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Tales Out Of School © 2008

by

Shirley Ann Howard

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Shirley@ShirleyAnnHoward.com

Chapter 1

Heat rose from concrete and asphalt pavements, and humidity much too steamy for September, hung thick and heavy in the air. Sandra Scott stood in a cavernous classroom behind a colossal oak desk—the teacher’s desk—amid stark fluorescent lighting, a wall of open windows, and the smell of dusty grammar books on the shelves below. Stacks of a rebound literature anthology, green to match the boards, towered on the sills.

It was the first day of school at Somerville High, five miles north of Boston. Sandy checked her note cards, again. She fluffed her freshly frosted hair, newly cut in layers to just below her chin. She fanned herself with limp class lists.

Surveying the scene in front of her, which included seating for thirty students, Sandy caught a glimpse of her chest heaving up and down, keeping time with a steady whoosh of long, deep breaths. Launching a new career, her second in as many years, made her heart pound.

Relentlessly, it beat in her ears, like *A Tell-Tale Heart*.

Brrrinnngggggg..... She flinched. The harsh, high-pitched clang—the signal to stand outside the classroom door—lasted a long time. Waves of teenagers rounded the corner, wearing trendy new clothes—baggy shorts and flashy sneakers for the boys, clingy tank tops and flip-flops for the girls. They carried new notebooks and spotless backpacks in lime green, hot pink, electric blue and camo. Some walked with a boisterous bounce, their

skin glowing with remnants of summer sun. Others hung close to the wall, their faces a mixed contortion of anguish and laughter.

One entered Room 232, then another, and another, taking seats tentatively, as if fearing something on the chair might sting them. Sandy waited for them to settle, then walked up close.

“Good morning,” she began, while some were still talking. “I’m Ms. Scott. This is homeroom and also Freshman English. Is everyone in the right place?” Nobody said anything.

Perspiration moistened her neck. “We have a few registration tasks to accomplish,” she said.

ATTENDANCE was listed at the top of her note card. Adam Adams—here, Kenneth Glenn—present, all the way through to Andrea Ventura.

“AhnDrayAh,” the girl corrected. Ms. Scott repeated it, calling it a very beautiful name.

“We have these forms to fill out today,” she said placing them on the front desks. “Emergency and health insurance information, personal data sheet.” A flurry of papers flapped over shoulders and down the rows.

Then, someone called out from the right. “I don’t know my father’s work phone number.”

“Can we bring these home?” A boy’s voice bellowed from the back.

“What if you don’t have insurance?” questioned a girl with red hair.

“I live with my grandmother. Should I put that where it says Mother’s name?”

Sandy's head spun at the sudden commotion. Although she'd skimmed the forms, she had not realized the kids would need help. Or that every new task would entail numerous questions, complete quiet, near chaos, hundreds of complaints, or some other entirely unanticipated reaction. She steered them through the paperwork, then tried to get acquainted.

"You're in high school now. How does it feel?" No response.

"How many of you think English is your best subject?" More silence. GET ACQUAINTED was not going well.

Twenty minutes left?

Her stomach did a slow motion cartwheel.

"Let's write!" she said, handing a piece of paper individually to each student, half of her thinking it the most inefficient method imaginable, but the other half intending it as a sign of her desire to connect with them. The paper shook a bit in her hands, but she was not sorry she had done it.

"Does everyone have something to write with?" She let the error of ending a sentence with a preposition slide, quite certain nobody noticed.

"The first step is pre-writing. That means you brainstorm a few ideas to write about. Tell me about yourself or what you did for the summer." Many looked around with a blank stare, turning away when their eyes met hers. Sandy curled her mouth into a smile, urging everyone to write at least five lines. "I'll write five sentences about myself, too."

Several started to write. Others gazed about. Some made faces like they were having broken bones reset.

