

## The Story Knife

After Skagway in Alaska, in the long arctic light of the last summer solstice of the millennium, Brian Kelly, heading north, heading toward true north, realized the twilight of the gods must not be desperate. On his American cruise ship, docked against the granite mountains of the North Pacific, he had caught Himself catching the eye of a cabin boy from Genoa.

The boy was, in fact, freshly tipped over the cusp of adolescence, a young man, the Italian kind who gives occasion to sonnets, whose innocence beguiles, whose dark curls and darker eyes and supple-shouldered body cause notes of invitation, of assignation, accompanied by a cabin number and a hundred dollar bill, to be written in hope and then crumpled and thrown away in confusion.

Sex was not the quest.

Beauty was.

Love was on dangerous times.

To touch a stranger put life at risk, but the need to touch beauty, to trace the curling hair of the head and thigh and foot, even more than the groin, bit into his fifty-year-old heart.

He Himself had always worshiped beauty.

Never was sex itself his purpose. Sex was the hook to distract beauties in their own tracks long enough to savor beauty itself incarnate. Brian Kelly, Chicago-born out of a Dublin Dempsey come over to marry a Boston Kelly, was not some feckless rover traveling ignorant through the world. He knew what some people are for. The young man from Genoa may have hired on as ship's crew. But he was not for that. His beauty was his true vocation.