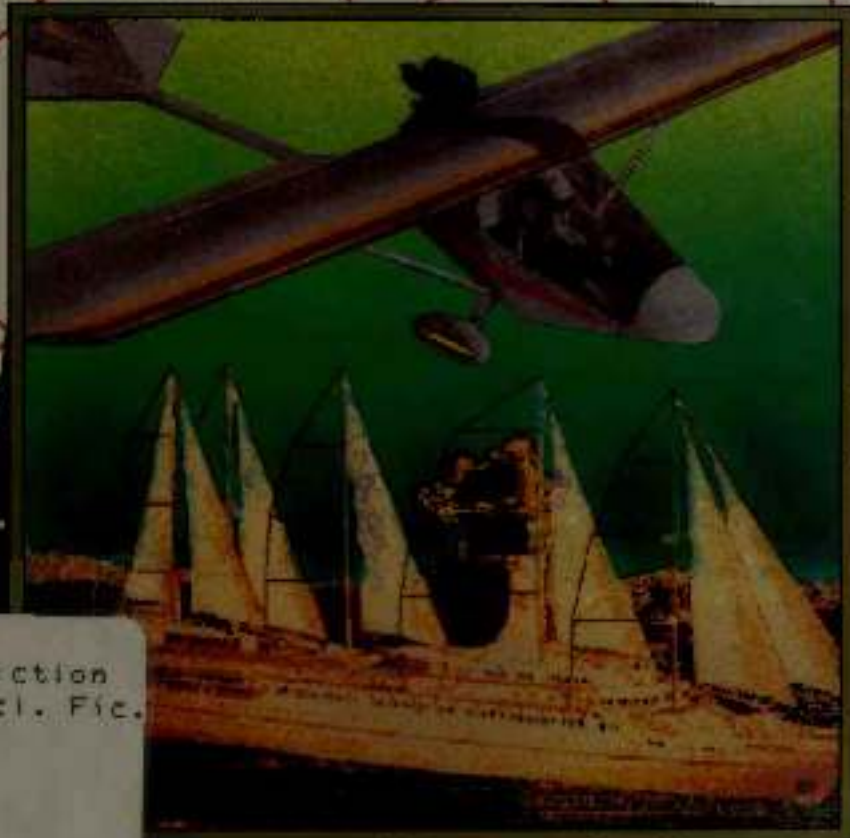


# PACIFIC EDGE

THE CONCLUDING VOLUME OF THE  
ORANGE COUNTY TRILOGY



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# PACIFIC EDGE

Humanity's first space station was Planet Earth itself, and the ecologic and economic disasters of the Twentieth Century brought it close to foundering. But even in the midst of collapse, there were men and women who saw a brighter vision of the future, and worked together, all across the planet, to make it come true. By the mid-21st century the global economy had stabilized, and the planet was beginning to recover. Humans had returned to space, to the Moon, and were on their way to Mars at last.

The path toward extinction had been avoided, but the battle to preserve the Earth while continuing to improve the lot of everyone on the Earth would never be over.

Kevin Claiborne's grandfather, Tom Barnard, had been instrumental in the Great Change. His work in Orange County, in cooperation with like-minded people all over the globe, had brought Southern California to realize that there was only so much water, and that thoughtless growth would soon destroy the land's ability to support a population. Tom was a hero, respected by the entire community. Now Kevin is about to take his seat on the council — and about to face a challenge he never expected. *(continued on back flap)*

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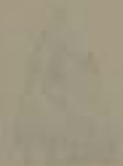
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# Pacific Edge