The bell clock ticked. A desk scraped the floor. A cough. A boy down back rumped his paper. Most seemed ready to move on. “Next you need to evaluate your ideas,” she said. “You can arrange them in any logical fashion such as order of excitement. Or you may concentrate your details about one event. The cool thing about writing is you get to control it.” They looked around, searching for escape, their silent grouching audible.

Sandy had heard stories about first day disasters, but had no desire to have that tale in her repertoire of conversation topics. She knew this lesson worked. She had used it several times during her internship, and it had been well documented as a successful means of teaching writing. She encouraged them to write, assuring them they’d have time to edit tomorrow.

She stood right near them, stoically writing about her summer work, and albeit with hesitation, they continued the assignment. Their pens scratched out the words. A few finished in five minutes; others had written only their names. Then, the unexpected clang. It made her jump; a few kids laughed. She barely grabbed their papers as they crowded each other out the door.

This same scene with minor variations played out four more times, when finally... mercifully... the clock reached two. Books clattered from desktops, bodies raged for the door. She collapsed into her chair, her top lip quivering, beads of sweat dripping down between her breasts. She closed her eyes—foggy with moisture—and

saw herself as a little girl playing school with an imaginary class: tapping her pen against the blackboard, discussing poetry, reciting the teacher's lines perfectly.

But this was reality, not play; the script was not as clear. Sandy deemed her Master's Degree from Boston University as worthy preparation, but now... she'd have to put all the pieces together. She tacked an enlarged bell schedule and period rotation to the wall, then hung pictures of Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, Shakespeare, and Jane Austen. Chalk, lined paper, and a dictionary stood ready. *I can do this*, she told herself.

Sandy's first new car, a deep blue Mustang, whisked her down McGrath Highway and Storrow Drive to Commonwealth Avenue, where BU students swarmed the wide sidewalks in shadows of high rise classrooms, dormitories and research facilities. Cell phones and wires to their ears, they were going here, going there, just as they always did... but now, a world apart.

Two connected trolley cars, sparking electricity from overhead wires, rattled down the rails through the heart of the busy urban campus. Sandy waited for the red light and crowd of pedestrians, then crossed over the tracks onto quiet Babcock Street and her converted Victorian, second-floor apartment. Kicking off her shoes and dumping her book bag on the floor, she realized she hadn't even eaten her yogurt during her twenty-minute lunch period. So she poured an icy glass of Chardonnay and started a salad.

The kitchen was small, but retained original crown moldings featuring carved rosettes and Grecian urns. She washed the lettuce and tomatoes. "Always make sure you

take the seeds out,” she heard her mother’s voice from a back alcove of her mind. “You wouldn’t want diverticulitis.” Sandy sliced the cucumber in vertical fourths, making it easy to remove the seeds. A few pitted black olives—twenty-five calories—and twelve cooked shrimp with the tails off, and feta cheese when she had it. Voila! Dinner.

She ate in front of the television news, but the top stories and tomorrow’s weather were vague, meaningless images. She was visualizing teaching thirty different students, five times a day, for the next ten months. “Jesus,” she said out loud, knowing she’d never be able to do it alone. It would require Divine intervention. And, a thorough review of her Methods text.

She read her yellow highlights about effective lesson planning and student-centered learning. She drew stars next to the sections on building rapport. But again her concentration wavered. *Was I the controlling factor in the classroom, or had the students’ responses dominated? I want the kids to feel empowered, so if I allow them a voice, ultimately that makes me in control. Yeab, right,* she thought, desperately wanting to believe it.

That night Sandy slept restlessly, dreaming about her career change from local news reporter to graduate student to teacher. She awoke with a start at four a.m., seeing a hundred nameless kids on every page of the newspaper. She knew she needed a seating chart, but worried if she waited until class to make it out, the kids would have nothing to do and might talk or cause trouble.

What if they don't remember where they sat yesterday, she thought. What difference does it make? I don't remember where they sat yesterday.

She got up and wrote out a hundred forty-eight names on tabs, deciding it would expedite the process. She took a yogurt from the refrigerator and put it with a spoon in a brown paper bag, hoping to remember and also feel up to eating it.

