

Deleted Chapter

Appaloosa Summer

by: Tudor Robins

I haven't had a shower since coming here.

Instead, every day, as soon as I finish my run, I walk straight over to the clothesline, hang my running t-shirt, shorts, socks and sports bra on it, and dodge thistles as I head to the river in my bare feet and underwear; a ratty old towel slung around my shoulders.

There's a sweet moment as I slip into the silky river water that makes everything worthwhile – rolling out of bed so early, on muscles only half-awake – it's worth it, because without them I wouldn't get this fleeting feeling as the river takes the weight of my body, and the water flows through my hair, and I twist and float like an otter.

I use the biodegradable shampoo and conditioner stashed on the swimming raft, and pull a wide-toothed comb through my hair, and that's me; ready to start the day.

I wade back out with my hair dripping down my back, and the air on my wet skin is almost as refreshing as the original plunge into the river.

Every single day I do this, there's a second when I think, *one of these days you're going to get caught*. A few times, an early morning fisherman, with his boat in too close, has forced me to plunge in with my sports bra still on but, other than that, I don't honestly believe anybody is ever going to rumble down our long driveway so early in the morning.

Today, though, is my day off. And thanks to the heat wave breaking, and a cooler night, I did manage to sleep in a bit. So it's later than usual and, just as I'm thinking, *one of these days* ... I take the step that brings the driveway into view, and sitting there is Jared's pick-up truck. *Crap*.

I'm happy to see him, of course. It's haying weather, and he's been out in the fields from sun-up to sun-down. I've ridden Salem out, more than once, pretending it's to condition her – giving him a casual wave – feeling a rush of relief at the sight of the new tractor, with its protective roll bar, working perfectly: Jared safe and sound.

This summer's taught me a lot about how fear grows.

So, I've barely seen Jared, and I've missed him, but this encounter is going to be awkward.

I do what I can to strategically arrange the threadbare towel, hope my underwear isn't too see-through, and walk forward to meet him.

“Long time, no see.” I cringe as soon as the words are out of my mouth, because right now pretty much everything is available for him to see.

But, to give him credit, when he says, “Too long,” his eyes stay on mine.

I can't decide if I'm relieved, or disappointed.

Half an hour later – dressed more appropriately – I’m riding in Jared’s old pick-up, enjoying the feel of the sun-warmed vinyl on the back of my legs, not caring that Kenny Chesney’s singing “She Thinks my Tractor’s Sexy” on the radio, because the wind’s whipping so loudly past the open window I can’t hear it anyway.

We’re speeding down Reid’s Bay Road which, lined with towering wind turbines, has the appearance of an outdoor corridor; a narrow passage between the imposing steel structures. Huge flocks of birds lift and circle at our approach, only to settle back down behind us; swallowed up by the billowing dust cloud our passage kicks up.

“Come on,” Jared urged, once we got inside the cottage. He gestured at my dad’s sadly abused windsock, all but ripped to shreds by the island weather. “Look at the wind; we’re going to Sable Bay.”

“But ...”

“But what? It’s your day off right? So I’m taking a day off too, and we’re going to play!”

I can’t remember the last time someone asked me to play. How could I say no after that?

So here we are. The parking lot’s deceptively quiet when we pull in, sheltered as it is by the trees all around it, and by being a good kilometre from the shore. The hiking path to the beach is calm too; regrettably, as there’s nothing to blow away the deer flies, and horse flies, and just plain old mosquitoes that thrive in the dappled shade.

Swatting and swearing we run, hop, twist and shake our way toward the beach. We drape our towels over our heads; gather them in tight around our necks. Slap at our own skin, and each other’s, whenever we see a distinctive green-headed horsefly settle on an unguarded piece of personal real estate.

“Thanks,” pants Jared as I knock one from his neck.

And “Thanks,” I say, as his hand sweeps down the back of my leg.

I’m sweaty, buggy, and generally irritable when I hear it. That sound. It always makes me wonder at first; is it real or my imagination? And then I think it’s the wind. It’s almost impossible to believe that here, in Ontario, deeply embedded in the continental landmass, it could be water making that pounding, rushing, restless noise.

The sound of surf.

Powerful, hypnotic and very, very welcome. No bugs will follow us there.

“We’re here!” We both start sprinting. There’s a magical line where the packed dirt we’ve been running over becomes fine sand, and we take one step backward for every two forward as we struggle up the hill, and over the top, and burst down the other side onto the beach.

The huge, white, crescent-shaped sandy sweep of beach with nobody else on it, with the curve of the bay rimming fathoms, and fathoms, of water.

Sable Bay.

And the waves. I always forget how big the waves can be here. They pound and crash, they curl and break, and their foam washes toward my feet; tickling my toes.

“Oh!” I yell, and Jared says “I know!” and he’s got his t-shirt off, and is running toward the water telling me, “Come on! Hurry up!” and then the first wave swamps him off his feet.

I scramble after him, stripping down to my bathing suit, dropping my clothes where they fall, because we’re the only ones here so, really, who cares?

The sucking undertow of the water pulls the sand right out from under my feet, and sends me stumbling to my knees, bracing with my hands, while the sand slips out from under them too.

And then Jared’s beside me, giving me his hand, hauling me up, pulling me deeper into the surf.

I lose myself. I'm completely gone. Somewhere else. Some place where all that matters is the next wave, and then the one after that.

The water assaults my senses, hammers my body, reminds me it's stronger than me. I laugh, and I yell, and sometimes I'm scared. We play in the waves in every way possible; diving through them before they break, floating up on the big rollers, trying to hold our ground against the pounding breakers.

We drift down the beach, and every now and then have to trudge back to where we started.

I've never had a massage, but this must be better. The waves smacking against me pull all the tension from my muscles, loosen places I didn't know were tight. That, combined with the constant laughing, has me feeling as wobbly as a jellyfish before long.

I know we can't stay all day; know we need to go back, but I so don't want to. I promise "just one more wave" and then "one more wave" again. I'm sure an hour slips by on "one more wave" time.

Finally Jared surfaces right beside me from an underwave dive. "You're blue. Time to head back."

When I open my mouth to protest "one more wave", my teeth chatter and I give up, nod and follow him from the water.

As we stand atop the sand dune, on the path that will take us back to the truck, I fling my arm wide and yell, "I love you lake!" Jared laughs and offers a more reserved, "Bye, lake!"

"That was, The. Best. Day. Ever."

"Ever?" Jared asks.

"Ever. Ever. *Ever.*"

There's a shaky, almost queasy, feeling in the pit of my stomach, but it's not something I

want to go away. Everything, in this minute, is more intense. The rough lake more powerful, the fine, white sand more beautiful.”

Does Jared feel it too? The way he’s looking at me; the way he’s quiet alongside me, makes me think *yes*.

He reaches out, touches my arm, and brushes a skiff of sand from my skin. “What?”

I shake my head. “Nothing. I just wish we didn’t have to go.”

“Me too,” he says. And I have to be happy with that before we take off again, running the gauntlet of the bugs and their bites.

Thank you for reading!

I hope you enjoyed this chapter, originally contained in my soon-to-be-released book [Appaloosa Summer](#).

To find out when *Appaloosa Summer* is available for purchase, please email tudor@tudorrobins.ca with “Newsletter Subscribe” in the subject line of your message.

You can also purchase my first book, *Objects in Mirror*, in [print](#) or as a [Kobo e-book](#).