

THE TRIP TO TRURO

As we leave New Jersey, it strikes me once again that Jersey's license-plate slogan should be changed from *Garden State* to the more accurate *Too Cool to Use Turn Signal*. Three masks hang from the rearview mirror of my Honda Accord (white, blue, and black-with-red-peppers.) I started going to Cape Cod for summer vacations as a kid, and Lynn and I (and our dog Nellie) have continued the tradition. We love the outer reaches of the Cape for the light, which Edward Hopper captured so memorably in his paintings, the air, the color of the bay at dusk, the beach roses, the smell of pine, the anthills in the sand, the seafood. Lynn would add the whales, who have risen up next to every whale-watch boat we've ever taken, their tender black flesh so close you can smell them. We've seen them leap in the air out of what seems pure playfulness. But no whale-watches this time.

Before this year our most serious concern in visiting Truro was whether the bobwhites, whom we've grown attached to over twenty years, have disappeared. As soon as we arrive, I slow down the car by the reedy dunes; Lynn lowers her window and whistles out: *Bob! Bobwhite!* We actually used to hear their answering calls — and one miraculous summer we saw a mother quail with a curl on top of her head leading seven babies across our backyard. Now, through avian diseases and overdevelopment of the Cape, they rarely appear, but Lynn still whistles hopefully through the open window.

More ominously, an abundance of seals moving into the warmer waters has caused the sharks to cruise inland, and the Cape beaches post shark-warning signs in every parking lot. Lynn is courageous enough to swim in the bay. I stand at the shoreline while she does, scanning the whitecaps for a flash of gray fin. Lynn tells me that if she gets half eaten, I should place her torso in a baby stroller. That's how much she loves to swim here.

Both the bobwhites and the white sharks now seem laughably irrelevant in the face of other challenges the world is enduring. We've brought disinfectant wipes and at least three digital thermometers: all of which give different readings. I bought an oximeter to clip on our fingers to see if our lungs are working. It remains sealed in its tiny box because Lynn and I are both too scared to use it.

Nellie, however, is thoroughly enjoying this period of sheltering together. "These have been the best four months of my life," she told me the other day. At six in the morning, I carry Nellie down the cliff-side staircase to the bay. Nellie's eyes open wide, and when she hits the sand, she tears along the shoreline with abandon. Sometimes she barks with joy. And if it's hot, she'll run into the water—and return to me caked in salt and sand, smiling.

Much of the Cape remains shuttered this summer. Terra Luna, a restaurant within walking distance from our cottage, has decided (according to their posted notice) to "sit this one out..." We'll miss their pasta with vegetables and truffle oil ("Romeo's Angel"). And our favorite restaurant in Truro, Blackfish, has been reduced to a take-out truck in

the parking lot of Truro Vineyards. The local fish market never reopened. The farm stand, happily, has.

So we sit by the wind-chopped bay this morning. Lynn is reading old *New Yorkers* and texting her daughter in Berlin. I'm reading *Charles Dickens and the Great Theatre of the World*. Nellie is tied to my beach chair, scanning the water for sharks.

The world may be ill and struggling for breath, but Lynn and I are still keeping our ears open for the song of one enduring bobwhite.