KIM STANLEY  
ROBINSON



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# Pacific Edge

**KIM STANLEY  
ROBINSON**



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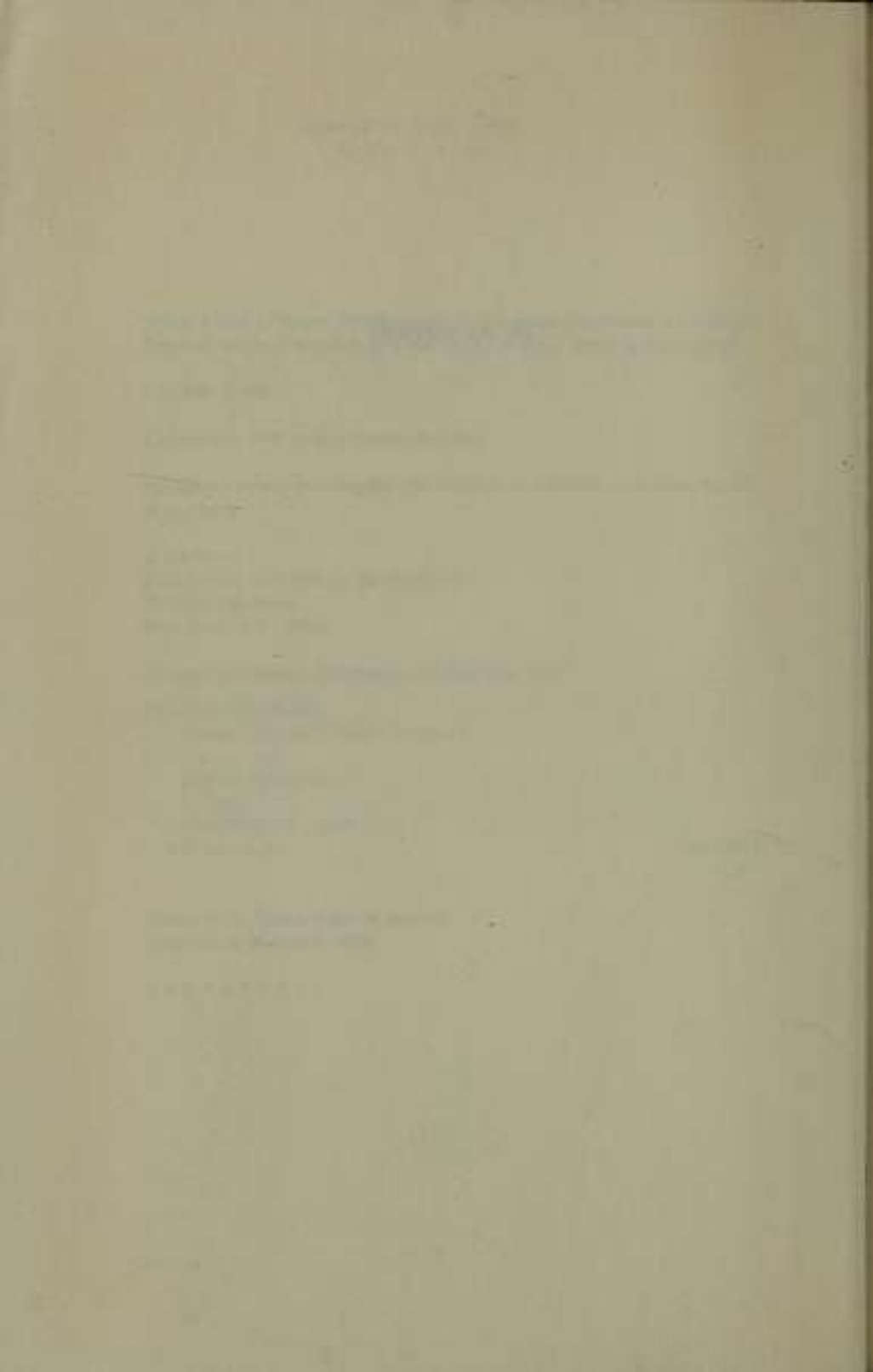
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for my parents



# Pacific Edge

The Pacific Edge is a collection of essays that explore the complex relationship between the Pacific and the United States. The essays are written by a variety of authors, including scholars, writers, and activists. The collection is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the Pacific region and its role in the world.

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Pacific Edge

# 1

Despair could never touch a morning like this.

The air was cool, and smelled of sage. It had the clarity that comes to southern California only after a Santa Ana wind has blown all haze and history out to sea—air like telescopic glass, so that the snowtopped San Gabriels seemed near enough to touch, though they were forty miles away. The flanks of the blue foothills revealed the etching of every ravine, and beneath the foothills, stretching to the sea, the broad coastal plain seemed nothing but treetops: groves of orange, avocado, lemon, olive; windbreaks of eucalyptus and palm; ornamentals of a thousand different varieties, both natural and genetically engineered. It was as if the whole plain were a garden run riot, with the dawn sun flushing the landscape every shade of green.

Overlooking all this was a man, walking down a hillside trail, stopping occasionally to take in the view. He had a loose gangly walk, and often skipped from one step to the next, as if playing a game. He was thirty-two but he looked like a boy, let loose in the hills with an eternal day before him.

