

*Judith Goode*  
**Remembering**

**A**rlene Chaud left her car in the parking area of the ferry and climbed the stairs to the deck. Soon the ferry would leave Woods Hole and head for Martha's Vineyard, the island of her youth. As the ferry ploughed through the waters of the Atlantic, she felt her journey to the past begin. She stood at the railing and watched the water fold back into itself in the ferry's wake. About 40 minutes later, she drove down the ramp and into Vineyard Haven where the ferry docked in the harbor. From there, she began the familiar drive up-island, passing sheep-grazing land, thin woods, moors, and, finally, West Tisbury. She had rented the Groff house, as her family used to do, but this time only for a week. She didn't have much time left.

She drove down the narrow lane to the property, the fields, the fresh-water pond, the barn, and the pre-revolutionary house. Everything was as she remembered it. She went into the house, through the cramped kitchen and into the master bedroom, which was large and white, and left her suitcase on the nubbed bedspread to unpack it later. She took the separate zipper bag into the kitchen and put away the food she had brought with her: coffee, milk, bread, butter, salad fixings, and juice. Fish she would buy at Everett Poole's market in Menemsha.

It had been a little over a four-hour drive from Pittsfield, Massachusetts, where she lived, counting the ferry ride, to get to the Vineyard, and she thought a bracing swim at Menemsha bight would perk her up. On the way back she would stop at Everett Poole's for fish. She quickly unpacked her suitcase, retrieved her swimsuit, changed, and got back in the car. With every step she took and motion she made she remembered that these familiar moments were her last on the Vineyard—and her last ever. This evening she would phone her children to tell them she had arrived safely and was feeling okay. Since she had gotten sick, they had kept tabs on her to know how she was doing. "Fatigue, only fatigue," was what she told them.

It was close to 5:00 pm and the beach was almost empty. The water was as usual frigid and Arlene swam fast to warm up. She took a swim along the beach and back, then ran out of the water to wrap herself in a beach towel. She sat on the wooden break water and smoked a cigarette, taking pleasure in the salty taste in her mouth mixed with the taste of tobacco. She saw no reason to quit now that the damage was done. She might as well enjoy what she had left of life. This trip to the Vineyard was a last present to herself. She didn't mind taking it alone, in fact she preferred it so she could concentrate on remembering. The last time she had been on the Vineyard she and Tom had two young children and they were visiting her late parents. She should say her mother since her father was pretty much a vegetable after his stroke.

Somewhat warmed up, Arlene drove to Everett's and asked him what was running. Everett looked the same—the chiseled profile—and he told her: "baby mackerel." She bought a filet. What was left over she would have for lunch. The sea air made her hungry. At home after a warm shower she mixed herself a drink of Cinzano, which she had brought with

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her, and sat in the hammock on the front lawn. She could almost hear the voices of her children as they played around her. The past was keeping her company in her solitude. Since her husband Tom had died five years ago, she'd preferred solitude over seeing her friends, although she did have the occasional dinner date to stay in touch.

When she finished her Cinzano, she went inside, made a salad and broiled the filet. The kitchen hadn't been updated in all these years and she still had to crawl on the floor to open the broiler. This didn't bother her in the least; it sharpened her memory of those past summers. Arlene and Tom had always been the designated cooks while her parents spent time with their grandchildren. They had made much the same dinner as she was making now, with the addition of a cooked Island vegetable and rice or potatoes. She ate more sparingly on her own, particularly since her appetite was undependable with the illness. It seemed fine tonight, however, charged by her icy swim at Menemsha.

After dinner she made a fire in the fireplace in the living room, called her children, and settled down with her book, which was a novel by a British writer who had won many awards—unmerited in Arlene's opinion. Still, she liked the novel enough to read it through. She sat up relatively late reading by the fire. Getting into the double bed in the master bedroom, she remembered that she and Tom used to make crazy love on that bed, whispering into the night:

"Oh Tommy!"

"Oh Arlie!"

as the pace quickened.



In the morning first thing she took a swim in the pond, the deliciously cool water waking up her senses. The morning swim was *de rigueur* in her family and she remembered little Chris standing on the big rock by the water, postponing his dive in as long as he could. Grace was two years older and braver at that point in their lives and dove in promptly like her mother. Arlene rarely hesitated when confronted with challenges, large or small. That was one of the things he admired about her, Tom used to say.

There were many birds around the pond and Arlene could hear them when she turned her head to breathe as she swam. The pond this morning was a Proustian experience for her: fragrant bushes, birdsong, water soft on her nude skin, all infused with memory. After breakfast she took a short walk around the property, beginning with a visit to the barn where the children used to sleep, her parents in the twin beds upstairs, and she and Tom in the double bed downstairs. She lingered, remembering how special sleeping in the barn was for the children. It was a real barn, renovated into living quarters. They would walk the short path from the house, turn on a lamp in the barn, undress, and climb into their beds. In the morning, the children went down to the pond in their pajamas.

