

The Cove
Second Place, Art Tales Short Story Contest, 2015
By Kienna Kulzer

Nobody really talked about Teddy Bear Cove. It was just kind of there, right on the other side of the looming forest at the end of town. Sunny sky, aqua blue water, and rocky islands scattered around. It seemed so out of place in this small Northwest logging town.

There was something very still about the whole place. No cars rushing past, no wind, no seagulls, just the waves going back and forth like a metronome. She could see forever, the train tracks extending in either direction until they seemed to be swallowed by the horizon.

She followed the arrow on a feeble wooden sign and began to walk.

She fumbled with the folded paper in her pocket. "I like the way you talk and walk and dress and act." He had written that. He'd written her an entire letter of similar confessions, but it was that line that kept circling through her mind.

She walked over the tracks extended over the water on a bridge and the wind howled as it whistled through the pillars. It sounded tortured somehow, like ghosts who had been there for far too long.

She pulled the paper from her pocket. She'd had it for months now. The blue lines were smeared in places, blending with the black ink from the pen he used. There was a dirt smudge, a small tear at one of the corners. It had the look of something that had been folded and unfolded a thousand-some times, too many creases to count.

Holding it in her hands, she could feel it all again. The hot, dusty desert, that small town beneath those looming red rocks and that overbearing blue sky. That sky and this sea, both never-ending stretches of blue, but that one had suffocated her and this one made her feel free/endless/infinite.

It didn't mean anything now. He loved her and she'd loved him but she couldn't love one person forever. Suffocating. Like the heat, the dusty streets, the neon signs. Like that blue sky.

"Nothing feels or looks right when you're not here."

No, it had ever felt right. Just...nice. Safe. Comfortable. Something to hold on to in a small town with nothing else to do. But now one of them had escaped. She was here, by herself in this eerie cove in a new town with new people, and she'd promised herself new beginnings.

"You've always been the only one for me."

Why did he have to be so intense? She always felt guilty for not feeling more when he said things like that, but they always felt empty somehow, like he could have gotten them from a movie.

“I like the way you talk and walk and act and dress.” Maybe that’s why she had kept it, for that line. It was the only one that felt real. The only one that she couldn’t let go, because it was so sincere, so honest, and it felt like something you only get once.

She read the last words on the page. “With love, Ira.” Then she folded it for the last time and tossed it into the sea.

The earth was a drum, the waves a metronome, and his words hit it right on beat. She watched the water soak through each crease and each of his sweet confessions turned to swirls of ink and slowly floated away. Then she turned around and walked back up the hill.