

## The Dune's Edge

ESSAY MARGOT STAGE | PAINTINGS ANNE PERETZ

I jump into the jeep, along with all my provisions for a week by myself in one of the Provincetown Dune Shacks. Flannel sheets and pillowcases, sleeping bag and afghan, towels and toiletries, T-shirts and down jacket, three bags of food and gallons of drinking water. My camera and extra film. Plenty of notebooks, pen, and pencils. The Scrabble game. Several books. Binoculars. My audio-recording equipment. Candles, matches, flashlight. A hatchet for chopping kindling. A friend's cell phone in case of emergency. A sprig of forsythia from my mother's garden.

I didn't bring a watch, a clock, or a radio.

Day One. March 28, 1998. Tom Boland is at the wheel, driving me and my stuff from the Provincetown Airport to the C-Scape Dune Shack. He's the administrator of a program that offers artists, writers, and community folks the opportunity to live in the dunes. He unlocks a steel cable stretching across a sandy one-track road and we begin to put the whole world behind us.

As we bump and swerve along the track, I'm afraid we'll get stuck in the soft sand, but eventually I spot our destination — a small shingled house, weathered a muted gray, hunched down in a hollow of golden dune hills. We unload, and he shows me the outhouse, instructions for the composting toilet, and how to turn on the propane, which runs a small refrigerator and a two-burner cook stove. Then he leaves.

C-Scape dune shack is my home for the next seven days. As it has been home to others before me, others will follow. I first made the space mine by unpacking my food and putting all the dry stuff in canisters to save it from the mice. Opened a window upstairs in the sleeping loft, musty and buzzing with winter flies. Brought in a box of kindling from under the deck. Took my suitcase and sleeping bag upstairs.

I'm alone in some 1,500 acres of sand dunes, the highest about eighty-feet tall, at the very tip of Cape Cod. The sand is swept with

dune grass and dotted with scrub pines, stunted oaks, and patches of berry bushes. Beyond the dunes the Atlantic Ocean sometimes kisses, sometimes pounds miles of beach. In his essays about Cape Cod, Henry David Thoreau wrote about this spot, "A man may stand there and put all America behind him."

This is a place of wide expanse and raw exposure. A place on the edge. I came here specifically to experience that edge. To discover what a week of complete solitude would feel like. To witness this unique environment. To stand at the cusp of a new season, and watch as March moved into April, winter into spring. To make an audio recording of the silence and any other sounds that might accompany the absence of human voices other than my own.

It has gotten windy and overcast. I can hear the wind so loudly from inside the shack — flapping the plastic covering the windows. I thought (while taking a nap upstairs) what a perfect way to record wind (which is always



*Falling Dune*