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Duxbury Beach

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Duxbury Beach

It wasn't, by most peoples' standards, a good idea. Not even by mine. But there I was. Plans made six months ago had arrived at last, innocent of all change. I was walking barefoot, on a beautiful beach, beside my now-ex boyfriend.

It was awkward. Not everyone could have done it. By which I mean that most people wouldn't have. Furthermore, not everyone could have watched the last-eight-months-of-one's-life waltz into the lobby of one's hotel, glowing with Boston sunshine and ready for an embrace, and insist that the only disturbing part of the scene was the fact that "I didn't see you, and you scared me to death!"

Not that it really worked. Because there I was, on a beautiful beach, beside my ex-boyfriend. He lives in Boston, and my little sister knew half a year ago that she was going to visit Boston University. Of course I planned to come along, and of course I let him know that.

Once things were over, I thought, maybe he won't want to see me, or maybe I just won't see him. I'll only be there for three days, after all. I can be absurdly "busy" for three days, even on vacation.

I didn't realize till I got there that downtown Boston isn't that big. My hotel and the building where he'd worked all summer were painfully proximate. After we took our first walk around our little section of the city, I realized that from the window of the room where I spent my nights, I could literally stare at the place in which he spent his days. It was a conspiracy, but I didn't know whose.

So there I was! On a beautiful beach!

And I just didn't know how it had happened. Or whether I was happy, or why I hadn't resisted at all. And instead of addressing any of that, I marveled at the fineness of the sand, and the salty shine of tiny pebbles. There were piled by the hundred in long stubbly ribbons which struck through the sand like the dark veins in marble. Aesthetically, they were astounding, but walking on them was either a thrilling massage, or utter torture—a matter of perspective well-suited for the hour.

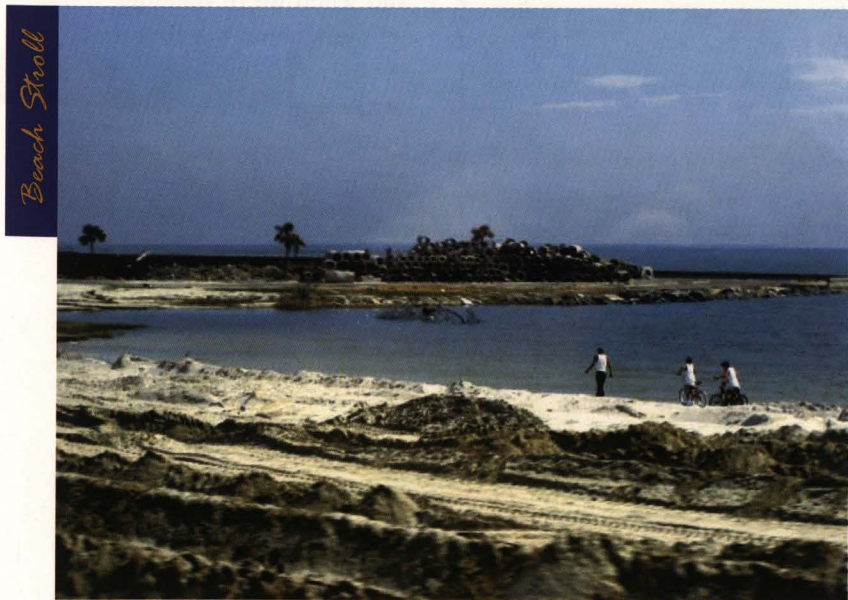
(I found a dark red pebble and wanted to keep it. But I was wearing a yellow sundress without any pockets, so he held it for me. And then I left it in his car, and he kept it anyway, for several months. Not long ago he gave it back to me, and now it is in one of my jewelry boxes. Which is, I think, the proper place for it. It is unbeveled, unpolished, and now that it's not soaked in Atlantic saltwater it's not even quite as red. But a jewel.)

We walked for a long time, and then we turned around and walked back. I admit that there was, in such behavior, nothing exciting. I've walked lots of beaches, but even at the time I knew that this one was something else, something pristine and impenetrable. Maybe because the town attached to it is so tiny and sweet, and the road you take to reach it is clean, and wide, and only

carries the perfect number of cars at any given moment.

And there are little grey and white docks, with little blue and yellow boats attached to them. Without the wind, the starchy stalks on the shore could have been of green and yellow glass. The shape of the beach itself was very simple—it did not curve, but it didn't seem to extend in one direction forever. It was just elided into the skyline.

Maybe that's not how it really looked. I asked him what it's (technically, geographically) supposed to be, and he said it's just part of the big bay, and therefore would, in fact, have curved. But I don't remember that, or our particular position on the bay made it look different. Either way, this is what my memory resurrects—a single stretch of silver, with no foreseeable end or direction, and glamorously fuzzy on either side. That was the beach, and the hour, and the whole thing, really. He has become that place—since then, I've never seen him without the clear, cold Atlantic, the little bright stones, and the wind that glazed the sand and our skin. No foreseeable end or direction, etc.



The sun started setting, and we were tired, and hungry. Had I been even just a year younger, I wouldn't have wanted to leave. But I wasn't, and I've become an expert in knowing what's beautiful and how to abandon it. Without any assurance of return (and let's face it, what were the odds), I knew that on this particular scrap of earth, beside a lover no longer mine, I was experiencing all of innocence at once. It was unnerving, and permanent.

We found a spot closer to the parking lot in which to wash our feet, and to try to make it back without getting more sand in our shoes. The plan failed rather badly, and my footprints on the way back looked much tinier than they should have.

—Meg Hustado