Plus I can always use the bag in case I start to hyperventilate.

~

Room 232. Neat yellow handwriting on the board, the smell of chalk, and the sound of incessant deep breathing. It reminded Sandy of the life-support ventilator at the hospital. The bell rang, followed by the loud clomping of sixteen hundred teenagers.

“Hey, Ms. Scott, how are ya?” one sang out on his way in. He had a three inch smile, dark glossy hair, and smooth shiny skin the color of bronze. He was big for a ninth grader, at least six feet, easily six inches taller than she, definitely an athlete.

Bodies squeezed through the aisles. Books thudded on desks. Loud voices scoffed at one another about dyed hair, a big butt, and someone being a slut. “Good morning, people,” Sandy started. “Is everyone satisfied with his seat?” No response.

She called their names, deftly placing the sticky tabs onto her seating plan. The cheerful young man with the friendly smile was Enriqu  Delgado—he asked to be called Rico.

Sandy returned yesterday’s rough drafts, individually, making sure she connected a face with a name, her hand

far from steady. “Today we’re going to review these drafts, adding detail to make sure ideas are clear, and of course, correcting errors.” She sounded confident. “Exchange papers with someone near you and ask for suggestions.” They gazed across the aisle, but did not say or do anything. “I’ll read my paragraph aloud; it will give you an idea of what I expect.”

Ms. Scott’s paragraph: This past summer I was in charge of publicity for a theatrical program for teenagers here at the high school. We printed a weekly newsletter about the play’s activities, wrote press releases for *The Somerville Journal*, and tacked up posters all around the city. I taught the kids how to interview; and they wrote interesting articles about the student actors and actresses, the play, the drama and the music directors, and the choreographer. Every day we appreciated hearing the singing, the rhythmic tap-tap of the dancing, and the merry voices of a hundred people enjoying themselves. Our efforts paid off with three sell-out shows of *Oliver!*

The kids reacted with wide open eyes, as if they’d just heard Juliet’s balcony soliloquy. “We can’t write like that,” a daring voice exclaimed. He’d spoken out before.

“Then it’s good you’re in this class... so you can learn,” Sandy said. Her tone was soft, caring, genuine. She hoped. She explained how to create sentence variety.

They put their pens in motion. They concentrated. They made corrections and copied their paragraphs onto clean, white paper. Collecting them, she held them close to her breast, like treasure... as the bell rang.

At lunchtime she filtered through two days of school email, directives mostly. “Be on time. Display your parking decal or you will be towed. Do not drink coffee in class. Stand in the hall during passing. Do not allow kids to leave the room unless there’s an emergency. Issue detention and call parents before sending any student to the office.” One message, from the nurse, made her cringe. It listed students requiring preferential seating due to vision and hearing deficits.

“Damn,” she cursed under her breath, “just when I made my seating plan.” But she’d have to think about that later, as thirty more kids licking the remains of ice cream sandwiches, spilled into the room.

At four o’clock Sandy threw away two warm vanilla yogurts, and upon entering her own serene and private world at home, she realized she was starving. A pound of Frozen at Sea swordfish thawed in the refrigerator. It costs less than the fresh, and ironically tastes fresher, because it was frozen immediately after being caught.

Who knows how long it takes for the fresh fish to find itself sitting on ice in the grocer’s case. Could be days...

Sandy enjoys cooking; it always relaxes her. She likes keeping her hands occupied while thinking. She loves the pleasure of the creativity and the comfort of the food. She put the swordfish on a preheated grille, brushed on melted butter, and heard TV’s *Grilling Gourmet* in a back alcove of her mind. “Angle it forty-five degrees from your original spot to make attractive grille lines on your finished product.” She really likes seeing those perfectly browned diamonds, all interconnecting.

And an icy glass of Chardonnay.

