



Road Not Taken

By Ben Amato

She stood on the beach, down on the waterline. Her feet were buried in the sand up to her ankles and the next set of waves were approaching. Her eyes were locked on a spot, far out on the horizon. Her body was rigid yet her left arm hung limply on her side. In her right hand was a scrap of paper, pressed to her chest. She was motionless, while the rest of the world was a spin. Seagulls circled. Kids were splashing wildly in the surf. Mothers were lined up at the shoreline, eyes as keen as the gulls were locked on their children.

A wave broke right where she was standing, washing her back into reality with a start. As the water receded, it pulled at her feet and for a brief moment she lost her balance and almost fell. The ocean wanted her in. She wanted out and backed up the wet sand towards the dunes.

The hot afternoon sun was baking everyone on the beach. Though not crowded, to her it was deserted. The laughter, playful screams and radios were muffled echoes to her ears. As she walked between the blankets and coolers, she felt their presence rather than saw them. Soon she reached the dunes and in the meager shade offered she sat, looking at the ocean and the crowd of families.



The rest of the afternoon she sat there. She seemed uncomfortable in her skin. The salt air dried her face into a squint but her mood had her looking inside rather than the distant boats dotting the horizon. A squawk from a seagull roused her and she saw several soaring, lifted by the wind to massive heights. The setting sun had sparked a cooler breeze which reached her and revived her spirit. In a flash, she rose, turned and walked towards the parking lot.

In seconds she was starting the car. The GPS came to life and asked for a location. Her finger reached forward and instead of pressing the button for Home, she turned it off. Down came her car windows and the convertible roof folded into place. Top down, the wind already blowing her hair, for the first time this day, her right hand let go of the note and gripped the wheel. It blew immediately out on to the parking lot and with that, the girl drove away.



When I packed the kids into the minivan, my mind raced to all the stops I had to make on the way home. Groceries, dinner, dry cleaning, ATM, some gas. As I loaded the buckets and blankets, the cooler and the chairs into the back, for a brief moment I saw a scrap of paper on the blacktop. To this day I am not sure what it said, the wind picked it up before the words really formed in my head. I think it was “marry me.” Or not.

I started the van and we all went home.