After her walk, Arlene drove up to Kenmore beach, owned by the Kenmores on their vast Chilmark estate. They were guests there because Tom knew Elaine Kenmore from college at Middlebury. Only guests of the

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Kenmores were allowed on the beach. The grassy path to the beach held some of the magic of the beach itself because of the anticipation they felt among the many birds and the deep scent of the flowering shrubs along the way. At the end of the path was a bench beside the top of the wooden stairs down to the beach, 100 of them (the children had counted). At the bench she took off her sandals. There were no other shoes there yet so she must be the first at the beach that morning. She climbed down the stairs and onto the fine white sand.

As Arlene walked to the spot where she would sit down on her towel, she noted that the rollers were small and even, perfect for riding the waves into the shallow water. She put her things down where they used to sit near the stream that ran down through a break in the gray clay cliffs. She took off her shorts and T-shirt and her underwear—it was a nude beach—and went down to the edge of the water. She ducked down into the foam from the breakers and swam out over the sand shelf, diving through a wave and swimming out to beyond the breakers. She took a swim parallel to the beach, then swam back to where the waves crested. She dove under one, facing the beach and rode it in all the way to the edge of the water, just like in the days when she and Tom rode the waves in together.

A few more rides, another swim, and after a ride brought her to the beach, she got out of the water and dried herself with her towel. She spread the towel on the sand and lay down in the warm sun, growing drowsy in the warmth following the cold of the water. She dozed, awakened by the arrival of a family with children. Arlene greeted them—she knew the parents from the old days. They asked about Tom and she had to tell them of his death. They were shocked and sorry. They chatted some more and she lay down again to nap. After another swim, she took a walk along the beach, heading down-island. This walk had been a pleasure she shared with her mother. Memories flooded her consciousness. She experienced the silence of the beach, broken by the crash of the waves, and the feeling of being in a different world from the world above the beach. Tom came back to her and she felt his hand in hers.

Arlene passed the rocky water near the point and turned back, retracing her footsteps back to her towel on the sand. She took one more swim, a short one, and gathered up her things to go. Her friends were in the water and she waved goodbye to them. They waved back. Another group of people whom she didn't know were coming down the stairs as she was going up. They said hello and remarked on the beauty of the day. She agreed and said the water was cold but refreshing. They passed each other and she retrieved her sandals at the bench overlooking the water. The walk back along the path was lonely—she was thinking of Tom—and when she got home fatigue overtook her.



It was later in the afternoon when Arlene woke in the hammock. She got up and drank a cup of coffee left over from breakfast, topping it with hot milk. The coffee helped with the fatigue and she thought about a bracing swim at Menemsha. Would that wipe her out? She didn't think so. The oncologist had said two or three months and the bad part would come in the last six weeks. She put on her swimsuit and went out the kitchen door, passing the wooden table and benches where they used to have lunch. Dinner outside was impossible because of the mosquitos at dusk.

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A few more people than yesterday were at the bight in Menemsha. Arlene took a short but invigorating swim and wrapped up in her towel when she came out. They used to call the late afternoon swim at Menemsha "the suicide club" because her father had a skin disease and couldn't tolerate the sun earlier in the day. So they swam at 5:00 and got thoroughly chilled. Rubbing her skin briskly with the towel warmed her slightly. She drove down to Everett's and bought a flounder filet. Then home again and a warm shower. With her Cinzano she sat next to the pond in a deck chair and cherished the beauty of the hour. She thought about a drive up to Gay Head at the upper tip of the Island and thought again that she would save it for another day, given the fatigue that had hit her after her morning of swimming and walking.

Suddenly, grief overcame her: these were the last trips to Kenmore beach, to Menemsha, to the Groff house, the pond, the barn; the last time she would eat baby mackerel and flounder; the last time she would sleep in the bed where she and Tom made love; the last time for everything. Two more months, the last six weeks bad. She'd already spent one of the three allotted to her. *Tempus fugit*. She sat with it, with the grief. It would pass like everything else. She decided to drive up to Gay Head after all. Might as well pack in what she could. She would not cry. She would watch the sunset from that farthest point up-island.

She walked along the beach at Gay Head, watching the setting sun put a warm glow on the different colored cliffs and on the waves breaking over the huge rocks in the water. They used to have beach picnics here, her family and a couple Arlene loved. They read aloud from *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. They roasted hamburgers and hot dogs and marshmallows over the fire. The grownups drank beer, Arlene soda. She walked to the point and looked out over the ocean. It was beginning to turn silver. She sat on a rock on the beach and smoked, drawing in the view with her breath. The sun went down and it was getting dark. She went up the path to her car and drove home.