Just as she finished the dishes, Lenny called. It seemed their summer fun and graduate school classes had been in a different dimension. “How did you do?” he asked. His soft, rational voice was a poultice.

“Too soon to tell.” The short phrase prevented her voice from cracking.

“Sorry I haven’t called,” he said. “This visiting professor from New Zealand is taking most of our time.” He offered to take her to dinner tomorrow, asking if she wanted seafood or Chinese.

“Chinese, I just barbecued swordfish.”

“Yum... I can hardly wait until you cook for me again.” There was something sensual in the way he said it.

“I can hardly wait to do it.” She did not hide her longing for his company. She said his voice soothed her.

“I think I remember soothing you before your comprehensive exam.”

“This is worse,” she complained. “I changed careers for this, and now I feel like I’m choking, gagging, can’t breathe.”

“You’ve never choked at anything, but I’ll give you my own special CPR anyway,” he offered.

“I wish you would.”

“Friday at five,” lingered in her mind as they said goodnight.

His voice reminded her of a different life—a life on campus, long walks in the Boston Common and by the Charles River, rides out to the beach, and quiet talks in the car and on the couch.

That life was gone; she had a new life now—a life requiring... everything she had.

She went to bed with her essays.

From Adam: During the summer I went ATVing with my freind and his father to the sand pit's in Bourne. It was very fun until my frend wiped out and broke the axel. It turned out he broke his ankle to and now he can't play Fall soccer.

From Ken Glenn: It was good to have no school in the summer. Me and my friends had party's just about every night. We played music, danced, and ate nachos. The best house was Nikki's, her parents are wicked cool and don't mind the music loud.

From Andrea: I have to babysit my two little brothers every day while my mother works. They are such brats. I never get to do anything fun or go anywhere. Also I have to get supper started. I mind them every afternoon, so I can't stay after school.

From Rico: We had company from the Dominican Republic for a month. My grandmother and grandfather, my aunt, uncle and three cousins. Us kids slept on air mattresses on the floor. Every night the grown-ups talked in Spanish until late in the night, the men drank beer and smoked cigars.

These paragraphs spoke to her. She wanted to help the kids—with reading, writing, whatever—and it was

obvious they were all unique human beings, with their very own private worlds, serene or otherwise. Even though she had given a seminar presentation in “Assessment of Student Learning,” she agonized over how to correct them. And... there were nearly a hundred and fifty.

She chose to grade them holistically, with a green pen, looking at each paragraph as a whole and putting a letter grade on it from A to F, without all kinds of indications of their mistakes. She had read negative articles about teachers marking up student papers with numerous corrections of their errors, the kids getting them back “bleeding with red ink.” She wrote a few individual comments at the end of everyone’s work. The lowest grade was a C, but she vowed that a major goal would be to teach them to care about writing more than they did at present.

~

Lenny reminded her it was Friday. TGIF... she smiled and winced, winding around the narrow back roads of Cambridge—her sleek new steed taking the curves with the ease of a show horse—and resigning herself to work for the car payments, if nothing else. The six-speaker stereo delivered rich, full sound—so did Green Day. *I bet the kids like them*, she thought. But... she had hoped her work would bring personal satisfaction, too.

Walking in the front of the building, three floors of aged terra cotta brick, and holding her head and chest high, she practiced Rico’s greeting technique. Several

teachers simply nodded, a couple grunted, a few said hello.

When Sandy arrived at her room, Andrea was standing there clutching her books, leaning up against the wall with one shoulder. She sported fashionably long, teenage hair of reddish-brown, a well developed body for a fourteen-year-old, and attractive features. An abundance of unnecessary makeup covered her clear complexion and large brown eyes.

“Good morning, Andrea.” Sandy remembered to pronounce it correctly. “Nice to see you so early.”

“My mother drops me off on her way to work, so I have extra time in the morning.”

“I’m glad you chose to hang out by 232.” Andrea followed her in. “Is there something you want to ask me?”

“No. I don’t get to talk to many interesting people. I didn’t think you’d mind.”