He wore khaki work pants, a tank-top shirt, and filthy tennis shoes. His hands were large, scabbed and scarred; his arms were long. From time to time he interrupted his ramble to grasp an invisible baseball bat and swing it before him in a sharp half swing, crying, "Boom!" Doves still involved in their dawn courtship

scattered before these horrors, and the man laughed and skipped down the trail. His neck was red, his skin freckled, his eyes sleepy, his hair straw-colored and poking out everywhere. He had a long face with high pronounced cheekbones, and pale blue eyes. Trying to walk and look at Catalina at the same time, he tripped and had to make a quick downhill run to recover his balance. "Whoah!" he said. "Man! What a day!"

He dropped down the hillside into El Modena. His friends trickled out of the hills in ones and twos, on foot or bicycle, to converge at a torn-up intersection. They took up pick or shovel, jumped into the rough holes and went to work. Dirt flew into hoppers, picks hit stones with a *clink clink clink*, voices chattered with the week's gossip.

They were tearing out the street. It had been a large intersection: four-lane asphalt streets, white concrete curbs, big asphalt parking lots and gas stations on the corners, shopping centers behind. Now the buildings were gone and most of the asphalt too, hauled away to refineries in Long Beach and they dug deeper.

His friends greeted him.

"Hey, Kevin, look what I found."

"Hi. Doris. Looks like a traffic light box."

"We already found one of those."

Kevin squatted by the box, checked it out. "Now we've got two. They probably left it down here when they installed a new one."

"What a waste."

From another crater Gabriela groaned. "No! No! Telephone lines, power cables, gas mains, PVC tubing, the traffic light network—and now another gas station tank!"

"Look, here's a buncha crushed beer cans," Hank said. "At least they did some things right."

\* \* \*

As they dug they teased Kevin about that night's town council meeting, Kevin's first as a council member. "I still don't know how you let yourself get talked into it," Gabriela said. She worked construction with Kevin and Hank; young, tough and wild, she had a mouth, and often gave Kevin a hard time.

"They told me it would be fun."

Everyone laughed.

"They told him it would be fun! Here's a man who's been to hundreds of council meetings, but when Jean Aureliano tells him they're fun, Kevin Claiborne says, 'Oh, yeah, I guess they are.'"

"Well, maybe they will be."

They laughed again. Kevin just kept wielding his pick, grinning an embarrassed grin.

"They won't be," Doris said. She was the other Green on the council. Having served two terms she would be something like Kevin's advisor, a task she didn't appear to relish. They were housemates, and old friends, so she knew what she was getting into. She said to Gabriela, "Jean chose Kevin because she wanted somebody popular."

"That doesn't explain Kevin agreeing to it!"

Hank said, "The tree growing fastest is the one they cut first."

Gabriela laughed. "Try making sense, Hank, okay?"

The air warmed as the morning passed. They ran into a third traffic light box, and Doris scowled. "People were so wasteful."

Hank said, "Every culture is as wasteful as it can afford to be."

"Nah. It's just lousy values."

"What about the Scots?" Kevin asked. "People say they were really thrifty."

"But they were poor," Hank said. "They couldn't afford not to be thrifty. It proves my point."

Doris threw dirt into a hopper. "Thrift is a value independent of circumstances."

"You can see why they might leave stuff down here," Kevin said, tapping at the traffic boxes. "It's a bitch to tear up these streets, and with all the cars."

Doris shook her short black hair. "You're getting it backwards, Kev, just like Hank. It's the values you have that drive your actions, and not the reverse. If they had cared enough they would have cleared all this shit out of here and used it, just like us."

"I guess."

"It's like pedaling a bike. Values are the downstroke, actions are the upstroke. And it's the downstroke that moves things along."

"Well," Kevin said, wiping sweat from his brow and thinking about it. "If you've got toeclips on, you can get quite a bit of power on your upstroke. At least I do."

Gabriela glanced quickly at Hank. "Power on your upstroke, Kev? Really?"

"Yeah, you pull up on the toeclips. Don't you get some thrust that way?"

"Shit yeah, Kev, I get a lot of power on my upstroke."

"About how much would you say you get?" Hank asked.

Kevin said, "Well, when I'm clipped in tight I think I must get twenty percent or so."

Gabriela broke into wild cackles. "Ah, ha ha HA! This, ha!—this is the mind about to join the town council! I can't wait! I can't wait to see him get into some heavy debate with Alfredo! Fucking *toeclips*—he'll be talking TOECLIPS!"

