**Warmth**

Erin Henry

The first time a man told me I wasn’t good enough was right after he spit in my face. The worst part about it was that I still loved him anyway. I remained tethered there, attached to the possibility of a happy future. I believed there existed a warmth that I could feel in my chest and run my fingertips over or breathe in, and it would feel like home. Like when I would sit on the couch, and it would bend to my shape. He would sit beside me, and it would bend to him too. There was warmth in the familiarity of the squeaky door hinges, the creaking stairs, and how his voice sounded gentle in the morning. It hung in the air with his laughter. It was hidden somewhere in the way his hands would squeeze into fists.

This warmth existed outside of him too. I could hear it in the ocean, tides sighing over the sand, telling me that everything was going to be okay. *Everything would be fine; go to sleep. Good night.* And with the roughest crashing of water on rocks, the warmth was there, shouting, “I love you!” It drew me back in, and I was swept out to sea.

He was lying in bed. The entire room was thick with his smell—a wall of something that was purely him. Something individual that we couldn’t share. The way it made me feel was foreign, cold. It didn’t smell like it did when I used to love it. It transformed into something fruity and sour. I couldn’t stand the stench of it, but I stayed in the room.

I drank my coffee and didn’t wake him. I let him sleep with the sheets twisted around his legs, then dozed off next to him and dreamed about being a child. My tiny fingers were clutching at the diamond-shaped metal of a chain-link fence, shouting at the kids playing baseball, summer heat on my neck. Sunlight licked each blade of grass to make the field look fluid. There were sticky ice cream fingers, grass-stained knees, and messy hair falling out of braids.

I woke up homesick, and I reached for him. The rattling of a chain-link fence followed me in and out of consciousness until the low evening sun fell across his pale shoulder, illuminating a fly rubbing its legs together as if preparing to dig in. The air began to warm, and I convinced myself I would finally be enough. I shooed the fly away, draped my arm across his cold, bloated torso, intertwined his stiff and unmoving fingers with mine, and smiled. It felt like I could live in that peaceful moment forever.