“You’re welcome to come by anytime.”

“My mother is always in too much of a hurry to talk.”

“Yeah... our lives are often like that.” Sandy put her sweater around the back of her chair and opened her plan book.

“Can I do anything around the room to help you get ready?”

“Would you mind putting a literature book on everyone’s desk?” Andrea looked around, wrinkling her forehead. “The green ones,” Ms. Scott said, much to the girl’s relief.

Brrrrnnnnngggggg..... the horde stomped in... laughing, talking, calling names, elbowing each other; incredibly perceptive about one another's appearance. They commented on every detail they noticed—the strawberry-colored birthmark on someone's arm; a boy's braces with blue elastics; and the kid with big ears, big nose, or big stomach. Sandy felt certain the recipients of these comments were being scarred for life. She was not sure, however, how they perceived her. She tucked at her top, making sure it was neat.

There was an empty front desk, and Adam said the girl who sat there had her math class changed, so she wouldn't be here anymore. *Thank you, God*, Sandy whispered, deciding to talk to her visually impaired student after class. She got the students on task fast by telling them about their books. It had short stories, poetry, narrative essays, a play, and a condensed version of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

"It'll take us a year to read all this stuff," Ken called out.

"Fortunately, that's the amount of time we have," Sandy said. She told them a little about each genre.

"Genre?" a blue Old Navy shirt mocked. Some kids laughed louder than others. Ignoring the twitch traversing her jaw, Sandy explained the term, determined they'd tolerate each other.

She actually felt capable of breathing normally and found her way to the teachers' room for lunch. There were separate groups—men and women—engaged in conversation: sports (the Red Sox and Somerville's football team), travel (what I did on my summer

vacation), and complaints (I have Bobby Bolanski in class for the second year in a row). A few guys made cracks about how long it would take Sandy to become cynical.

She drank Poland Spring water and consumed a container of peach yogurt, while talking mostly to MaryAnn Porter, an English teacher and also the school newspaper advisor. Having completed a year of teaching, MaryAnn was wise and experienced.

Sandy offered to help with the newspaper activities. MaryAnn said she'd like that, inquiring why Sandy left *The Herald*. "The news," Sandy said, "consisted of car wrecks, baby abuse, dishonest politicians, level three sex offenders... Besides, I always wanted to teach." Just as Sandy was assuring her colleagues that everything was going fine, the bell rang with its usual shrill. They all offered to be resources of advice and assistance.

They seemed OK for the most part, but Sandy wanted to keep company with teachers who shared her philosophy and attitude. These folks shared her lunch period.

Afternoon classes hum at a much higher pitch than morning. The kids are always wound up, loud, less interested in the subtleties of literature. With the few minutes remaining prior to the final bell, Sandy casually asked what plans they had for the weekend. One was going shopping for her sister's wedding. Others had sports practice. Most planned to sleep in.

They asked about her plans, and not knowing what else to say, she told them she was going for Chinese food with her boyfriend. They were very interested in

knowing about him, so she disclosed a little more. “He’s a doctoral candidate in biochemistry at BU.” And as they filed out in a noisy press, they issued parting instructions to have a good time, and to behave herself.

At home, Sandy washed away all the cares of her week with a relaxing AromaSpa shower, thoroughly enjoying the excitement of preparing for Len’s arrival. She dabbed the backs of her ears with Arpège, and the classic scent of bergamot and patchouli reminded her yet again of sitting at her grandmother’s vanity as a young girl.

Grandma Terrence had often patted a little drop on Sandy’s wrist and told her a woman should have a fragrance that identified her. And although the pure perfume is not as readily available as it once was, Sandy snagged a few sealed bottles on eBay. She thought she could see her grandmother’s image in her mirror, standing behind her, lovingly stroking Sandy’s honey blond hair with the engraved sterling hairbrush she kept on her dressing table.

