

Turtle Summer

by Paula Ray

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The summer before freshman year at college, the beach transformed from childhood playground to playboy's mansion. She became a centerfold to catch the splatter. He was her summer fling, the first cock to crow when the sun rose over her tequila smile. A Wednesday night, post Bible study, drinking buddy, preacher's son, he pickled her giggles and made a marionette of her body, pulling strings with his tongue. She danced like a fish on the sand--mouth opened. He took her picture, scribbled his address on her palm, then drove her home before parental coffee eyes spied her empty bed upstairs.

First semester, horns pierced her hymen halo and she sprouted a tail and learned to wield it as a spear, harpooning A's stored in professor blubber. Her mother thought her little angel had flown away, abandoned the nest, but she'd grown scales and developed a fondness for staying wet. The preacher's son became a turtle who guarded eggs then crawled out to sea, but returned each summer to the same wet spot in the sand. She was a light on the shore to guide him home.

During the school year, she hid in the corner of her aquarium co-ed dormitory and baited her hook with waves of red coral hair. After college graduation, she ran into the turtle on the pier. He carried her picture in a secret place in his wallet, next to his emergency condom. She buried her egg in the sand with her head and convinced the turtle it was his offspring when it hatched. Broken shells littered the beach. Shrieking gulls circled as the tide swallowed the shore.

