

FICTION – FIRST PLACE

“The Beach”

Laura Hunter, Age 16
Kenmore, WA
The Attic Learning Community

My hair whips around my face. I attempt to smooth it with a hand, but its salt-harsh strands continue to tangle with each other in the wind.

I look at my feet, partially buried in pale sand. The cut off threads of the jeans I wear have become entwined with the grains. I raise my head, gaze out to where the deep grey blue of the ocean meets the pale grey of the sky. I shiver a little and hunch deeper into my baggy navy sweatshirt. All of a sudden, coming to the beach to search for artistic inspiration seems like a really silly idea.

I prop the spiral notebook on my knee and twiddle a pen between cold fingers. I try to think of words to force onto the paper... artistic words, inspirational words, unique words. Words that will make people sit up and pay attention. I close my eyes, letting my lashes brush the tops of my cheeks, and try to just write the first thing that comes to mind.

His hands are cold on my face as he tips my mouth to his.

I examine the words on the paper. What an opening line, right? In my mind, I watch Ms. Francisco, my old English teacher, smiling with approval. “Promising,” she would say, nodding so that the loose, wrinkled skin on her neck would sway gently. “We are given the contrasting images of the kiss... a romantic gesture... along with the cold, which could symbolize foreboding and cue up that ominous music in the reader’s mind.” Emboldened with my success, I close my eyes again and let the pen in my fingers fly along the page.

His tongue slides over my lips and probes into my mouth. I can taste the sharp tang of cigarettes as he cups the back of my neck hard, pulling me to him.

I hunch my shoulders a little deeper into my sweatshirt as I read what I have written in that neat ball-point hand. Why would I write something like that? I wonder. But Ms. Francisco’s eyes are gleaming with approval. “Good, Mira.” she says. “Keep this going. This has potential.” A gull swoops low over the sand in front of me, wings barely moving as the wind propels it along the beach.

I feel a tiny ball of anxiety, starting in the pit of my stomach. But this is all so overwhelming... his hands, moving down from my neck to my back, the surprising warmth of his bare arms as they meet my shoulders, the insistent pull of his tongue, his mouth, on mine. I feel as if I should stagger backwards, but my feet will not move.

I press my knees tight together, trying to ignore the goose bumps that are rising on my legs. It is a day far too chilly to be writing on a beach. I could be inside right now, I think. Sipping hot chocolate, perhaps. In my little, safe, warm kitchen.

I read what I have written on the paper. It is as if somebody else has penned the words. As I take them in, I feel almost a little scared. But this is good. Ms. Francisco thinks so. “Emotional usage,” she is saying, gesturing grandly with her hands, a stray shawl dangling from one arm. “You are drawing us into that character’s head, Mira. A good author,” she announces, snapping her fingers, “always does that.” The waves crash against the beach, roaring, but they are already receding into the background as I close my eyes and write again.

He draws back for a moment and surveys my face. I watch his eyes, the blue darker than I have ever seen it before. I realize all over again how handsome he is. The dark stubble on his jaw glints in the cloudy light.

“I love you.” His voice is lower than usual.

“I... I...” my answer is a gasp. I gingerly stroke my lower lip with a finger, wondering if it is really as swollen as it feels. The depth of his feeling, his need, both awes and frightens me, and yet all I want to do is kiss him again.

“Come here.” He pulls me to him, and I feel my arms reach up to meet around his neck.

I start, realizing as I come back to my surroundings that my heart is pounding uneven, faster. I stare at the pen in my hand. I’m not sure if I like this story. But Ms. Francisco is regarding me with chastisement in her gaze. “You can’t give up on this, hon.” she says. “This is promising.” She always did say promising a lot. I take a moment to pause, to look up at the sky. If only there were one break in the clouds... but the hazy grey stretches as far as I can see. I can feel the moisture settling in around me like a cloak.

His hands move, caressing, along my back, drop to my ribs, then, ever so slowly, to my front. I smell the smoke on him as I inhale. His lips are soft on mine now. I feel as if I am floating, as if I am in a dream.

I feel a pull on my shirt, and look down to see he has undone the top button. But still he is kissing me, and I don’t feel like I can slow down long enough to realize what’s going on here. Almost without my conscious permission, my body is responding to his.

The wind, buffeting a strand of hair in front of my eyes. The chill of the air as it swishes through my sweat shirt. The grain of the driftwood, hard behind me. I realize I am clenching my left hand in my lap, and open it to see red half-moons etched in my palm. But the words on the paper call me, compel me, will me to continue.

His breathing is uneven, the swell of his chest rising and falling sharply. I place a hand there and discern the solid beating of his heart. He mirrors my gesture, and I let out a breath as his cool hands meet my skin. I close my eyes as he slides his tongue around mine. I want to stay right here, in this moment, forever.

But now he is moving his hands down, down, down. Automatically I take a step back, but he snares me to him with one arm.

I try to disengage my mouth from his, to draw back and see his face, but he kisses me harder, the stubble on his jaw scraping the tender skin of my cheek. And his hands seem to be everywhere now, now on the cold metal button of my jeans, now catching a hold of my wrist as I try to draw it back, now jerking my pants from my hips, now...

And I try to yell, to scream, to say no, to make a noise, any noise... but his tongue is muffling my cries, and they fall...

unheard....

on the empty sand of the beach.

The harsh grains stick to my cheek as my tears soak into the sand beneath me. I huddle there, my keens rising to mingle with the shrieks of the sea gulls. And, like that time, there is nobody around to hear me.