

The Fascination of the Pool
An Anthology

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Genre-Typical Introduction: How to Use an English Degree to Make Others Feel Inferior

No two people think about anything in exactly the same way. Although we can spend our days imagining that there's some kind of universal human experience, the way each of us understands and perceives the world likely differs at least somewhat from person to person. By necessity, each of us assumes that our peers are seeing the same colors, feeling the same emotions, and thinking in the same way, though in reality, we likely only barely have enough common ground to communicate (my blue is your pink, but we'll both call it orange).

This idea of incorrectly assumed homogeneity both intrigues and scares me. I like to believe in shared humanity – that there's some constant thread linking me to even those living around the globe – and I like to believe that there's something inherent in people that transcends language, culture, religion, location. At the same time, I can't help but wonder whether banking on some kind of human connectedness is just another instance of assuming that other people think and feel like I do.

In May 2023, after months with that idea floating around in my head, I was wasting time clicking through Wikipedia and found myself scrolling through author Virginia Woolf's works and skimming the dozens of titles I had never heard of before, most of which were short stories without Wikipedia synopses. Reading through the unfamiliar titles, I guessed what the stories were about then looked up a summary on Google. Sometimes I was right, but often I found that my expectation based on the title was entirely wrong. I began to wonder what would happen if a group of people were asked to respond to the same prompt with no other direction.

I decided I would ask my friends to write their own stories entitled “The Fascination of the Pool,” a title I stole from a Virginia Woolf short story of the same name. I had not read Woolf’s “Fascination of the Pool” at the time and primarily selected the title because it was open-ended and not abundantly accessible online. Woolf’s original story, which is included in this anthology, was written around 100 years ago, likely between 1925-1930, although ultimately it was only published posthumously.

I went through my contacts and sent out a call for submissions. Via individual email or text, I asked friends to send me a story and specified that there were “no subject requirements, style guidelines, due dates, or length suggestions.” Friends were urged not to Google “The Fascination of the Pool” and instead write whatever came to mind.

I got positive responses immediately. Some, recent college graduates, expressed interest in having a creative project to work on in lieu of assignments, others were eager to see what other people had written, others still asked if they could share the prompt with other friends who were interested in the project – I of course said yes. Although busy schedules kept some from writing for the project, I received several submissions. Reviewing submissions, I was interested in the wide range of

interpretations, associations, genres, and tropes employed by the writers. I also became further convinced that I have the world's most interesting and wonderful friends.

I hope you enjoy reading what everyone came up with and perhaps begin to ponder how the differences in ways we perceive the world around us shape us both individually and collectively.

Alicia Lopez

2023

The Fascination of the Pool
By Virginia Woolf

It may have been very deep — certainly one could not see to the bottom of it. Round the edge was so thick a fringe of rushes that their reflections made a darkness like the darkness of very deep water. However in the middle was something white. The big farm a mile off was to be sold and some zealous person, or it may have been a joke on the part of a boy, had stuck one of the posters advertising the sale, with farm horses, agricultural implements, and young heifers, on a tree stump by the side of the pool. The centre of the water reflected the white placard and when the wind blew the centre of the pool seemed to flow and ripple like a piece of washing. One could trace the big red letters in which Romford Mill was printed in the water. A tinge of red was in the green that rippled from bank to bank.

But if one sat down among the rushes and watched the pool — pools have some curious fascination, one knows not what — the red and black letters and the white paper seemed to lie very thinly on the surface, while beneath went on some profound under-water life like the brooding, the ruminating of a mind. Many, many people must have come there alone, from time to time, from age to age, dropping their thoughts into the water, asking it some question, as one did oneself this summer evening. Perhaps that was the reason of its fascination — that it held in its waters all kinds of fancies, complaints, confidences, not printed or spoken aloud, but in a liquid state, floating one on top of another, almost disembodied. A fish would swim through them, be cut in two by the blade of a reed; or the moon would annihilate them with its great white plate. The charm of the pool was that thoughts had been left there by people who had gone away and without their bodies their thoughts wandered in and out freely, friendly and communicative, in the common pool.

Among all these liquid thoughts some seemed to stick together and to form recognisable people — just for a moment. And one saw a whiskered red face formed in the pool leaning low over it, drinking it. I came here in 1851 after the heat of the Great Exhibition. I saw the Queen open it. And the voice chuckled liquidly, easily, as if he had thrown off his elastic side boots and put his top hat on the edge of the pool. Lord, how hot it was! and now all gone, all crumbled, of course, the thoughts seemed to say, swaying among the reeds. But I was a lover, another thought began, sliding over the other silently and orderly as fish not impeding each other. A girl; we used to come down from the farm (the placard of its sale was reflected on the top of the water) that summer, 1662. The soldiers never saw us from the road. It was very hot. We lay here. She was lying hidden in the rushes with her lover, laughing into the pool and slipping into it, thoughts of eternal love, of fiery kisses and despair. And I was very happy, said another thought glancing briskly over the girl's despair (for she had drowned herself). I used to fish here. We never caught the giant carp but we saw him once — the day Nelson fought at Trafalgar. We saw him under the willow — my word! what a great brute he was! They say he was never caught. Alas, alas sighed a voice, slipping over the boy's voice. So sad a voice must come from

