s eyes. “But I can tell you wouldn’t do a thing like that.”

“Thanks,” he smiled. “You know, you’re so pretty that when you drive away I’ll probably think of you the whole rest of the day.”

“How sweet of you!” the girl exclaimed, looking surprised. Then her face grew thoughtful. “When I leave, I’m sure I’ll be sorry that I never found out anything about you.”

"I'm free this afternoon," said the young man. "If you wouldn't mind, I could go with you and show you the beach."

"Thanks," said the girl. "You seem like a nice guy. I'd like you to go with me, though I'm a little worried you might get the wrong impression. I'm not in the habit of picking up strangers."

"I understand how you feel," said the young man. "And it was hard for me to ask to go with you. I was afraid you'd be put off."

"I like your honesty," said the girl. "Nothing matters to me more than honesty."

"I totally agree," said the young man. "No matter what it is, I try to tell the truth."

"Well, why don't we go then," said the girl. "Hop in."

They headed down Main Street and turned left at the church.

"My name is George," the young man said.

"I'm Jill," the girl smiled as she drove. "I just put on some cologne. I hope it's not too strong."

"Not at all," the young man said. "Most of the girls I know don't wear cologne, but I like it when it's not too strong." He paused. "Are you here for the summer?"

"My family's taken a house in Tisbury till July. I feel a little strange because I don't know anyone down here." The girl's hair was blowing out around her face.

"How old are you?" the young man asked.

"I turned nineteen last week."

"I'm nineteen, too," he said. "That's the post office up ahead, so you want to take the next right."

"Great," said the girl. "You have such a deep voice. I really like it."

"Thanks," the young man said. "I think you have a perfect mouth."

"It's amazing all the things you notice when you meet someone." Jill's eyes swept over him and then back to the road.

"I like your shirt, I don't care for your pants, and your shoes are disappointing. But your hair, your face, your voice, and your overall appearance appeal to me a lot."

"Wow. It hurts a little that you don't like everything about me," said the young man. He sighed. "But who knows what we'll think when we get to know each other. For instance, I just noticed that you're chewing gum, which is a habit I can't stand."

"How cynical you sound!" the girl exclaimed. "If I thought we were going to *dislike* each other in the end, I'd ask you to get out of the car right now. I wouldn't want to stay with you for one more minute. As for what you said about my gum, in a way I'd like to throw it out the window just to please you. But another part of me would like to say 'flake off,' because I chew gum all the time, and if you couldn't accept that about me, if that would be enough to make you DISLIKE me, then we might as well not waste another minute with each other."

"Wow. I really didn't mean to make you angry."

"Well, I'm sorry I yelled like that. I do have a quick temper sometimes, and I'm not much good at taking criticism."

"Hey," said the young man. "Here's the beach."

"I like your bathing suit. You look great in a bikini."

"Thanks," said the girl. "I'm glad you like it. This is the first time I've worn it."

"It's a beautiful day, isn't it?" The young man stared out at the water.

"I'd like to agree with you," said the girl, "but I wish the sun would come out. I don't think it's fun to be at the beach unless it's sunny."

"Sunny days are a dime a dozen down here. My favorite weather is just like this, kind of gray. Look at that water. It's almost black."

"I'm actually chilly," said the girl.

"Why don't you wrap up in that blanket if you're cold." The young man looked concerned. "I may go for a swim," he said. Removing his shoes, he unbuttoned his long shirt and stepped out of his pants. "I always wear these in the summer," he smiled, standing before her in red bathing trunks.

The girl looked up at him appraisingly. "I didn't expect you'd be as heavy as you are," she said to him.

The young man's face flushed slightly. "I am out of shape," he said, "but it hurts me to hear you say it. It makes me a bit angry, too. I'm disappointed you can be so mean."

"I'm sorry if I hurt you. People are always sensitive about their looks. But you misunderstood me. Even though your body is a bit overweight, I still like it very much."

"You do?" The young man seemed relieved.

The girl yawned. "I'm exhausted," she said. She lay on her back and closed her eyes. "I'd like to curl up on this blanket and take a little nap if you wouldn't mind. It would only be for fifteen minutes."

"I don't mind at all. In fact I *feel* like being on my own. Maybe I'll take a walk down the beach. Look, nobody is here today. It's completely empty."

"You certainly sound eager to go," said the girl, "but I understand how tiring it is to be with people. The more you're open and completely honest about all of your feelings, the more it makes for endless waves of love, pleasure, pain, anger and fear that seem to sweep over you one after another."

"Yes," said the young man. "That's how it is." In the gray light of the beach, his face quite suddenly looked haggard.

"You seem depressed," the girl said sadly. "I'd like to cheer you up, but I can't help feeling a bit threatened and a little irritated, too. After all, if you really liked me, you'd be so happy to be with me, you *couldn't* be depressed."

The young man smiled. "I'm glad it matters to you what

I think of you," he said. "But you don't have to worry. As I head down the beach, I'll probably feel somewhat annoyed and frustrated at first when I think back on everything that's happened between us. But after I've walked about a mile, around the time I reach that dune down there, I'm sure I'll start to feel relieved and glad, pleased that we've been so open with each other, and excited at the prospect of getting back to you."