

## 1.

Behind *The Guardian* he spied on her while she swam her lengths undisturbed. One on her front, one on her back, always with her face turned towards him. Was she looking at him the way he was looking at her? Her sunglasses concealed her gaze. It made him feel uneasy, but he couldn't help sneaking glances at her whenever he turned the page.

He regretted not greeting her yesterday when they'd arrived at the holiday apartment, but instead he had dutifully followed the steps of his wife. Even later that day, he'd passed her twice while she sat motionless on her terrace. He'd felt her eyes boring into his back but hadn't dared to stop.

And now here she was, right in front of him, still swimming lengths. She had an unusual way of doing backstroke. The zigzagging motion of her closed legs made him think of a mermaid. She glided almost silently through the water.

How old could she be? Thirty-five, thirty-six maybe? He was already retired, taking things easy since that heart attack five years ago. His wife had insisted that they sell their sailing boat and use the proceeds for a peaceful annual holiday on the Costa Blanca. This was their fourth consecutive year here.

He turned another page. Good grief, how many lengths had she done by now?

His breath caught as Mermaid suddenly stopped halfway through her length and swam back towards the aluminium ladder, no more than three yards from where he was sitting. Quickly, he lowered his gaze to the jumble of news stories in front of him.

“Have you not finished that paper yet, John? I want to check the weather forecast.”

He flinched, feeling caught out. Quickly, he turned his head aside. His wife had her eyes closed, her chin tilted upwards to the sun.

“Just a moment, Mary. I’m nearly done.”

Mermaid grasped the ladder with her muscular, toned arms. John felt beads of sweat form on his forehead. Had she noticed him watching her all the time? Was she climbing out to give him a piece of her mind?

She didn’t climb out but used the ladder as support, resting just above the water’s surface. Hypnotised, John watched as she was laying on her front, stretching out her arms and legs. He was transfixed by the sight of her firm, rounded buttocks. What a goddess this woman was! He never should have passed her without saying hello or even sparing her a glance. She was his neighbour, for heaven’s sake!

She turned around and smiled. What a heavenly smile. Was that meant for him?

As John’s body temperature rose even higher, Mermaid swam back to the other end of the pool. Breathless, he watched her sway her hips as she ascended the stone steps.

“Ow!” He felt a sharp jab in his side.

“Now give me that paper!” Mary commanded.

John stood up and flung the newspaper down. Without a word, he headed back to the apartment.

## 2.

He didn't want to go to the bar, but it couldn't be avoided, not without upsetting Mary.

"We can't leave Bill and Susan hanging, can we?" she fussed, hands firmly on her hips, waiting for John to lift himself out of the chair.

He sighed deeply. Every holiday seemed to come with these tiresome obligations with that idiot, Bill.

John locked the door behind him and grudgingly followed Mary who was already in front of Bill's door.

As he passed the neighbouring apartment, John's eyes flicked briefly to the...