Just before six, her two-tone chime announced the arrival of the doctoral candidate, smiling apologetically, as he followed her upstairs, bending his tall frame to avoid the low ceiling of the winding wooden stairway. He had brought a bottle of Korbel Brut Rosé, which was pink and pretty, bubbling up in the crystal wine glasses she bought for half price at Crate & Barrel. They toasted her new career. He gave her a little kiss—then a longer one—quite skilled at making her feel good. She ruffled his shock of sandy-colored hair falling straight down on

his forehead; then nestled into his chest, thrilled by the rumbles and ka-thumps they shared there.

Lenny drove Sandy's Mustang to Kim's Garden, proclaiming it gave a solid ride. She said she was looking for a thrill ride—for her soul. He said he understood.

Kim greeted them with a very long hell-low... stretching out the word, and by name, as they come here at least a couple times a month. Sandy ordered a MaiTai and sat back, next to a gold dragon gracing a deep red wall. Lenny drank tap water. He's not much of a drinker. He joins Sandy occasionally, but usually only takes a few sips.

He talked about the professor from New Zealand and their common research on ocean species that regenerate limbs. To be thousands of miles away on the coast of New Zealand sounded like a lifestyle Sandy could embrace, but she came to a rapid conclusion that it was most likely not an option for her. She told Lenny about her students and her uncertainties. "I'll make them disappear," he said waving his arm like a magician, "as soon as we get back."

Half an hour later, they were settling into their usual spots on her micro suede couch in rich taupe. Dim light from antique street lamps filtered through lacy curtains on her triple bay window, softly illuminating the silhouettes of their trim, young bodies.

Lenny rubbed her shoulders and kissed her shaggy hair... ears... neck... and her breathless mouth. She lay her face in his warm, firm chest, savoring his simple musk, becoming totally lost in it.

~

In the morning they had coffee and blueberry scones Lenny had picked up at the organic food store. He's the only one who makes coffee the way Sandy likes it, not too strong and with extra cream. He takes his coffee with extra cream also, even though he often complains that it's high in fat and has no calcium.

They sat at the tiny kitchen table, tête-à-tête.

"I had a most excellent time last night," she sighed as he held a toasted scone to her lips.

"So did I," he sighed likewise, adding that the scones were free of hydrogenated oils and bleached or bromated flour.

"They taste pretty good, too," she said, taking a tiny bite and brushing her fingertips over the back of his hand. "If I were a man and you were a woman, I'd send you flowers today."

"So would I," he said. "How about beef tips instead?" Their eyes—identically blue and bright—met, and they shared a coffee kiss. He continued whispering two inches from her face. "Natural substances keep microbiotic activity nice and healthy."

After his little lesson on organic farming, Lenny announced he needed to go into the lab for a while and invited Sandy to go along. She declined, saying she needed to clean and do laundry. He said he was going to the gym afterwards and invited her there too, but again she declined, saying she was too tired.

Sandy only uses energy to accomplish a goal, and groaning at machines has never been a goal for her.

"Besides," she said, "I don't like the way the gym smells."

So they agreed on sirloin steak tips for dinner and went their separate ways, he to his gurgling apparatus, and she to the fridge for the beef. Lenny eats red meat in moderation, especially when it soaks all day in Sandy's special marinade of red wine, soy sauce, ginger, and garlic. She mixed it altogether in a zip lock plastic bag and let chemistry do the rest.

She put Bruce Springsteen on the stereo and rocked with the Boss, her vacuum cleaner, multi-surface spray, and a cloth. She considered it exercise. Just after two KaBloom delivered an asymmetrical arrangement of a dozen red roses with baby's breath, a big pink bow, and three different kinds of green ferns. The dryer had thirty-two minutes left, so sitting down with a Diet Coke and conjuring her energy reserves, Sandy called her mother.

"Where have you been?" Helen Scott always yelps into the phone louder than required.

"Busy," Sandy replied. "School's been exhausting."

"You can do it. You've prepared all your life for it."

