

Car Pool

To climb the fence you need a good pair of sneakers, for it is seven feet to the top. My Chuck Taylors would have done fine, if I could have found them. My parents have been gone for a while and somehow things around the house have the habit of disappearing.

It's the perfect night to go pool hopping. Overcast and cloudy, with rain threatening. We take my old Mustang up to the golf course and park a cautious distance from the community pool, the Oak Crest Bath and Racquet Club. I sniff at the 'Bath' and wonder why the word 'pool' wasn't good enough for them.

The water glistens like a waiting jewel. The management keeps the underwater lights on, hoping to discourage those looking to refresh themselves, those who wish to clean the humidity from their skin, those who know. This is a spot from the old days, from a time when I was so young that I didn't know I was young, a time when I couldn't imagine the thoughts that I have now.

The two of us climb the fence at the place where the wire is pulled from its staples and is loose and awkward and hopefully enough to hold our weight. He tosses his shoes over to me. They are old and worn, three sizes too big and I look clumsy, jamming them deep into the wire, hoping I can manage. It's a quarter past midnight when I drop to the pool deck, my mouth dry from the alcohol consumed. He is facing the emerald water, its surface speckled with darts of rain.

"No diving," I tell him, holding on to the board, "too much noise." And later, after a cautious lap back and forth I say to him, "No one can shoot us, it's community property."

Underwater it's new, a foreign place of noise and light as I follow black tile markings and imagine a sudden meeting with a shark. Pools are not safe from my imaginings. Here my hair is dark and slick, it moves in front of my face and grips my throat as I kick, desperate to avoid the shark's attack. There is no hope for this and I sputter to the surface, spewing bile and blood.

"Be quiet," he tells me, his voice enclosed by the tile. "There's a car."

No glasses and I am sunk. Rain taps on my skull, my nose. I squint and put out my tongue. "Wet, wet, wet," I think, and the rain tastes of something worse than chlorine.

Two men climb an obvious part of the fence where they are certain to be caught in passing headlights. I sink lower and fade into a place of shadows and I am hit with the clear beauty of the colored water right before they push the object in. Spears of rain strike the surface. The splash echoes and follows their running feet.

It settles at the bottom under the board. Part of it is black and solid, the other half looking like an attached feature, its hollow middle the size of a coffin. I swim and peer through twelve feet of water. The sharks disappear and the rain continues to splash. We balance over the ropes, kicking our feet at our fears.

"Do you know?" I ask him, because to me it looks like half of an Art Deco table. "I want to go down and touch it," I say, "but I'm afraid of broken glass."

Now it looks like a window frame. It is brilliantly lit from three sides and casts complimentary shadows over the racing lane tile. "Very geometric," he whispers, liking such things. It comes to me now in thick, black lines.

I hesitate before leaving the rope. I sink beneath the surface and glide over it, eight feet above, afraid, unsure. The far side of it is slick and black, unaware of me. I think of a horror movie I wasn't supposed to watch, I think it is breathing. Bubbles rise to the surface, clear and light in their escape. It sits on the bottom and I am afraid to touch it, though I want to. I say I am afraid of broken glass. I see the cut in the palm of my hand, thin and clean and even. The blood doesn't come immediately, it waits to make sure I am watching, then spreads in thick pink clouds toward the filters.

Drops of rain catch my eye on the surface. The sounds of passing cars come to me through the fence. I am directly above it, treading water. Car doors bounce and jump in the darkness. He is already in the shadows, at the far end, away from me.

So I flail there alone, lit from three sides, hovering. This time there are more of them, I'm not sure how many, and only one comes over the fence.

My eyes follow his shadow as it moves. There's something about him that is familiar to me, it's in the soles of his feet and his balance, in the way he holds his head. There's something about him being so close to me, I hold my breath, for I know the very smell of him, sweaty and deep and drowsy. I've forgotten to breathe now, but it doesn't seem to matter. There's something different about him in the way he holds his hands, bends at the waist. My fear of broken glass doesn't stop me from seeking refuge at the bottom, as deep as I can go. I choke on pool water as I sink. It tastes of the tap, of screens and a hope for purity. I would rather think of tap water, of the perfumed sticky aftertaste that mixes so poorly with mint and fluoride than think of his shadow on the pool deck. And when he throws something in the pool, something I'm convinced will electrocute me, all thoughts of water and air fade. The splash consumes me, the violent sound of moving water makes me ache, and ache that starts at my skin and does damage to my insides.

Now there are four objects in the pool, I think, though I don't say this to him when we regroup to discuss the new offering. "Did you see him?" my companion asks, and his voice bores me. I don't want to answer. I don't have to answer. I just needed his shoes to get in here.

I don't have the same reaction to this object, I don't fear it. It lies under three feet of water, a round wheel with three spokes. An offering. I grip it without hesitation, with no thought of glass or deep slits and blood. It is solid and familiar, covered in soft leather that is now useless, ruined.

"That bastard," I say, holding it under the water, its running horse etched in the light. I have known all along the danger posed by this shadow.

"Your steering wheel?" he asks, his voice behind me.

"It's a message," I say, though not to him. I am speaking to the tiles, to the fence, because I need only his shoes to get out of this place.

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