the very bottom of the pool. It raised itself under the others as a spoon lifts all the things in a bowl of water. This was the voice we all wished to listen to. All the voices slipped gently away to the side of the pool to listen to the voice which so sad it seemed — it must surely know the reason of all this. For they all wished to know.

One drew closer to the pool and parted the reeds so that one could see deeper, through the reflections, through the faces, through the voices to the bottom. But there under the man who had been to the Exhibition; and the girl who had drowned herself and the boy who had seen the fish; and the voice which cried alas alas! yet there was always something else. There was always another face, another voice. One thought came and covered another. For though there are moments when a spoon seems about to lift all of us, and our thoughts and longings and questions and confessions and disillusionments into the light of day, somehow the spoon always slips beneath and we flow back again over the edge into the pool. And once more the whole of its centre is covered over with the reflection of the placard which advertises the sale of Romford Mill Farm. That perhaps is why one loves to sit and look into pools.

The Fascination of the Pool
By Laurie Casteneda

Whos pool? Whos pool? Whos pool? Flyers posted on every corner asking about whose pool with no other details. Why is this person so fascinated by the person's pool? Is it big? Has it been causing issues? Wouldn't you just be able to stake out at the pool to know? Also, why put in the effort for a flier on every corner if you're gonna have such chicken scratch handwriting; why be so erratic? I have too many questions and not enough answers, maybe it's just a speakeasy like all those liquor store themed ones, or maybe it's a pool party like in my college days. I guess I haven't been walking for too long now so I'll make this a workout and get to the end of this mystery.

Wandering endless corridors, sidewalk after sidewalk I start to smell a stench, a familiar stench that you would get in a Walmart electronic section or outside the bathroom doors at a chipotle. My eyes are stinging from the stench but I feel myself magnetizing towards it. The fascination of the pool has got me doing things I've never thought I would do; have I hit rock bottom? I'm starting to get an urge to use the restroom so I should stop this existentialism and get to the bottom of all these mysteries.

At last, as I turn one final corner, an even more peculiar sight has entered my view; a mattress in the middle of the road covered in hundreds of flyers with the same erratic handwriting but I can't read what it says from this far away. As I get closer I make a full stop and see that plopped down right in the middle of the mattress is the source of all the smells and fascinations; a piece of human shit. WHO SHITS ON A BED? Horrified, I go closer, why I don't know, but I need closure. I can finally see the writing on the flyers and all the dots finally connect, because the flyers didn't say 'Whos pool?'...the flier said 'WHOS POO!?' The relief from figuring out all the mysteries caused a slip up of my bowels and before I could think of anything else I took off my pants and right next to 'poo!' I made my own.

I guess it's time to make flyers asking 'who did number two?'.

Aesop's New Fables

Number 11:

Ἡ τῆς Λίμνης Θέλξις

"The Fascination of the Pool"

By Cole Gaboriault

On opening weekend, the kiddie pool at Hidden Hollow Swim Club felt sad and lonely. Her sister, the big pool, got all the attention; as soon as they were old enough, kids would only swim in her, leaving the kiddie pool to watch from afar with no friends. She lay there and waited, hoping she might find one.

A little while passed, and a mom and dad arrived with their young son.

"Go on, Timmy, play in the kiddie pool!"

"But I wanna swim in the big pool."

"You can swim in the big pool as soon as you turn five. Until then, you have to play in the kiddie pool while we swim in the big pool."

Timmy reluctantly stepped into the shallow end of the kiddie pool. She was thrilled: this was the first company she'd had in months! He slowly waded deeper, allowing the water up to his calves, then knees, then thighs. But Timmy's brand new big boy bathing suit was just a little too big. As the water reached his waist, it slid down below his hips.

The kiddie pool was fascinated. She'd never seen beneath a bathing suit before. She stared intently, watching how it moved and how it looked until, all too soon, Timmy pulled the suit back up. She wanted to see more. So she decided to blow a little stream of water to pull it down again.

And down it came. She stared and stared, yet alas, after just a moment Timmy pulled it back up again. She simply had to take one more good look. And so, again, she blew a little stream into little Timmy's bathing suit. And again it came down. But this time she kept blowing, hoping to hold the bathing suit down longer.