"Well," Kevin said stubbornly, "don't you get power on your upstroke?"

"But twenty percent?" Hank asked, interested now. "Is that all the time, or just when you're resting your quads?"



Doris and Gabriela groaned. The two men fell into a technical discussion of the issue.

Gabriela said, "Kevin gets into it with Alfredo, he'll say *uesclips!* He'll say, 'Watch out, Fredo, or I'll poison your blood!'"

Doris chuckled, and from the depths of his discourse Kevin frowned.

Gabriela was referring to an incident from Kevin's grade school days, when he had been assigned with some others to debate the proposition, "The pen is mightier than the sword." Kevin had had to start the debate by arguing in favor of the proposition, and he had stood at the head of the class, blushing hot red, twisting his hands, rocking back and forth, biting his lips, blowing out every circuit—until finally he said, thinking doubtfully, "Well—if you had just the pen—and if you stuck someone—they might get blood poisoning from the ink!"

Heads to the desks, minutes of helpless howling, Mr. Freeman wiping the tears from his eyes—people falling out of their chairs! No one had ever forgotten it. In fact it sometimes seemed to Kevin that everyone he had ever known had been in that classroom that day, even people like Hank, who was ten years older than him, or Gabriela, who was ten years younger. Everybody! But it was just a story people told.

They dug deeper, ran into rounded sandstone boulders. Over the eons Santiago Creek had wandered over the alluvial slopes tailing out of the Santa Ana Mountains, and it seemed all of El Modena had been the streambed at one time or another, because they found these stones everywhere. The pace was casual; this was town work, and so was best regarded as a party, to avoid irritation at the inefficiency. In El Modena they were required to do ten hours a week of town work, and so there were opportunities for vast

amounts of irritation. They had gotten good at taking it less than seriously.

Kevin said, "Hey, where's Ramona?"

Doris looked up, "Didn't you hear?"

"No, what?"

"She and Alfredo broke up."

This got the attention of everyone in earshot. Some stopped and came over to get the story. "He's moved out of the house, on to Redhill with his partners."

"You're kidding!"

"No, I guess they've been fighting a lot more lately. That's what everyone at their house says. Anyway, Ramona went for a walk this morning."

"But the game?" Kevin said.

Doris jabbed her shovel into dirt an inch from his toe. "Kevin, did it ever occur to you that there are more important things than softball?"

"Well sure," he said, looking dubious at the proposition.

"She said she'd be back in time for the game."

"Good," Kevin said, then saw her expression and added quickly, "Too bad, though. Really too bad. Quite a surprise, too."

He thought about Ramona Sanchez. Single for the first time since ninth grade, in fact.

Doris saw the look on his face and turned her back on him. Her stocky brown legs were dusty below green nylon shorts; her sleeveless tan shirt was sweaty and smudged. Straight black hair swung from side to side as she attacked the ground. "Help me with this rock," she said to Kevin sharply, back still to him. Uncertainly he helped her move yet another water-rounded blob of sandstone.

"Well, if it isn't the new council at work," said an amused baritone voice above them.

Kevin and Doris looked up to see Alfredo Blair himself, seated

on his mountain bike. The bright titanium frame flashed in the sun. Without thinking Kevin said, "Speak of the devil."

"Well," Doris said, with a quick warning glance at Kevin, "if it isn't the new mayor at leisure."

Alfredo grinned rakishly. He was a big handsome man, black-haired, moustached, clear clean lines to his jaw, nose, forehead. It was hard to imagine that just the day before he had moved out of a fifteen-year relationship.

"Good luck in your game today," he said, in a tone that implied they would need it, even though they were only playing the lowly Oranges. Alfredo's team the Vanguardians and their team the Lobos were perpetual rivals; before today this had always been a source of jokes, as Ramona was on the Lobos. Now Kevin wasn't sure what it was. Alfredo went on: "I'm looking forward to when we get to play you."

"We've got work to do, Alfredo," Doris said.

"Don't let me stop you. Town work benefits everyone." He laughed, biked off. "See you at the council meeting!" he yelled over his shoulder.

They went back to work.

"I hope when we play them we heat the shit out of them," Kevin said.

"You always hope that."

"True."

