

# SANDY DAYS, SALTY NIGHTS

## Lost in the Fog

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On perfect winter days, when sunshine saturates the atmosphere and the white sand of Fort Myers Beach is warm underfoot, the waters of the Gulf join the sky at a distant vanishing point. A blurred line of blue-green incandescence delineates the borders of this part of paradise.

For beach babies raised in these tropical environs, clear skies and calm seas are just another mundane part of balmy southwest Florida. We take for granted 80 degree temps in January and can choose when to soak up the sun – there's an endless supply.

On rare days when the sky grows cloudy and rain threatens, many of us thrill at the novelty of a darkened, overcast day. Rarer still, and even more alluring, are the days when a heavy sea fog rolls in off the Gulf.

For the time that the fog lingers, the beach is silent, holding its breath under a milky layer of moisture. The fog forms at the salty join of cool ocean and warmer land, blanketing

sea oats and sand dunes and changing the lay of the beach, so that the landscape suddenly seems ominous and unfamiliar.

When the Londoner arrived from England, in the midst of a raging cold front that covered the northeast in snow and dipped our thermometers below freezing, it was hard to imagine the placid weather I'd been describing just days before. That first night, we sat wrapped in a blanket on the porch of our rented beach cottage, the space between us the only warmth.

The fury of the front stilled, and we watched as a heavy fog rolled down the beach, beginning at the pier and making its way along the shore. It was eerily beautiful, but discomfiting, as if the beach I knew had suddenly been transformed.

In French, foreigners are often said to be "dépaycé," a word that loosely translates as homesick. More literally, though, it means away from one's country or out of one's element. Or, simply but aptly, lost. Oddly, it was the Londoner who should have felt that way, having traveled all the way from the British Isles to my corner of paradise. But, as the weather stayed cold most of the week and the sea fog

rolled in each evening, it was as if he were not out of his element at all.

Rather, it was me that felt dépaycé in his presence. His posh accent, the suave way he ordered expensive wine and bought designer clothes: these were the things that I loved in London, his trademarks that had thrilled me with their classy unfamiliarity. But, here, in my element, they didn't make sense, didn't jive with the laidback attitude that is fundamental to Fort Myers Beach.

Where the coolness of his London lifestyle met the warm tranquility of my Floridian ways, a fog formed, settling dense and heavy around us. It muddled the details of our affection, and our relationship (which had touched three continents in its romantic sweep) lost its way. When he left at the end of the week, tendrils of fog trailing him, it was with a definitive goodbye. In the steady, familiarly beautiful way of south Florida, the next day dawned clear and beautiful, and the beach again sparkled in luminous jewel tones. ■

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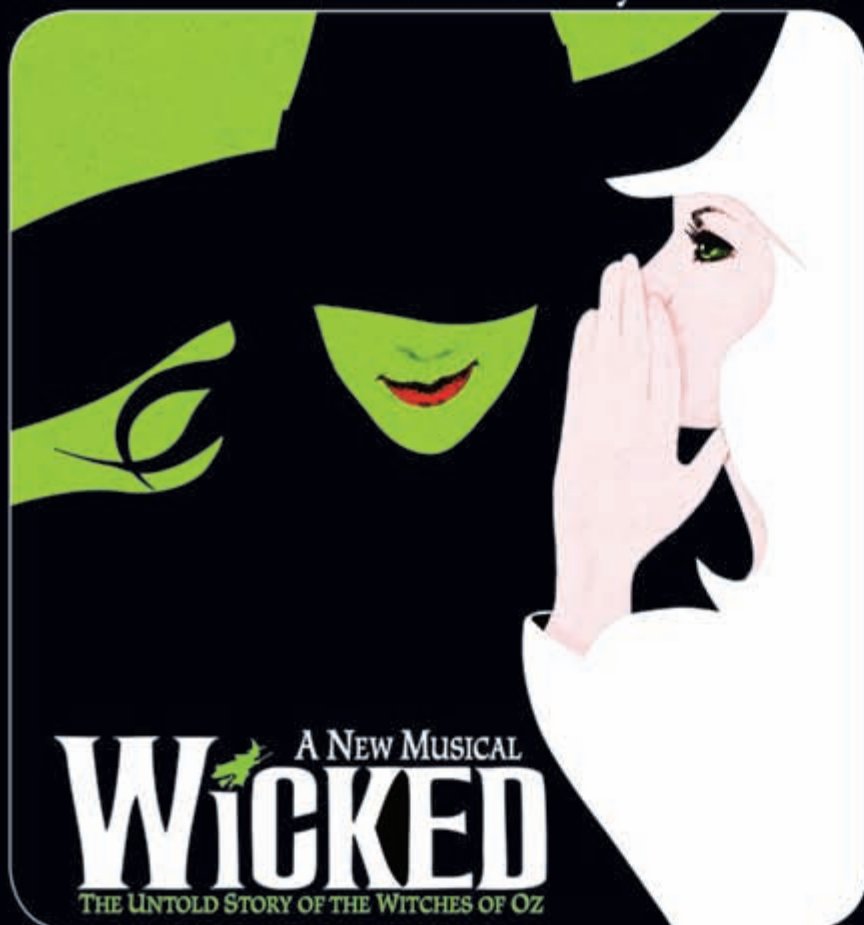


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