



The Mermaid That Came Between Them

Carol Ann Sima

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Jacob Koleman was nearly seduced by a trio of mermaids when he was young, and the experience has never left him. Now he's a middle-aged adventure novel writer who has lost his edge; even an aggressive book doctor thinks his latest book can't be saved. Contemplating his future as an unhappily divorced father of a college-bound son, Jacob again encounters a mermaid, this one menopausal. Claritha is seeking someone powerful enough to fertilize her last egg, giving her the ultimate experience: childbirth.

Jacob falls head over heels in love with the insatiable Claritha—and so does his son, Mac. Trying to give birth to the golden egg, Claritha dies, and a battle begins between father and son as to who loved her more. While Jacob tries to help his son cope with her death, Mac stubbornly insists that his pure love for Claritha can bring her back to life.

This imaginative and original story is a whimsical take on life, death, and the pursuit of happiness. Jacob is not the most likable character in the world, but the reader still feels a surge of sympathy for this unhappy man who never recovered from his mermaid sighting, and who has difficulty letting go of his marriage (to his Second True Love, after the mermaids).

Pulling from ancient and current cultural references, Sima explores the land of myth: “The world according to Disney: Mermaid falls in love. Mermaid trades tail for legs. Mermaid lives happily ever after. Death takes a holiday...[Jacob] dreaded the Herculean task ahead: deprogramming his son. No ifs, ands or buts, fairy tales don't come true.”

The writing in the book is as whimsical as the story itself, which at times is useful, but at other times distracts. The dialogue is the weakest part: most of the characters sound exactly alike when they talk, and their speeches sometimes sound convoluted and stagy.

Sima's flights of fancy, however, are well grounded in realistic details that keep the story from seeming too fantastic. Claritha is as flesh-and-blood as any character in this story, even if her flesh takes the form of a mermaid's tail. The author's tongue-in-cheek explorations of myth and popular culture will keep the reader smiling through to the last bittersweet page.

AMY REA (September / October 2002)

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