

The Knights of the Cherry Beach Table

The one table is there for everyone—it belongs to the city, the beach, the lake, the weather. But every weekend it seemed to be claimed by only one, standing at the edge of the sand like a loyal sentinel. He calls it “my spot, and my table” and by repetition it became believable.

That morning the sun was shining bright but struggling to beam through layers of fighting clouds blocking the heat, with a soft breeze off the water. They had been there quite early, with food, drinks and other provisions laid out for a day of relaxation. A small clutter of comfort: sunglasses and sandals tossed carelessly, bags spilling towels, and a speaker crooning a variety of songs.

At some point, for whatever reason, they moved the table. Maybe it was for more shade, or maybe they knew a louder party was coming soon. Whatever it was, four pairs of hands lifted it easily, carrying the whole feast and fiesta across the sand in laughter and shouts, as though it weighed and meant nothing.

A beach full of people, including myself, turned their heads as the table walked, swaying, into its new place, and I tapped my fingers with a silly grin on my face, waiting in anticipation to see what kind of drama might unfold upon his arrival. I've known him for years, though his name seems to keep changing... Then he arrived.

Chris Kringle, as I now call him—though not in kindness—strode toward the empty spot where his table had always stood. He was red-faced, full of bluster, as if his entire authority depended on wood and bolts sunk into sand in his spot. When he found nothing there, only the imprint of the legs pressed into dirt, his anger boiled over. He marched away to continue with his business of setting up the party. I took this opportunity to run over to the grown boys to tell them how much enjoyment I'm getting from watching him glaring at the table like it had betrayed him personally.

“That’s his table,” I said. “Or so he likes to insist. Don’t give it up. Not today. Not for him. Not for anyone.”

And that was it. A line drawn, invisible but unshakable. He fumed, muttered, paced, but the table did not return to its original spot. They even took a long moment enjoying a swim in the water, splashing and playing, while the table sat, guarded by their belongings, and my watchful eye from a distance. This place—this moment—was theirs, and I was thrilled to be there to share it in my own way.

It was only one afternoon, but it changed the air. The table was no longer just a table. It had been defended, claimed, consecrated by resistance. From then on I called these young lads, half-joking but half-serious, The Knights of the Cherry Beach Table.