Kevin and Alfredo had grown up on the same street, and had shared many classes in school, including the class assigned to debate the proposition. So they were old friends, and Kevin had had many opportunities to watch Alfredo operate in the world, and he knew well that his old friend was a very admirable person—smart, friendly, popular, energetic, successful. Good at everything; everything came easily to him and everyone liked him.

But it was too nice a day to let the thought of Alfredo wreck it.

Besides, Alfredo and Ramona had broken up. Obscurely cheered by the thought, Kevin hauled a boulder up into a hopper.

When they stopped for lunch they were about eye-level with the old surface of the intersection, which was now a chaotic field of craters, pocked by trenches and treadmarks, with wheelbarrows and dumpsters all over. Kevin squinted at the sight and grinned. "This is gonna make one hell of a softball diamond."

After lunch the spring softball season began. Players biked into Santiago Park from all directions, bats over handlebars, and they fell collectively into time-honored patterns; for softball is a ritual activity, and the approach to ritual is also ritualized. Feet were shoved into stiff cleats, gloves were slipped on, and they walked out onto the green grass field and played catch in groups of two and three, the big balls floating back and forth, making a dreamy knitwork of white lines in the air.

The umpires were tuning their chalk wheelbarrows up the foul lines when Ramona Sanchez coasted to the third base side and dumped her bike. Long legs, wide shoulders, Hispanic coloring, black hair. . . . The rest of the Lobos greeted her happily, relieved to see her, and she smiled and said, "Hi, guys," in almost her usual way; but everyone could see she wasn't herself.

Ramona was one of those people who always have a bright smile and a cheery tone of voice. Doris for one found it exasperating. "She's a biological optimist," Doris would grouse. "it isn't even up to her. It's something in her blood chemistry."

"Wait a second," Hank would object. "you're the one always talking about values—shouldn't optimism be the result of will? I mean, *blood chemistry?*"

And Doris would reply that optimism might indeed be an act of will, but that good looks, intelligence and great athletic skill no doubt helped to make it a rather small one; and these qualities were all biological, even if they weren't blood chemistry.

Anyway, the sight of Ramona on this day was a disturbing thing: an unhappy optimist. Even Kevin, who started to play catch with her with the full intention of behaving normally, thus giving

her a break from unwanted sympathy, was underved by how subdued she seemed. He felt foolish trying to pretend all was well, and since she ignored his pretense he just caught and threw, warming her up.

Judging by the hard flat trajectory of her throws, she was considerably warm already. Ramona Sanchez had a good arm; in fact, she was a gun. Once Kevin had seen one of her rare wild throws knock a spoke cleanly out of the wheel of a parked bike, without moving the rest of the bike an inch. She regularly broke the leather ties in first basemen's gloves, and once or twice had broken fingers as well. Kevin had to pay close attention to avoid a similar fate, because the ball jumped across the space between them almost instantaneously. A real gun. And not in a good mood.

So they threw in silence, except for the leather smack of the glove. There was a certain companionableness about it, Kevin felt—a sort of solidarity expressed. Or so he hoped, since he couldn't think of anything to say. Then the umpires called for the start of the game, and he walked over and stood beside her as she sat and jammed on her cleats. She did it with such violence that it seemed artificial not to notice, so Kevin said, hesitantly, "I heard about you and Alfredo."

"Uh huh," she said, not impressed.

"I'm sorry."

Briefly she twisted her mouth down. That's how unhappy I would be if I let myself go, the look said. Then the stoic look returned and she shrugged, stood, bent over to stretch her legs. The backs of her thighs banded, muscles clearly visible under smooth brown skin.

They walked back to the bench, where their teammates were swinging bats. The team captains gave line-up cards to the scorer. All activity began to spiral down toward the ritual; more and more that was not part of it fell away and disappeared, until when one team took the field—first basemen rolling grounders to the infielders, pitcher taking practice tosses, outfielders throwing fly balls around—everything extraneous to the ritual was gone. Kevin, the

first batter of the new year, walked up to the plate, adrenaline spiking through him. Players called out something encouraging to him or the pitcher, and the umpire cried "Play ball!"

And the batter stepped into the box, and the first pitch of the season rose into the air, and the shouts ("Get a hit!" "Start it off right!" "Hey batter, hey batter!") grew distant, faded until no one heard them, not even those who spoke. Time dilated and the big fat shiny new white ball hung up there at the top of its arc, became the center of all their worlds, the focus—until it crossed the plate, the batter swung, and the game began.

