

# The Distance Between You

*by* Jennifer Donnell

**“Love is the distance between you and what you love.” -**  
Frank Bidart

We stepped from the concrete walkway onto the the wooden pier. I wanted to jump off the side and land in a grainy pile of sand, but he moved toward the stairs, too dignified. The ocean and skyline had merged into a magnificent, swirly, blue grey. I took off my shoes and pulled my blonde hair away from my eyes. He kept his on. They were brown and ordinary. I tried not to think about this. Did all of our little differences mean we were more different than we were alike? I focused on the clouds, bulbous and grey, tickled with smears of white. I told him the largest mass of clouds resembled my Aunt Helen's profile. He laughed, knowing he'd never meet my aunt, wondering if she even existed. She didn't.

“What's the difference between fiction and reality?” I bemused, as we walked along the sand, near the water, in a mostly straight line.

“What?” he questioned with a smile, as if expecting to hear the punch line for a fantastic joke.

Yet it wasn't a joke. I forced a toothy grin so he wouldn't be terribly let down and explained, “How much you want to believe in it.” He smiled back, like you smile at someone you don't understand but still want to kiss.

If kissing is dangerous, not kissing was even more so. I found myself contemplating geometry whenever I stared at his lips. Would the angle of his bottom lip fit the mold of my top lip? Would he drool too much? Would he spear me with his tongue or would it flow with mine, as naturally as the moon helps control the ocean's tides.

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Kissing shouldn't be thought out as much as I had. Now, I felt too much pressure. As much as I wanted it him to kiss me, I found myself praying that it wouldn't happen here, not today.

It wasn't that I couldn't imagine it. Rather, I could almost conjure the choreography to mind. One of his hands would graze at the side of my face. One finger would extend and stroke me, from my temples to my chin. He would press my body against something, anything, and explore me with his mouth and hands. However, as we walked along the beach, the only solid objects were rock formations. The mathematic angles of kissing against any of them sounded painful.

He climbed upon a large rock that resembled a meteorite and reached out his hand, to help me up. I knew it was an excuse to touch me and him being a gentleman, but I resisted grabbing ahold. I was just as spry and could climb up without his help. Suddenly, I was the twelve year old tom boy who could still beat the boys in her class at arm wrestling. His face fell like a wave breaking upon another wave. I jokingly brushed my shoulder against his, accidentally on purpose, in reassurance. He smiled and glanced at my mouth, once, twice. One more glance and, surely, we'd be kissing. I sat down on the the smoothest surface of rock I could find. He sat beside me. I shivered and blushed. My cheeks were the only part of me retaining warmth. If we were kissing, we'd be warm all over, our bodies kindling.

The wind blew off the ocean as if it was having a conversation with us. I asked him if he'd ever owned any pets. It was small talk. I wanted to ask him about more important things, but didn't know if I was prepared for his answers. I switched to asking if he had any scars. He told me about the time he'd drunkenly punched through glass, back home. I'd had these conversations before, with others. The tried and true "scar" conversations usually precipitated absentminded kisses at parties, not kisses with someone I actually

liked. Still, I showed him my scars as if exquisite dolphins jumping after fishermen. There was a “c” shaped one of my right pinky, from a cat food can. Another on my left elbow, from a chance ride on someone's handlebars when I was ten.

I thought about the scars we can't see. The time my older sister called me a “bitch”. The way my step father never loved me. How my first boyfriend dumped me a month after telling me he was madly in love. Small stones dug into my skin like tree knobs, even through my blue jeans. I watched as he picked up a small shell, which had managed its way up the incline of the rock. I hoped he'd never be a scar, but then you never can tell.

I fidgeted, needing to shift my weight to the side. Yet I stayed in my mermaidian pose, leaning toward him, just enough, but not too much. I figured this was the most attractive way to get him to think about kissing me, without actually kissing me. I bit my lip and caught him watching me do so. The distance between our bodies seemed hard to bridge.

