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Good Lovin'

By Susan Hodara

The beat of the Young Rascals filters through the screens of the second story snack bar, growing louder as we climb the wooden steps that are grainy with sand and sticky with blotches of spilled lemonade beneath our bare feet. “Good lovin’, give me that good good lovin’...” We are wearing our bathing suits, mine hot pink with little yellow daisies, a “bikini,” we call it, though it is really just a two-piece whose bottom hits my hips instead of my waist so my navel is exposed. It is the summer of 1968 and I am 14.

This is the two-week chunk of August that is our family’s vacation. My parents have rented a cottage on Cape Cod, one of a cluster of summer rentals in a small community called Mashnee Village. We’ve come with the Cones, whose cottage is on the next block. Mrs. Cone, tall and ample with a thick mat of short gray hair and a beaky nose, was my 9th-grade French teacher, even though she is also the mother of my friend Marsha and her sister, Beth, who’s one year older.

Marsha and I have spent the rest of the summer sitting on her bed playing Spit. When I envision her now, I see her wavy, seemingly unbrushed brown hair falling along either side of her perpetually glum face. Her voice is quiet and languid; she pushes her hair behind her ears when she talks, only to have it clamber forward again, as if her ears are just too small to restrain it. Her main attraction at school is her tall, slender frame.

I’d ride my bike to her house in the morning, and there the days would pass. Sometimes we’d invade Beth’s room across the hall to see what music she was listening to. Beth is also tall, with her mother’s face and hips wider than Marsha’s that she’s always complaining about. On our first day at Mashnee, when we’ve donned our bathing suits and met half-naked clutching towels at the bottom of the street, she peruses my budding frame and declares to her sister, “Look how slight she is!” Her tone has a tinge of contempt, but I am pleased by her observation and take it as a compliment.

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My parents and two younger brothers are entirely absent from the memories I have of this summer stay, save for glimpses of breakfasts at a round aluminum table in the cottage's kitchen. There must have been some shopping excursions and certainly a few evening barbecues with the Cones, but these have left no imprint. My days are spent in bathing suits with Marsha and Beth, at the small beach that's reserved for Mashnee residents, and mostly poolside.

It's an indoor pool, enclosed by glass, so you can swim even if it rains. We take turns diving off the aquamarine diving board, then lie facing upwards toward the clouds through the glassed-in roof on the plastic lounge chairs whose white strips leave bands of red on the backs of our legs. I remember sitting on the edge of the pool dangling my calves in the water and noticing for the first time the way the flesh of my thighs spread out when they hit full force against the prickly concrete. I was horrified and shoved my hands, palm down, underneath them to decrease their swell.

The lifeguard is curly-headed Dale, old enough that we flirt with him as if he's a friendly uncle, but young enough to have a pimply brother named Wayne who's the same age as I. Dale, whose body is tanned around his blue boxer-type bathing suit, shows up everywhere. I figure he is not a vacationer but a summer employee who lives somewhere near the resort and drives over with his brother every day. We pass him on the snack bar steps at lunchtime, then sit not far from him on the grassy area next to the pool to eat our hotdogs and fries. He gives us tips down by the shuffleboard game that's painted on the pavement on the way to the beach, and we giggle and shrug because we're not really playing by the rules anyway. He's energetic and outgoing and I find it exciting to spot him in my vicinity.

His brother Wayne appears to be spending his days at Mashnee because he has nothing else to do, and probably isn't allowed to stay home alone while Dale and his parents are at work. His hair is darker than Dale's, straight and greasy as it hangs limply in front of his eyes. Even though his body is shorter, it seems harder, stronger than his brother's. He is quiet, sitting off by himself most of the time, as if he's waiting for Dale to finish his work, watching idly, thinking about nothing much. Though for some reason I

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don't think he's allowed to use the pool, he, too, spends his days in a bathing suit, and there are blemishes along the top of his shoulders.

Nevertheless, it is Wayne whom I kiss every night. We meet as the sun is setting by the rocky shore down the road on the other side of the resort. There are a few houses nearby, but I don't think they're part of Mashnee. I walk there after dinner with my family wearing shorts and a T-shirt, pink beach sandals flip-flopping against the pavement, and he is waiting, standing on chunks of rocks that sometimes move under our feet. I don't know how we've worked out this arrangement, because I have no recollection of speaking with him, but I can imagine a group of kids meeting up at the snack bar and walking off together at the end of the afternoon, one heading here, another there, until it is just Wayne and me. "Can you come again tomorrow night?" he might have asked me through lips reddened from the pressure of mine. I'm sure I've told my parents I'm with Marsha and Beth, but I worry I'll be discovered where I'm not supposed to be, silhouetted against the deep gray of the sea. We stand pressed together as it gets dark, kissing with our tongues, our arms around each other, the ocean wind cool in my hair. We don't talk; I don't even know his last name.

In my memory, it seems like it was night after night, but if you count, there may not have been more than a few of these meetings. I am almost sure that the image I carry of us, nearly motionless and silent along the rocks, is from the last night of my vacation. When I slid into the backseat of my parents' packed up Chevrolet the next morning, I was probably steeped in thoughts of Wayne, though nothing more was ever exchanged between us. He was the first boy I kissed that way, and when I think about it, maybe the last, endless and stripped-bare kisses in the night air, more pressure than taste, more me than us. Yet for those few nights, that was the only place I belonged, trailing innocence in the wake of unquestioned drives, sucked together with a boy who by just standing still was all I needed, and whose mouth continues to hold a place in my heart.