It was a great game as far as Kevin was concerned: the Lobos kept the lead throughout, but not by much. And Kevin was four for four, which would always be enough to make him happy.

In the field he settled down at third base to sharp attention on every pitch. Third base like a razor's edge, third base like a mongoose among snakes: this was how the announcer in his head had always put it, ever since childhood. Occasionally there was a sudden chance to act, but mostly it was settling down, paying attention, the same phrases said over and over. Playing as a kind of praying.

So he was lulled a bit, deep in the rhythms of what was essentially a very ordinary game, when suddenly things picked up. The Oranges scored four runs in their final at-bat, and now with two outs Santos Perez was coming to bat. Santos was a strong pull hitter, and as Donna prepared to pitch, Kevin settled into his clear-scored position off third base, extra alert.

A short pitch dropped and Santos smashed a hot grounder to Kevin's left. Kevin dove instantly but the ball bounced past his glove, missing it by an inch. He hit the dirt cursing, and as he slid forward on chest and elbows he looked back, just in time to see the sprinting Ramona lunge out and snag the ball.

It was a tremendous backhand catch, but she had almost overbalanced to make it, and now she was running directly away from

first base, very deep in the hole. There was no time to stop and set, and so she leaped in the air, spun to give the sidearm throw some momentum, and let it fly with a vicious flick of the wrist. The ball looped across the diamond and Andy caught it neatly on one hop at first base, just ahead of the racing Santos. Third out. Game over.

"Yeah!" Kevin cried, pushing up to his knees. "Wow!"

Everyone was cheering. Kevin looked back at Ramona. She had tumbled to the ground after the throw, and now she was sitting on the outfield grass, long, graceful, splay-legged, grinning, black hair in her eyes. And Kevin fell in love.

Of course that isn't *exactly* how it happened. That isn't the whole story. Kevin was a straightforward kind of guy, and crazy about softball, but still, he was not the kind of person who would fall in love on the strength of a good play at shortstop. No, this was something else, something that had been developing for years and years.

He had known Ramona Sanchez since she first arrived in El Modena, when they were both in third grade. They had been in the same classes in grade school—including, yes, the class with the famous debate—and had shared a lot of classes in junior high. And Kevin had always liked her. One day in sixth grade she had told him she was Roman Catholic, and he had told her that there were Greek Catholics too. She had denied it disdainfully, and so they had gone to look it up in the encyclopedia. They had failed to find a listing for "Greek Catholic," which Kevin could not understand, as his grandfather Tom had certainly mentioned such a church. But having been proved right Ramona became sympathetic, and even scanned the index and found a listing for "Greek Orthodox Church," which seemed to explain things. After that they sat before the screen and read the entry, and scanned through other articles, talking about Greece, the travels they had made (Ramona had been to Mexico, Kevin had been to Death Valley).

the possibilities of buying a Greek island and living on it, and so on.

After that Kevin had had a crush on Ramona, one that he never told anyone about—certainly not her. He was a shy boy, that's all there was to it. But the feeling persisted, and in junior high when it became the thing to have romantic friends, life was a dizzying polymorphous swirl of crushes and relationships, and everyone was absorbed in it. So over the course of junior high's three years, shy Kevin gradually and with difficulty worked himself up to the point of asking Ramona out to a school dance—to Homecoming, in fact, the big dance of the year. When he asked her, stammering with fright, she made him feel like she thought it was an excellent idea; but said she had already accepted an invitation, from Alfredo Blair.

The rest was history. Ramona and Alfredo had been a couple, aside from the brief breaks that stormy high school romances often have, from that Homecoming to the present day.

In later years, however, as El Modena High School's biology teacher, Ramona had developed the habit of taking her classes out to Kevin's construction sites, to learn some applied ecology—also carpentry, and a bit of architecture—all while helping him out a little. Kevin liked that, even though the students were only marginally more help than hassle. It was a friendly thing, something he and Ramona did to spend time together.

Still, she and Alfredo were partners. They never married, but always lived together. So Kevin had gotten used to thinking of Ramona as a friend only. A good friend, sort of like his sister Jill—only not like a sister, because there had always been an extra attraction. A shared attraction, it seemed. It wasn't all that important, but it gave their friendship a kind of thrill, a nice fullness—a kind of latent potential, perhaps, destined never to be fulfilled. Which made it romantic.

A lifelong thing, then. And before the softball game, while warming Ramona up, he had been conscious of seeing her in a



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