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The Obsession

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THE OBSESSION

Occasionally the sailor suspects a woman swims nude beneath his ship, though when he dives into the water, he sees only white jellyfish opening and closing like umbrellas. He is reminded of the time when he was a boy and imagined ordinary stones were gems, lovely enough to win the heart of the girl next door. But he never reached to pick one up. Instead he decided the girl would never like him. The more he thought about her not liking him, the more he grew to despise her and her adolescent beauty. The more he despised her, the more he wanted to see her, to follow her, to sit just behind her, and never let her out of his sight. That was the beginning of the obsession. Evenings he stayed up late, peeking through his Venetian blinds, hoping to catch a glimpse of her in her pink striped pajamas. Every weeknight she stretched out on the lime green carpet in her living room and did her homework in front of the flickering TV. The boy began to believe that if he did not watch her, she might not do her homework. Then she might do poorly in school and be mocked, and he would have to protect her. What if he didn't know how? Better to be sure she did her work. But the more he stared at her, the more beautiful she became, the more her skin softened, and the silk of her hair awakened him from his dreams. He grew convinced his eyes gave off a kind of glow that polished the girl, like an apple, that she could never have been as lovely if he had not looked at her so intensely. He even thought his staring might have been making her breasts grow, just as the sun's heat caused fruit to ripen. That's when he realized her beauty was a kind of death wish. Like a mirage, he thought. A mirage of an oasis in the Sahara, something that could never satisfy his thirst. No wonder years later he still saw her breasts in the middle of the sea. No wonder he hated her.