"It's been hard... and requires a lot of thinking both ahead of time and on the spot."

"Of course, work is hard. That's why they pay you to do it. That's exactly what I told you about the newspaper." Her mother was rarely generous with sympathy.

Sandy changed the subject. "How's Dad?"

"Dr. Cohen increased his respiratory treatments and added a new medication," her mother said. "He's been looking for you. When are you coming over?"

"Do you need anything?" Sandy asked.

“Not today, but maybe next week.” Helen ran on about going to the store and what she wanted to buy. Sandy listened patiently, offering to go with her on Tuesday.

“My love to Dad,” Sandy said hanging up with considerable sadness. Arthur Scott had been a smoker. And like so many others who succumbed to the ads and the nicotine, he was now paying the price.

Sandy set two glasses of hearty burgundy on the counter, then steamed frozen broccoli florets topped off with shredded cheese. She also made pasta, true comfort food. The aroma of sautéed garlic in olive oil and butter greeted Lenny as he arrived freshly showered, shaved, and invigorated. They sipped wine and kissed... they stirred basil and diced tomatoes into cooked pasta... they grilled steak tips to a perfect medium rare.

The dinner was good, the company even better. Len wrapped his long arms completely around Sandy’s back, said “Thanks for another great meal,” and offered his sweet lips again. She always accepts with enthusiasm. She thanked him for the flowers—using the circular stroke he likes—and they cleaned up the kitchen.

As he put the last glass on a high shelf, she kissed the back of his broad shoulders and rubbed against him. He turned around, held her close, breathed into her neck. She lay her head back and opened her mouth to him while running her fingers through his neat, blond hair. She thought he smelled more fabulous than her cooking, and they spent a memorable Saturday night together. Her clean cotton sheets kindled her senses, as did Lenny’s gentle caresses and tender attention. She

responded with silky smooth contact of her femininity against his hard, muscular chest... and thighs...

The weather was beautiful on Sunday, so they drove up the old Route 128 to Singing Beach in Manchester-by-the-Sea. There was no such thing as school. The sun, sand, and sea took them to another place in another time. They lay side by side on a blanket. Lenny insisted Sandy rub #24 sunscreen all over him. She insisted he rub her feet, imprisoned in pumps all week. She told him about the less than stellar paragraphs she received; he told her the chemical properties of the sunscreen.

“The benzo compounds absorb UV radiation when electrons in the molecules become excited and create heat.” He has a way of expressing himself that activates their entire cardiovascular systems. “Like how I feel seeing you in that bikini. And how you made me feel last night.”

They swam in the brisk, revitalizing ocean—diving under each other’s legs. He carried her into deep water farther than she usually goes. Huge waves crashed against the boulders all afternoon until the tide peaked and took the beach. They tasted salt water on their lips; their skin tingled with the perfect warmth of fall sun. Salt air always makes them hungry, so on the way home they stopped at Woodman’s for fried clams and Sam Adams.

They stood at the top of Sandy’s stairs, saying goodnight, but alas, they both had work to do. Sandy relaxed with a leisurely bath, trying to shift her thoughts from Lenny to school.

Will we get married and have children? Will that end my teaching?

She surrounded her warm body in the luxurious terry robe Lenny gave her last Christmas, wishing he were wrapped up in this fuzzy cocoon with her. Finally, she sat at her kitchen table in front of her school books and laptop, ready to tackle the task at hand.

She planned her lessons for the week, short stories, the first by Roald Dahl. She dreamed up motivational introductions to create an impetus for the reading, and prepared worksheets with discussion questions and relevant vocabulary. Her goal was for the students to understand the author's ideas, comprehend the major literary devices, and most of all, appreciate the literature. It took quite a long time, because she put considerable thought and energy into it, hoping the kids would too. She packed up all her gear at midnight.

Drifting into sweet slumber, she mused, *I'm quite certain I'm in love with Leonard Bachenweiler... And definitely sleep much better with him in my bed.*