

WARMTH OF SUMMER

In those days, coming up from Newport, the expected tradition every summer was to spend a week or two usually in Provincetown or Ogunquit, varying the lustre of the season. Sometimes one sailed up, leisurely and blown, enjoying the bright sea; but most times the trip was driven, in whatever sporty roadster that became available, open to the fluff-speckled blue sky and the sun-warmed road. The sail was quite pleasant, the salt of the sea, the cool mornings rising into the sunshine, the toss of the waves, a dream of peaceful solitude, a pleasure encompassing blissful activity and anticipation; but, though passage of time not really being the point, the drive was much quicker to the festive destinations. These wonderful much-awaited excursions were as well garnished with pleasures, re-exploring favourite haunts. The journey was always beautiful, in the beautiful extended days of youthfulness. There were stops in sandy towns and at fruit-stands and ice cream freezettes along the way; and hitting the dunes of the Cape was like driving into a moonscape of whiteness that stretched into the infinite bluish space that was the sea. What a world it was—golden world! And the

temperature of the July sun, for the unprepared, even here could raise to blistering.

Cares, like the gulls, flew aside. Besides the throngs of chattering tourists, gesturing clots venturing into the dunes, and in the village those who trod the sidewalks to the galleries, Provincetown in the evenings was a bumptious carnival of roistering entertainment, replete with frivolous revelers and complete with drinks that had those tiny paper umbrellas in them. After around ten:thirty p.m. the entire village began to whirl about in a daze. Brock Smith would be as well among that number in the raucous crowds. Irrepressible fun shimmied. There, fun was the reason for life.

In Ogunquit, fun was also the reason, but of a simpler quieter sort. Ogunquit, being a small quaint village along the southern sandy coast of Maine, was centered on the beautiful gossamery beach and tranquil waves, on wakened lunches at clam shacks, and in the evenings on the restaurants and just-trapped lobsters and the one discotheque of that time, and, after enough dancing and imbibing in the social circle, taking wandering nighttime walks along the windy dark beach where the occasional phosphorescent seaweed glowed like clumps of floating stars. Brock was totally a devotee of this place—its' country charm and

serene ambiance. With an appreciation, offering contemplative musing, sketching in his pad the colours and impressions of summer, walking and reclining about the teeming beach, he relished with ardour the casual days there. They gave him a chance to become tanner, and careless, and exercise, walking much along the Marginal Way and the long sandy beach and eating well. There were plenty of various accommodations--for Canadians came there as well for holiday--scattered about the seacoast and woodland. Aside from those times of when sleeping onboard the anchored sailboat, Brock preferred the old-fashioned rambling of the clapboard Gov. King Inn in its' cheery yellow paint and wide porch, towering to hold high above the roadway a convenient location to the main attractions of the village.

The inn was managed during the season by a man, perhaps indeterminate late-thirties in age, playful, formerly a Canadian, who was the son of the widow who owned it, and was a jovial booster of the villages' social and tourist occupations. He, Antoine, thoroughly enjoyed zooming among the businesses and guests, churning the social and holiday activities, and promoting his own talents thereof as well. He occupied the season in Ogunquit, enjoying himself while working hard at the Inn, and spent winter moved to Florida. Antoine, early on, befriended Brock, making his acquaintance, and assigning him a choice room

at the private end of a corridor, and encountering him in the Inn and beach and bars and disco. Antoine was an outgoing social sort, saw it as a part of his occupation, acting as an eager guide to all local attractions.

Brock, on these rambling summer trips, often was accompanied by a friend or three who loosely shared, more or less, the casual times of these unconstrained holidays—sometimes it being chums from school days, or the odd cousin, or random acquaintances from mutual friends. Sometimes Brock simply traveled alone. Brock, at any rate, seemed to embody a solitary persona, to which he was accustomed—spending time alone, friendly enough but quiet, shy around strangers, hesitant. Brock's inner humour had to be drawn out. That, perhaps, reflecting the bruise of his past—the dark wound inside under a layer of scar of a disasterous affair of six years earlier that due to the uncomprehending cold blue steel hand of another had been aborted before it had a chance to actually begin. Constantly the remembrance of that backed Brock into a confined dark corner—an inner despair of promise unfulfilled.