Arlene remembered the flounder filet she'd bought from Everett. She broiled it and made a salad. The food tasted good. Her oncologist warned her not to stop eating. She had already lost weight. "Keep your weight steady," he said. She would do her best. She read the *Vineyard Gazette* while she ate. After dinner she made a fire in the fireplace again and sat with her book, reading. Before bed, she took a little stroll outside. It was clear and she could see many stars. She knew her constellations, too. Tom had taught her. He was an astronomer. She had retired from her university professorship in French Literature this month, September, when she got her diagnosis. She and Tom had taught at Boston University.



The following day, again beautiful and sunny, Arlene went to Kenmore beach in the morning and she was surprised to see an old friend there. It was Andrew Semple, whom she'd dated before she met Tom. In fact, he was a friend of Tom's, which was how he got invited to the beach. He and his wife had visited them one summer on the Island. They kissed and embraced and sat together to catch up. Andy was a planetary scientist also teaching at B.U. He and his wife were divorced and his children, like Arlene's, were in college.

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She and Andy swam together and then went for a walk toward down-island. At the rocky point they sat and watched the waves crashing against the rocks in the water.

"What happened with you and Carol?" Arlene said.

"We grew apart...it's common," Andy said. "The marriage was probably not grounded in enough similarities to begin with."

"I'm sorry. I liked Carol."

"I did, too. But I guess I didn't love her enough to keep it going."

"And what about her? How did she feel?"

"She saw me more as a friend, ultimately.... And how about you? Why did you retire early?"

Arlene took a while to answer. When she did, she put her hand over Andy's.

"I'm sick, Andy."

"Is it something serious?"

"Small cell carcinoma of the lung."

"Is it--?"

"--Yes, it's terminal."

"...How long—"

"---Two months."

"...Oh Jesus...I'm so sorry, Arlie."

They sat in silence until Arlene said:

"Shall we?"

They walked back, holding hands. They didn't speak for a while. They swam, riding waves in, sunned, swam again. Arlene invited Andy to her house for lunch. He followed her car with his to the Groff House.

"Beautiful as always," Andy said. "Do you still swim in the pond?"

"Every morning."

In the kitchen, Andy made a fish salad out of the leftover flounder. Arlene came up behind him and put her arms around his waist.

"Let's go to bed, Andy."

Afterward they lay on their backs talking. She lit a cigarette.

"Do you mind?" the windows in the room were wide open and there was a breeze.

Andy said he didn't mind at all. In fact, he'd have a puff. He kissed her.

"...You're my first since Tom," Arlene said.

"Really? That's a long time."

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"I just haven't felt the urge...it was so hard losing Tom."

Andy kissed her again and stroked her face.



They had lunch at the wooden table and benches behind the house.

"This is a relief from the Menemsha Inn," Andy said.

Arlene asked him why he was staying there. He said he wouldn't be on the Island long enough to rent a house. She asked how long? He said four days.

"Well, you can stay here. I have the house for a week and I've been here two days...I'd like you to stay, Andy."

"I'll fall in love with you."

"And I with you.... It'll be short and sweet, you know," Arlene said.

"Better than not at all."

After lunch they took a nap in the hammock, which was a double. Arlene felt the fatigue again. That was her only symptom. That and appetite loss, she told Andy. But she was eating well here on the Island, she said.

Later they swam at Menemsha. They dried off and sat on the breakwater wrapped in their towels.

"Do you think that's what caused it?" Andy said.

"I don't know, but it certainly contributed," Arlene said. "The only reason I'm smoking now is that I have nothing to lose at this point."

"Understood."

On the way back they stopped at Everett's.

"What should we have?" Arlene said.

"Sword fish, I'm buying."

Everett said the sword fish had just come in this afternoon.

At home they took a shower and made love again.

They got dressed and sat on deck chairs by the pond with their Cinzano.

"I like your routine," Andy said. "Kenmore beach in the morning and Menemsha in the afternoon."

"And the pond before breakfast.... We should go to Lambert's Cove tomorrow afternoon," Arlene said.

"I don't think I've ever been there."

"Didn't we take you and Carol there? You'll see if you recognize it.... Isn't the Vineyard the most beautiful place you've ever been to? More so than the Côte d'azur or Positano...?" Arlene said.

"Except maybe Paris...." Andy said.

"Well, *Paris*...."



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The next morning Andy swam with her in the pond.

"Delicious," he said as they dried themselves off.

"A lovely way to wake yourself up," Arlene said.

