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Sands of Time

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I don't remember which Cape Cod beach I went to first. I imagine the ocean seemed overwhelming and enveloping back then, as if the greenish-blue water would swallow me whole. I do remember that it was the only time I felt free and unattached from a world I didn't want to understand. I would spiral with the wave to shore and, with it, be rushed back to sea. But I always emerged, my eyes salted and my hair full of seaweed.

Cape Cod, a 77-mile-long peninsula on the east side of Massachusetts, became my second home when I was five years old. My family still stays in the same house, located in Eastham.

The night we leave for Cape Cod, I'm always on edge. I pace the length of our house and check each clock on the way: the digital one that shines blue off the stainless steel stove, the manual one by my sister's middle school paintings, and my alarm clock that plays sounds of the rainforest each morning.

I bring the same books to the cape every year: coming of age stories about girls who are in love with boys who don't look at them twice. I love the familiarity of the crinkled pages and the sentences I've underlined. Some years they mean nothing to me, but sometimes, they mean everything.

Cape Cod's shape has stayed relatively the same since its formation after the ice age. It got its shriveled up arm from lobes containing basins in bedrock. My cape house sits right in the middle of The South Channel lobe, and it, too, has stayed relatively the same over the years, with its blue shutters and wood siding. Two years ago, the owners named the house "The Sanctuary" and hung a blue sign up above the kitchen window.

There used to be a plaque on the wall that said, "I searched the rainbows end and found not gold but you my friend." Every year, I would take a picture of it and laugh. To me, it never lost its hilarity. Because when I looked at it, I saw the house. Cheesy and cliché but familiar and something I didn't want to change. They took the plaque away years ago. But I still look for it, hoping they'll bring it back.

I can never sleep that first night. It's almost as if the house is not mine yet. As I lie on the bouncy twin mattress, thinking of my empty house back in New Hampshire, I think of my unmade bed with the grey flowered comforter, the sheets cold and bare. Then, I think of my current bedroom with the pictures on the wall above my head. In them are redheaded grandkids of the family we rent from. I'll think about my previous summers on the Cape, weeks where I'd do nothing but sit in the sun and read all day, and then, once that got too hot to bare, I'd run to the ocean's edge, letting my toes meet the liquid that felt too cold to be so smooth. But I never forced myself to rush in. I finally felt like I had time to get used to it.

Once I'm wrapped in the comfort of these memories, I'll close my eyes, and it will start to feel like home.

I always sleep the best on the last night. My exhaustion mixes with sunscreen, and this time, I don't think of how the people above me are strangers. Instead, I think about how we may not have anything in common but Cape Cod and "The Sanctuary" and the waves that sometimes crash too soon.

On our way out of town, we stop at the Salt Pond Visitor Center to see "Sands of Time" the documentary that they run every fifteen minutes. I choose to stay in the car and read while the rest of my family goes inside, down the corridor to the left, and enters a small theater.

There was a time when I joined them. I don't even know why I stopped going. It could have been because I had seen it enough times that I had it memorized. It could have been that nothing could compare to the time my sister found a lost diamond engagement ring under one of the seats, and the owner cried and hugged my sister tight. Maybe I just didn't like the film very much. It could have been that I didn't need it in my life anymore, one more thing to make me feel like I didn't have control. But right before I stopped going entirely, I'd only pay attention to the ending, when the narrator would say that Cape Cod would continue to change until it isn't here at all.

I imagine it like a tsunami; the wave rising up, foaming at the top and falling down all at once, taking out the cement bathrooms, then the parking lot, and the overgrown trail that my family takes to get to the beach, and lastly, I imagine it reaching my house with the freshly painted sign hanging above the bay window.