

MY STARBUCKS MERMAID



A Short Story by
Brian Baxter

MY STARBUCKS MERMAID



“I’LL HAVE A TALL AMERICANO,” he said, “water in first.” So many baristas didn’t know how to make it right. It was called a long black. If they added the water after the espresso, it destroyed the crema. He liked the crema; he liked to scoop it off the top and lick it off his forefinger and his lips.

He found his table outside on the patio as the night settled in and broke out a cigar—he usually got away with this. He pushed the closest table farther away and arranged his body so he was facing the street, so the smoke would be carried by the wind in that direction and not into the faces of people sitting at the next table. If he was careful, he could avoid getting into a confrontation with some vigilant anti-tobacco activist—they were out there; he knew that from experience.

He cut the head of the cigar and lit up, relishing the mellow flavor of the smoke in his mouth before slowly pushing it out with a satisfying exhalation. Ah, this was the good life, he thought, as he savored one of the Cohiba Esplendidos that his friend had brought back for him from his trip to Cuba, having regaled him with his adventures in Havana and his encounters with the hot Latina chicks—one in particular, dynamite in bed, fucked him crazy. What was the word he'd used?—*jinetera*. Find yourself a *jinetera*, he said; Havana was crawling with them, girls looking for a better life, not the hardened pros; you could have a fabulous time if you didn't fall in love.

Yeah, he might put that on the agenda, he thought; it was tempting, though he still preferred the Asian persuasion, the sultry mystery of those enigmatic features. Jade dreams; Buddha on his mind. Somehow, you couldn't get closer to some deep-rooted spiritual source than that—well, Indian women perhaps, though there were so many beautiful ones of all races and cultures. He thought of the black girls he'd partied with in New Orleans; he had jungle fever in those days.

Yes, there were gorgeous women walking past all the time. It was an everyday occurrence, but to most guys they were impossible dreams, untouchable except in imagination; yet weren't you supposed to dream the impossible dream; wasn't that always the injunction?

Like this one walking by?

He liked to watch the women pass and wonder what it would be like to have them, but not in some compulsive, carnal way; his desire was more of a tribute to beauty itself, the ideal of feminine beauty, rather than lust for an individual woman, though there were many who inspired just such a fine passion in him, who set his imagination on fire and could, no doubt, inflame him on a night like tonight.

Yes, he'd slept with his share of women in his time, and

he'd started young, so he didn't have to make up for lost time, yet they came and went, didn't they?

Over the years, they added up, yet the more experiences one had, the more they blurred together, the more the details got forgotten.

That was always sad, always a regret.

He was with Julia now; he'd found a resting place, a secure niche after so much adventuring. It was companionship that was important now, not just the thrill of pursuit and conquest, the phallic imperative to savor life's erotic epiphanies in all their permutations.

His eyes moved sideways as he watched the girl approach; she was young, but not too young; sophisticated, yes; she must have money, he thought, judging from the way she dressed. He watched her stride past, flaunting her figure; he was immobile, stricken, still hungry, even though he'd just feasted on the flesh of a warm body; somehow, it didn't matter; he still craved dessert.

Yes, life was sweet, especially tonight, with an armada of women—well, a flotilla perhaps—sailing towards him on the seas of desire, the winds blowing them across the lusty swells, blowing them as they might do the same to him, blowing his wreathed horn.

The Starbucks mermaid was overhead, an enigmatic siren smiling down on him, the beckoning brand of this ubiquitous coffee empire, promise of satisfaction embodied in the seductive power of a maritime maiden. She was his good luck charm, his own special talisman, the girl with the sea-green eyes and seaweed hair who swam elusively beyond the grasp of her million suitors, beyond the nets of the rapacious fisherfolk who hunted her along the shores of her watery realm, hoping to capture her and make her their own.

Julia would find her way back to him soon enough, he knew, the way she always did, packages spilling off

her, clutching some shiny stainless steel cookware to her breast, her newest acquisition, some state-of-the-art Cuisinart that she couldn't live without. She was a shopper—born to shop, as they say.

Another hot woman just walked past. That was three Asian hotties in the last half hour. Those high cheek bones killed him—on that last one especially.

That shiny black hair and that slinky gait; and what was it with those tattoos?

Was she Thai?

He took a sip of his coffee, contemplating the enormity of it all, the endless panorama of life and this bittersweet, complex moment of mystery. The green and white glow of the Starbucks sign reflected off his features as he glanced up at the mermaid in the center of the logo.

Years ago, she had a split tail that she held to the sides of her head. She was wide open, ready for action. The logo was more explicit and provocative, but it had been eviscerated. Mrs. Grundy was at work in the corporate boardrooms and she'd been safely sanitized now, though she still possessed a certain alluring appeal, with her come-hither smile. What more could one ask of a mermaid?

Well, maybe more, he reckoned, cocking his head and catching the eye of this knowing nymph, the tantalizing corporate brand of a multibillion-dollar global empire.

Yes, she had been swimming in the collective consciousness of so many for so long, yet how many, he reflected, really *knew* her? How many knew that she was a secret wanton, would put out for the right guy under the right circumstances?

Who would believe that, yet he spoke from experience, for he knew what it was like to caress her breasts, to stroke her slippery scales, to put his finger on her navel, knowing how much that turned her on, and slip his hand between her legs, feeling the wetness there.

Wait; there were no legs; she was a mermaid—can't forget that. She had fins, not legs.

Yes, how many knew that she would bend her body to those who bent her will, that she harbored her own yearnings, was not just some anthropomorphic angel of the deep, aloof and virginal, but a sexual being as well, with real needs, real desires.

Yes...

