

Cabana

The St. Malo Beach Association owned a cabana that was used to house umbrellas, beach chairs, surfboards, and life guard equipment. It was also the community weenie roast place and served as rallying point during grunion runs. I don't think people actually went inside it except to retrieve or replace beach equipment, but underneath the building I had a special place.

Leonard Keith and I knew about it and we used to sneak there to smoke cigarettes. The only entrance was under the steps of the bordering walkway where you could scoop the sand out of the way and wriggle your way in. We were careful to push sand back again so that no one - big people especially - would know about it. I thought we were pretty smart and definitely stealthy.

The summer I turned fifteen, the Warner sisters came to the beach. Margaret was eighteen and Barbara sixteen, both with flaming red hair, green eyes and freckles. Margaret was just about the most beautiful girl I had ever seen, but at such an advanced age, she was clearly beyond my reach - particularly since every older boy in the area took a run at her. Barbara was outclassed and the boys left her alone, so it was sort of by default that she and I started hanging around together.

The truth be known, I was less than great shakes, neither fish nor fowl, caught as I was in the throes of puberty. My skin was pretty good, but my voice cracked and I had this penchant for running off at the mouth. Sandy was serious and given to wearing sweatshirts and sawed off Levis instead of a bathing suit like everyone else.

It was my habit to be the first person on the beach every morning, going out half an hour before sunrise. It was nice with no one around and I could dig out sand crabs or pop seaweed to my heart's content. One day, Barbara was there before me and I felt somehow cheated. We walked and talked for a while, but I vowed not to be upstaged again.

Next day I was first, but not by much. Again we walked and I skipped rocks on the surf and so did she. After about a week I told her about the cabana and smoking and she said she'd like to try that even though she had never had a cigarette before. The skin-prickling sense of expectation and urgency was new to me but I had no term for it.

I showed her how Leonard and I reconnoitered the area to make sure no one could see us and then uncovered the entrance. It was still pretty dark and Barbara snagged her sweatshirt on a board, but other than that things went smoothly. We whispered and giggled and smoked a cigarette - neither of us inhaled - and I found I was happy I had told Barbara about the cabana. She seemed pleased as well and both of us were reluctant to leave. After that, our early morning rendezvous took place at the cabana.

I'm not sure who suggested it first, but we began meeting there in the early afternoon when most of the people were home eating lunch or taking naps. Maybe we both got the idea at the same time. Anyway, we began meeting there more often and things were different ... a delicious sense of wrong.

Sandy had taken to wearing a bathing suit rather than sweatshirt and cut-offs. Besides freckles, she had fine light hair on her arms and thighs which glowed in the latticed sunlight filtering through the cracks in the boardwalk. For a while, the gentle curve of her neck captured my attention until her firm belly with just the slightest hint of mounding took absolute possession of me.

In the days that followed, we couldn't see enough of one another. I'd sneak in and there would be Sandy, or maybe it was vice-versa, but our capacity for each other was endless though both of us knew she would be leaving the beach soon.

But for the time, the cabana was ours and we were a team until the day came when a black limousine arrived to retrieve Margaret and Sandy and all their belongings. A small clump of us gathered to wave goodbye, and I saw through stinging eyes that Barbara was wearing her snagged sweatshirt and sawed-off Levis. She wouldn't meet my eyes.