

The Story Teller

by Michael Downing

I would read her stories on quiet summer days as we sat along the river, just the two of us stretched out in the tall grass, hidden in the shade of the pine trees lining the banks of the Mullica while a gentle breeze cooled our skin. She liked the way I read to her and said it wasn't just the stories but the sound of my voice — how I would give some words little twists of emotion, along with the emphasis I put on certain sentences to make them stand out, and I loved the way Katie would giggle when I mispronounced the vocabulary words we had learned in Miss Rittenberg's English class only weeks earlier. Her body would sway slowly from side to side before she dropped her head in my lap, closing her eyes to listen as I read; the hours and days that passed never mattered back then, neither one of us ever imagining we could run out of time or that it would pass so quickly. Some days we dreamed about a world beyond the Mullica and our little New Jersey town - as the years went by we talked about a life together and a world waiting to be explored; Katie would take my hand in hers as I told another story about the places we could go and smile at the depth of my ambition and the strength of our growing love. Now, I am left to fill our days with stories about the places we have visited while wishing that for a little while we can return, if only in our dreams - some times for just a few moments my words unlock a memory long since buried and her eyes light up with a recognition that is both rare and fleeting. All I can do is hope that the next time I read to her I will again see that glow in her eyes and the spark that lights up her expression when she briefly remembers the life and the love we have shared.

