

One Picture Says It All

The wind fluttered by, catching Lilith's hair and trying to pull it along to its next destination farther down the beach. She smoothed down the strands and tucked them into her crimson beanie, vowing it would be the last time. For the past half hour the wind had galloped by happily and innocently until it raced back with a destructive nature like an *anemoi thuellai*, an ancient Greek storm spirit.

"I hate this weather," she muttered under her breath.

While the beach was sunny and bright and the water a glistening blue-green, the wind refused to relent. The sand warmed her bare feet, and she was still amazed that it was relatively clear—no rocks, sea shells or seaweed had gotten caught between her toes or sliced open her skin. Only small, relaxing grains of sand.

Lilith sighed, pulling her sweater tighter around her torso. She hugged her sketch pad to her chest, clutching one small pencil in her fist. She had come to the beach looking for inspiration, since her stereotypically lazy, fat, sweaty, and strict boss heavily censored her content. If it was up to him, Lilith's talent would only be shown through the pencil strokes of another political propaganda piece.

The past week was no different. Monday she guiltily ate ice cream and kicked herself after turning in her depiction of her boss's boss's opponent. Tuesday she nearly vomited when her illustration of her boss's boss was revealed. Wednesday, thankfully, was easier to stomach as she was only ordered to sketch "something to capture the masses," whatever that meant. Thursday and Friday, however, were unfortunately a repeat of the beginning of the week.

The weekend was her solace. Two glorious days away from the office, free for her to draw whatever she liked. No one told Lilith what they wanted to see or what she had no business drawing. It was all up to her. But after being stuck in that hellhole, nothing had come to mind. So, she had hopped onto her bike with her sketch pad tucked into her backpack and pedaled down to the beach. It seemed that the depressing week had won its battle against the right side of her brain, because in her 30 minutes of walking along the shore, no pencil had been put to paper.

Yes, the water was beautiful. Yes, the sun's rays splayed across the ocean were mesmerizing. Yes, dolphins continually burst out of the sea for a few seconds before delving back into the endless blue liquid.

But she'd already seen those sights and traced those pictures. Everyone had. Her first field trip in ninth grade art class took her to the closest beach where they painted the horizon. She wanted something new. She wanted something fresh.

The wind attacked her again, but this time it succeeded in its attempt to kidnap her hat. The knitted beanie flew off of her head and danced through the air, teasing Lilith as she chased after it. Tugging it higher and higher, the wind careened away with her possession.

Holding her sweater closed with one hand, Lilith jumped again and again as she tried to catch her hat. After traveling several hundred feet, the wind lost interest in its prank and dropped her hat. She darted forward and searched frantically for the hat her grandmother had knitted for her before she died. It was the only thing left that connected them.

Lilith approached a rusted, browning and seaweed covered shopping cart abandoned in the middle of the beach. The little red hat sat perfectly in the middle of the cart. Lilith picked it up, shook it out and placed it firmly atop her head.

Then she paused. She took a few steps back. Seaweed, rocks and seashells were scattered along the sand in between the shopping cart and the shore line. Bridge foundations covered in moss and barnacles played leapfrog with each from the beginning of the shore to about a hundred feet in. A few buoys bobbed back and forth in the distance, followed by a pair of boats. The wind retreated, like it never even existed. Its task was complete.

The picture was nothing particularly beautiful. It was quite the opposite, actually. The sight was depressing and Lilith's spirits lowered as she lingered. She could only imagine the homeless person the cart belonged to. To her, the shopping cart represented one of the biggest economic problems in the United States of America.

But she couldn't look away. There was something about the cart, the bridge foundations, the boats, the rocks and the kelp. It was exactly what she had been searching for. It was exactly what she needed.

Inspired, she sat down, opened her sketchbook, and copied the scene. And for years after, whenever she had a particularly rough week, she simply looked at the sketch, took a deep breath, and pushed on.