This summer, after all the accumulation of that persistent nonevent and dazingly morbid time, Brock was at last as much as possible active in his life again, enjoying a renewed outlook. He felt a balm of some peacefulness. Last

December he had met someone to whom, for spontaneous and unexamined reasons, he had been immediately attracted, that moment when eyes blush, and a smile says everything that is needed, then a sparkle leaps through the air. After those five previous years, this sparkle seemed a tremendous shock, a stunning jolt—and a package as glittery as Christmas. Since Brock and his newly-discovered love lived in different places so the end of that bliss of tropic holiday led to the inevitable parting, and promises to stay connected, in touch, despite great distance of the world in-between. It became Brock's mission to bridge that distance; but he could not feel comfortable to ask someone, after only three weeks, however zealously he wished, to give up their job and home to come live in the uncertainty of future in the States. And the possible looming of another rejection was so unthinkable, again potentially so devastating, that it might lead to whatever disaster could unfold, the last voyage of a ship going down. In this meantime, so ethereal, Brock, riding the crest of a swell, was still in the pink dawn of new, tender, infatuation.

Brock's emotional course had not yet been fully charted; he was in a latitude where the winds were as yet weak, and the sea, gray, undulating, was deceptively calm. Brock floated along, with an eye toward the distance.

Of course, aside from all the scenic beauties and sailing, and relaxation at the beach and Cove, and good restaurants and bars, one of the chief benefits of the holiday village was the abundance of other holiday-makers and the waiting enticements of a possible warm romance. Many came here for the allure of that very pleasure. Even Brock, though relatively serene in his new love-match with its' inconvenient distance, was susceptible to the breezy atmosphere. One day, at a beachside lunch, Brock spotted a young man in a bathing suit laughing along with a friend, carrying a beach kite, kicking up some sand. The young man was handsome, quite so, wearing his graphic black-and-white striped bathing suit, was sturdily athletic, seemed joyful, and exhibited a remarkably stunning resemblance to Brock's absent Corfiot love that welled up in Brock a yearning that was somehow overwhelming. Brock had always been a keen observer of beauty and beauties, to wherever he had gone. He, in the rosy glowing aftermath of a recent brief yet idyllic reunion trip to Corfu, tantalizingly missed his absent love who emblazoned a yearning occupying Brock's mind, waking or dreaming; and the resemblance to absent Paul was uncannily disconcerting. Alternately clouds chased by sunshine played along the peak of sky; and shaded under a verandah, in one of their afternoon conversations, casually passing the time over drinks,

Brock mentioned to Antoine the attractive young man that had appeared on the scene at the beach.

“Eh?” quizzed Antoine.

“Very attractive. Masculine athletic, wearing a black-and-white swimsuit. Quite noticable; even among the multitude of flagrant beauty here.”

“Ahh! Oui. I have seen him.”

“I think he is alluring. He seemed to be laughing a lot—having a good time.” Brock did not mention his resemblance to an absent anyone, but he considered it in his mind's eye.

“I know where he is staying.” Antoine raised an eyebrow; and Brock laughed as well.

Brock was unsure about his feelings of anything more, except for wishful thinking—about the possible fantasy of resemblance, and the possible proximity of warm flesh. A daydream, like the tides, came and went. This spicy mull came into his mind over the next days, flitting like the dancers on the steaming floor at each night's parading escapade where the village's fluctuating community gathered at the boisterous disco. At some point everyone could be seen there. It

was, after all, only a small village, on a beautiful beach, full of holiday-makers.

Antoine, after another day passed, told Brock to go to a certain bar in the afternoon just before tea-dance; he did not elaborate. "You'll see", he said. "It is a popular place."

"Are you meeting me there?"

"Yes. Perhaps. Wait for me."

