

78 STORIES

By Ben Segal

<p>It came as a blow to the church mouse's ego when he discovered the object of his affection had fallen completely for Jennifer and was hoping to propose to her in a letter. Carl gave up trying to teach himself a modified version of American Sign Language using the less-than-adequate version of fingers on his paws. He had once entertained fantasies of Paul learning to communicate with him, but with this news he sunk into despondency.</p>	<p>Carl desired some means of protesting Paul's interest in Jennifer. She was slim and well-spoken and had attended a liberal arts college. She had grown up with both parents and they were both still alive and she had nice hair. She didn't even have dandruff or psoriasis or even more than a little acne. There was absolutely no reason she couldn't find someone other than Paul to take an interest in her. Now she was hanging out regularly at Paul's apartment and wearing deep-cut v-neck shirts.</p>	<p>Before Paul had a girl in his life, there were always magazines within easy reach. Carl had loved this and looked forward to them every day. Now Jennifer stacked them neatly on the glass coffee table that he couldn't climb. Jennifer also preferred books, which were heavier, harder to open and harder to read. Carl despised her. On one occasion she went out of contact for a few days; Carl fantasized so vividly and so hopefully that she'd been killed that he began to believe she had actually died.</p>	<p>In Carl's dream, Jennifer had to watch from the shore while he and Paul sailed aimlessly together on their yacht and fed each other by hand. Paul was completely disgusted by Jennifer because she was a dead and rotting corpse and her blemish-free skin was peeling back and turning the color of old refrigerated meat. He threw things at her from the boat while Carl offered encouragement. "Good job!" Carl said, "What an arm you've got!" "Oh it's nothing," said Paul, "I used to play minor league baseball." Then he hit corpse-Jennifer right in the stomach with a piece of fruit and gave Carl a high-five.</p>
		<p>Jennifer had gone to her cousin's Bat Mitzvah in Pennsylvania and left her little book of phone numbers at home. She refused to own a cellular phone out of a deep-seated Luddite instinct, so she usually always carried her notebook. It shouldn't have been a problem, but after the ceremony she discovered that she had fairly significant damage to her car and had to stay an extra several days to have the vehicle fixed. As a result she was out of contact with the world for a spell. When she returned home, she drove to Paul's house to relay the story to him and, midway through her telling, spotted a mouse that was watching them from the edge of the sofa. Paul, mortified, went immediately to the supermarket and purchased several different kinds of mousetraps.</p> <p>Carl moved into an abandoned shed along the Delaware coast. He always yearned for Paul, but he knew he'd been defeated. Paul had met a girl who was pretty and smart. Moreover, she could actually physically please him—something Carl knew he could never accomplish. Occasionally drifters would come and occupy the shed for a few days, but Carl never fancied any of them. He just hung around in the shed in a lonely inertia, thinking about Paul, wishing he were human.</p>	

To purchase this novella, please close this window and follow this link to our store:

<http://store.no-record.com>