She was small; don't hurt her, he thought. Was he being too reckless, too out of control, too over the top with his passion, his amorous intentions, to want to simply *do* her?

He thrust more deeply into her, feeling how fine it was to be inside her like this, lodged so exquisitely in her flesh, in the divine part of her sex.

She was cooler than her human counterparts, he realized. He surmised that was some characteristic of mermaid physiology; after all, they were different from human females. Not quite so warm-blooded perhaps, so it wasn't something that surprised him; still, she was deliciously tight, and being inside her was such a fine feeling, so indescribably sweet.

Yes, you've got me under your scales, he thought, your slippery iridescent scales.

The pure sensuality of sliding together on that platform, indulging in the sheer unexpurgated bliss of her body; to be able to take her in his grip, to hold her quivering flesh and thrust into her like that.

What a moment!

That was sublime, a feeling of ecstasy that he would like to repeat if he could, again and again, until his dying day.

If he could, mermaid; if I can, mermaid.

One last gasp, one last massive, trembling shudder and he was there. It was over; he was spent, finished, yet how satisfying that was, he thought as he felt himself coming to rest, drifting in his reverie back to reality, back to the real

world, if he could ever find his way back.

That was too much, he thought, rising off her, steady-ing himself, feeling the waves swirl around them, the soft sand giving way beneath their bodies.

Somewhere, they lay entwined on a beach of no foot-prints, on some time-lorn, love-lorn, loin-lorn, antediluvi-an shore.

She wriggled away from him, slipped out of his grasp.

He tried to dig his fingers into her, but it was no use; slippery—that was her nature, slippery when wet, and when it was over, it was over and she simply swam away.

Come back, fish, he wanted to call to her.

So he washed her out of his hair; she was a fantasy; she wasn't real; how many times did he have to tell him-self that? It wasn't easy; he was under her spell, enthralled with every sip of her that he took, with every smooth slap, with every penetrating gaze into the watery depths of her eyes as she clung to him, positioned herself so perfectly be-neath the hard musculature of his body, her plaintive cries arousing him anew, reverberating in his heart.

He was the foam; she was the foam as well.

Gone with the foam.

Yes, she was a spinner.

Mermaid love.

His eyes drifted down the street, took in the flow of traf-fic, the approaching pedestrians. He felt indolent, satiated, gorged almost, bathing in the after-glow of his fantasy, lux-uriant in that languorous sensation.

Well, it was Friday night, wasn't it?

He stretched, he yawned.

He sucked harder on his cigar, blowing perfect smoke rings for his own amusement. He was grateful he'd been left alone in this corner of the patio; no one had set up close to him, which was fine by him.

Julia would be back soon with her purchases, her stain-

less steel seven-person fondue set, her white stoneware casserole dish, her electronic yogurt and ice-cream maker, her classic whistling kettle, whatever it was this time, some new addition to the kitchen that she couldn't live without. She loved that kind of stuff, was fascinated by kitchen paraphernalia, the more high-tech, the better.

"Look at what I bought!" she exclaimed, producing a Belgian waffle iron from her bag in giddy delight. "I know you like waffles. I couldn't resist; it was on sale."

They stood up and picked up their stuff. Time to get back to the car; otherwise, Julia would miss her program—perish the thought she miss her program.

They walked to the car.

The mercury vapor lights fizzed and sparked above them, burning out, flickering and dying. The light blistered and boiled; it was like an embodiment, a visitation. There was some hissing angel in the discharge, he thought; he could see the shape of it in the air above him, lowering itself to earth, the charged particles, the electron cloud of them, swollen from their own weight, effulgent. It had assumed the shape of a figure, a divine messenger, spectral hand upraised, some kind of celestial holograph transmitting a message to those able to receive it. He was witnessing an annunciation of sorts, an extemporaneous baptism of light.

He found his groove again behind the wheel—driving, leaving the city behind, the landscape streaming past on either side. Driving; that's what it was all about, driving without thinking, mindlessly, yet mindfully.

He liked that, craved the sensual purity of it, especially at this moment in time, in the middle of the bridge, with a speckled fairyland of light spread out on each side of him, Kipling's tread-softly-on-my-dreams world, that same magical realm that he loved to gaze down upon from the plane when he was returning from Europe or Southeast

Asia, from one of his many favorite Starbucks there.

It didn't surprise him anymore that they were all the same: same décor, same aesthetic, same operating ethos, same Starbucks mermaid bestowing her silent benediction upon the endless flow of patrons that passed beneath her gaze, graced by her subtle smile.

They sped past a couple of other Starbucks on their way back to the apartment, ones that he periodically patronized; like so many countless others, they were a universal feature of the urban landscape, offering an experience that made each customer feel special, granting some kind of subtle empowerment to each, inviting them to identify with something so much bigger than themselves, an unprecedented planetary consciousness based on coffee.

There was a kind of democratic, metaphysical element to it all, he mused, a collective sense of destiny perhaps. It was all so quintessentially contemporary that it was hard to fathom; and people kept coming back; they couldn't get enough of Starbucks and all that it represented; they wanted to be part of that extended community, to log on to the culture of the digital age.

He glimpsed the circular green and white sign sliding past in his peripheral vision. Was that his imagination or did she just *wink* at him?

The fleeting image of the mermaid on his retina reminded him of how quickly things slipped away, yet he knew she'd be waiting for him when he returned; she might be fickle, but she was always there, wasn't she?

They reached the complex and he gently nosed the vehicle into the parking space. He turned off the ignition and sat there for a moment, reflecting.

"Let's go," Julia said impatiently. "I don't want to miss my program."

They got out of the car and walked towards the apartment.

He tossed the keys in his hand.

Goodnight, Starbucks mermaid—we'll hook up again
at the next change of tide.