

Jillian Teknus

Palimpsest

This is a story about a woman named Mildred and it begins at the beach, with Mildred lying in the sun. It might seem funny to start a story with a woman lying on the beach alone, without a care. It's not that she didn't have any cares per se, but beaches are also calming. We just don't know her personal situation at this time.

The past hour of Mildred's life was spent, unlike most of the others, at luau beach, a nearby sandy cove by a great gray ocean. The beach had the usual attractions, a boardwalk, mini golf, a sunscreen kiosk, an ice cream stand, and a park area where you can relax on a hammock or spin on a tire swing. It also had a big new slide called Mary's Slip n' Slide, and this would be where Mildred's children would play, had she had any, in a sugar induced frenzy, squealing loudly enough to wake the neighbors around the block.

At the time of her beach trip, Mildred was a tall, brown-haired young woman, with an elongated neck, a sizeable chest, dainty forearms, and a dangling pink belly ring ascending nearly into her bathing suit bottom. Her legs were smooth and plentiful, and her back had a slight scar on it from an operation she underwent several years earlier. She had had to wear bandages. Her face was genuine and caring from years of trying situations, she had green eyes, and a lower jaw that pronounced itself, making her look more elegant than she felt. She kept a granola bar in her purse and a ring of gold permanently around her finger. She wore chocolate colored flip-flops. She wore an old cotton tee shirt. Her pale pink bathing suit suggested a woman who worked for her money, and work for it she did.

Mitch Albom, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*

This is a story about a man named Eddie and it begins at the end, with Eddie dying in the sun. It might seem strange to start a story with an ending. But all endings are also beginnings. We just don't know it at the time.

The last hour of Eddie's life was spent, like most of the others, at Ruby Pier, an amusement park by a great gray ocean. The park had the usual attractions, a boardwalk, a Ferris Wheel, roller coasters, bumper cars, a taffy stand, and an arcade where you can shoot streams of water into a clown's mouth. It also had a big new ride called Freddy's Free Fall, and this would be where Eddie would be killed, in an accident that would make newspapers around the state.

At the time of his death, Eddie was a squat, white-haired old man, with a short neck, a barrel chest, thick forearms, and a faded army tattoo on his right shoulder. His legs were thin and veined now, and his left knee, wounded in the war, was ruined by arthritis. He used a cane to get around. His face was broad and craggy from the sun, with salty whiskers, and a lower jaw that protruded slightly, making him look prouder than he felt. He kept a cigarette behind his left ear and a ring of keys hooked to his belt. He wore rubber-soled shoes. He wore an old linen cap. His pale brown uniform suggested a workingman, and a workingman he was.