"...You know, all this swimming in the nude makes me want you constantly."

"Likewise...was sex this good when we were young?" Arlene said.

"No, because we were too young—I didn't know how to pace myself and you didn't always come."

"That's right, I remember now...."

After breakfast they drove to the Menemsha Inn for Andy to check out and down to the vegetable market in North Tisbury. They bought corn, tomatoes, salad greens, peas, herbs, peaches, and Honey Dew melon. Then they went to Kenmore beach and swam and walked in the other direction past King's Beach and to the point facing up-island. That night they had a beach picnic at Gay Head Beach. They used the grill from the oven and grilled the sword fish and corn over the fire. They had put raw peas in the salad and brought it with them.

When they had finished eating they built up the fire and since no one else was on the beach they made love in the firelight. Afterward when they were lying in each other's arms Andy said:

"I love you, Arlie."

"And I love you," Arlene said.

"...I'll stay with you till the end."

"You'll come back to Pittsfield with me?"

"Of course." He lived in Boston.

One afternoon they went to Lambert's Cove. The beach was white sand with views of the Elizabeth Islands and Vineyard Sound. The water was about the temperature of Kenmore--cold but not frigid like Menemsha. Andy liked Lambert's Cove almost as much as Kenmore. They lounged on the beach for quite a while and took several long swims. The water was perfect for long swims: no surf and a comfortable temperature. Arlene had forgotten how nice it was there. It wasn't too populated either just a few families. Of course, it was September and the busiest months on the Island were July and August.

"How're you feeling, sweetheart?" Andy said.

"Not too bad. It's just the fatigue that hits me later—bothersome is all. Otherwise, apart from the appetite fussiness, I'm all right. The oncologist told me that the last six weeks would be hard...your company is a god-send, Andy."

He kissed her, took her hand, and they ran into the water. They went for a long swim and floated on their backs recliner style. Andy said,

"How did a French literature professor end up with two scientists? Have you ever wondered about that?"

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"I have and I think it's because you're sharp...I can't tolerate dull people."

"Were there dull people in your department?"

"Not so much dull as limited. Their ideas seemed to run along the same little track...except for my friend Rena. She's very bright."

They swam into shore and walked out of the water.

"...Did you stay in touch?" Andy said as they dried off.

"No alas. When I got my diagnosis I retired and put it all behind me."

"You could still call her."

"I might...to say goodbye."

"...I'm beginning to hate that word."

"Sorry. But it's the reality of my life now."

They went home, showered, and drank Cinzano in the hammock.

"We forgot to go to Everett's," Arlene said.

"Why don't we go out for dinner at the Home Port?"

"Umm—lobster...yes, let's."

The Home Port brought back memories of Arlene's childhood on the Vineyard. Going to the Home Port for dinner was such a treat in those days. It was tonight, too, with Andy. They had clam chowder and broiled lobster. Arlene could only eat half of hers so they took it with them in a doggy bag. At home they made love in front of the fire and later they went for a walk in the fields with a flashlight. The night was balmy. Arlene had tears running down her face, which Andy didn't see. Life was so sweet with Andy she couldn't bear the thought of leaving him. But when they got back to the house he said:

"You've been crying—"

"—It's so sweet with you I don't want to leave—"

"--Shhh. We still have time..." He put his arms around her and they stood there for a long time inside the front door.



The last six weeks were hard, as the oncologist had warned her. Arlene spent a lot of the time sleeping with Andy beside her reading in bed. Every day she got up for a while, they had a meal cooked and served by Arlene's housekeeper, who had been her nanny when she was a child. Nanny was jealous of Andy at first but his sweetness won her over. They both took care of Arlene. The morphine she was taking only dulled the pain. While Arlene was sleeping, Andy walked around Pittsfield, an interesting city with many historic houses. He also walked around the two lakes and took pleasure in the soft wind blowing in from the water.

When she was awake and picking at her meal, Arlene talked about the old days during which they were dating. Andy asked her why she left him. She said she was restless and couldn't be with one man for any period of time.



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"Until you met Tom," Andy said.

"Until I met Tom...because I knew he was the one," Arlene said. "But I did love you, Andy, in my childish way. And you loved me back, didn't you?"

"I was smitten.... And I still am." Andy had tears in his eyes. "It's going to be painful saying goodbye."

"I know...me too." Arlene put down her fork after eating next to nothing." She had kissed the ground when they were leaving the Groff house on the Vineyard. "Everything is for the last time now." She didn't cry as she said this. She was accepting.



Before she fell asleep for the last time, Arlene said:

"I don't mind dying now because I've had such a beautiful life."

Andy held her in his arms all night. In the morning she was dead.