

Water Music

The Prologue

The bridge at Sagamore was closed when we got there that summer of 1956. We had to cross the canal at Buzzards Bay over the only other roadway that tethered Cape Cod to the mainland. That was the summer the cello proved to be my steadiest companion, although I would have had it other-wise. My mother had to make do without a piano of her own, which did not auger well: music had always been her refuge.

And my father was dead set on building a cottage-built the right way, which was to say, better than Uncle George's – when we couldn't afford it. We thought we spotted the Andrea Doria moments before it sank. And I discovered the small ways in which people try to rescue each other.

Our property fronted a salt pond whose fertile waters hatched clams the size of a toenail, infant eels no bigger than a bobby pin, and young crabs so fragile you could crush them between two fingers. When they matured, they found their way to the creek, an outlet booby-trapped with rocks from an old abandoned mill, and followed it out to Pleasant Bay, that vast shallow body of water which, like a long adolescence, spanned the distance between our pond and the full-fledged, fathomless ocean.

Tides filled and emptied our small world and I tried to figure out who belonged to whom. I longed to belong to my mother. But I learned that summer that she was like a teacup, spilled out and upside down on the saucer, and she couldn't right herself. She thought she was mad at my father; she didn't recognize that fiercer winds than his tore at her. All summer the storm gathered and gathered, took its breath from every direction we thought we knew, and lashed us into spindrift.

And all the while, surrounding us, holding us up like the sea we floated on, was the music.