Brock was at top form then, renewed in his reinvigorated prime, in the shallow end of thirties, energetic, fit. Walking through the village lanes, at the appointment time, dutifully Brock appeared, leaving the bright sunlight, and entering into the dark room. Only the bartender was behind the bar, busying himself with setting up washed glasses. The only other person in the room, sitting at the bar in the dimness, was the beautiful young man from the beach, now tanned beautifully, dressed casually for happy-hour cocktails. He turned toward the light streaming through the door, sanctioned an appraising look, flashed a tentative smile across his familiar visage, a smile that illuminated Brock, a light going on above his head. Antoine would be shocked, shocked, to think of himself as a busy procurer, in a professional sort of way, outside the tourist milieu, but he fancied himself often as a facilitator of introductions. It was simply his way of

being a friendly host, simply a part of the “beautiful-place-by-the-sea”'s
ambiance. Brock marched tentatively up to the young man, too stunned and
intrigued to think otherwise. “Hello”, he said, almost a whisper. Brock had to
clear his throat to cover the hoarseness of his surprise.

“I was told you wanted to meet me.” He was still smiling, and with just the
sun-kissed look and lively eyes that Brock found so attractive. “My name is Pierre.
My English is not so good a language. I am Quebecois.”

“I...I'm Brock. I...I had seen you at the beach, the restaurant with your
friends, dancing at the disco.” They ordered drinks, the bartender having
reappeared and obliging. They sipped. They spoke, a bit awkwardly, standing
quite close in the empty room. “I like here,” said Pierre, “I try to come every year,
for a holiday.”

“Yes, it is beautiful.” Brock was not too comfortable with introductory
small chat. What was he thinking? What *was* he thinking?

“La plage...shore...bon, charmant. It is fun...joy. But tomorrow is my last
day.”

“Oh.” An ever-so-distant cloud appeared on the horizon. Brock had seated himself on a stool, his legs spread outward, almost touching the man, and now he shifted.

The beautiful stranger sipped at his drink. The smiling eyes questioned Brock. He mentioned a possible dinner. Before Brock's eyes the evening withered. He found the man's resemblance enticing, his willingness inviting; but as much as Brock was tempted, thinking it over, he really did not want to pursue spending the whole night with someone who was leaving the next day. It did not seem fruitful. More importantly, Brock was still consumed in love—with Paul—something, despite the newness and the distance, worth working on, and keeping, in a safe place. Brock tried to explain why he was reluctant to accept the rendezvous, the offer of only one night. It sounded unconvincing, implausible. The two—they exchanged names, addresses, promised to perhaps see each other in the next summer. Then the young man shrugged, looked a bit confused, his smile slipped. He turned, and left. Brock, for a long confused moment of his own, watched him as he walked through the door.

Later on, Brock found himself standing at the bar in the disco where they were playing already that summer's most favourite hits, the most rousing

danceable selections. He had met up with Antoine, as usual habitually appearing here, but Brock not answering the unasked questions. They would come around again in another day's conversations, in a quieter place. The tepid Maine warmth of mid-August midnight in the compact bar/discotheque rose in surging soaking degrees about the throng under the flashing lights and pulsing rhythms and faint but so potent odours of amyl nitrite that permeated the dance floor. For a while he and Antoine danced, though in their own distinct portions of the world's terrain; stopping at intervals for a Labatt's. The pulsing frantic music belied summer was beginning to take on its' ebbing glow. Youth...wanted to live forever. To everything, its' season.

When Brock sensed at last that the room of the tight club had become too stuffy and close, he crept outside to get a breath of the soft briny air. He decided to walk, to clear a bit his thick head. It was a short block stroll to the edge of the beach. He turned in that direction. Eagerly passing the shuttered refreshment stand and beach shop, he walked past the glare of their lights, and onto the sand, and into the curtain of darkness, deepening, obscuring the farther away. His eyes adjusting; he passed a few couples, whispering, or silent in the dark. The wind was picking up from the sea—carrying the wet and slimey salt smell of the churning sea, the drenched twirling smell of life forming, of the green splendour

of its' peak, and then its' going down away and the swim of its' being swept into the detritus of the dark beach. The rolling surf's foamy moan pulsing against the shore became the sole sound, hissing out of the roiling vast darkness. Brock ventured further, dragging his feet through the sand, listening to the waves pounding. A glimmer of phosphorescence floated there. He thought of the now-absent love; looked out into the night at the August stars distantly twinkling over the sea.

--J. F. Lowe