Timmy began to reach down, but then he stopped, and smiled, and started laughing, and started splashing, as the kiddie pool kept blowing a little stream between his legs. He laughed and laughed at

the funny new things he was feeling. The kiddie pool saw how happy he was, and she was happy, because she had made a friend. And Timmy's mom and dad looked over, and they were thrilled to see Timmy happily playing by himself.

"It's so wonderful that our son can play all by himself in the kiddie pool while we swim in the big pool," they said.

The kiddie pool kept blowing streams at Timmy, swirling between his legs, and he kept laughing and splashing, and the kiddie pool felt loved. Beneath the shimmering surface of the water, it was her and Timmy's little secret.

That evening, Timmy eagerly asked his mom and dad if they could go to the pool again tomorrow.

"Of course," they said. After all, they'd never seen him this excited about anything, so they were eager to indulge his rare enthusiasm.

The next day they returned. Timmy ran right into the deep end of the kiddie pool and lowered his bathing suit immediately. She blew swirls and streams and eddies between his legs, and he laughed and splashed, and they had a wonderful time.

A little while passed, and a mom and dad arrived with their young daughter.

"Go on, Lucy, play in the kiddie pool! Little Timmy from preschool is already over there. You should play with him."

"But I wanna swim in the big pool."

"You can swim in the big pool as soon as you turn five. Until then, you have to play in the kiddie pool while we swim in the big pool."

Lucy would usually have put up a fight, but since she at least had someone to play with, she reluctantly obliged and stepped into the shallow end of the kiddie pool.

"Hi Timmy," said Lucy, "what are you doing?"

Timmy smiled and laughed in response. It looked like he was having fun, so she waded deeper, allowing the water up to her calves, then knees, then thighs. When it reached her waist, the kiddie pool noticed that there was something different about Lucy: her bathing suit didn't look like Timmy's, and her body didn't look like Timmy's. She decided to blow a little stream of water into Lucy's bathing suit to see what was underneath.

The bathing suit came right down, and the kiddie pool was fascinated. This was nothing like what was underneath Timmy's bathing suit! Lucy began to reach down, but then she stopped, and smiled, and started laughing, and started splashing, as the kiddie pool kept blowing a little stream between her legs. She laughed and laughed at the funny new things she was feeling. The kiddie pool saw how happy she was, and she was happy, because she had made another friend. And Timmy's mom and dad and Lucy's mom and dad looked over, and they were thrilled to see Timmy and Lucy happily playing by themselves.

"It's so wonderful that our kids can play all by themselves in the kiddie pool while we swim in the big pool," they said.

Timmy and Lucy laughed and splashed with the kiddie pool all afternoon.

The next day, Lucy told her friends about how wonderful the kiddie pool was, and those friends told their friends, and those friends told their friends. Before long, all the kids wanted to come to the kiddie pool. And their moms and dads said yes.

They all waded into the water, and when the water reached their waists, the kiddie pool blew little streams into their bathing suits. They smiled, and laughed, and splashed around as the kiddie pool swirled between their legs. And they laughed and laughed at the funny new things they were feeling. Even some kids who were old enough to swim in the big pool wanted to play in the kiddie pool now. She had so many friends that she felt like the most loved pool in the world. And all the moms and dads looked over, and they were thrilled to see their kids happily playing by themselves.

"It's so wonderful that our kids can play all by themselves in the kiddie pool while we swim in the big pool," they said.

One day, as everyone smiled and laughed and splashed, the kiddie pool had an idea. Little Timmy and Little Lucy were awfully close together. They both loved so much to have little streams of water squirted between their legs; why not use one stream for both of them?

She made a few gentle waves and inched little Timmy and little Lucy closer together until their legs touched. Then she blew a stream of water between both of their legs at once, and that made them rub together, and that made them smile and laugh and splash even more than they had before.

All this laughing and splashing caught the attention of Lucy's dad, who happened to be walking by the kiddie pool. He looked down and saw what was happening, then screamed, "What are you doing? Stop!"

The other moms and dads ran over to see what he was yelling about. He promptly grabbed hold of Lucy and pulled her out of the kiddie pool to scold her. Fearing the same would happen to them, all the rest of the kids jumped out, except for little Timmy, who was distracted by the stream of water between his legs.

The kiddie pool quickly realized that all her friends were leaving. She became distraught; she couldn't go back to a lonely life without anybody to play with. At least Timmy was still with her. She held onto him very tightly and made sure he felt the warm embrace of the water.

Timmy's mom and dad grabbed him and tried to pull him out of the kiddie pool to scold him. But he wouldn't move. The water just splashed back at them. They pulled harder, and the water splashed back harder. So they pulled as hard as they could, and little Timmy became afraid.

He gasped as his mom squeezed his hand and his fingers snapped; he gasped as his dad yanked his arm and his shoulder dislocated; and he gasped as the kiddie pool swirled around him, between his legs, and he felt something he had never dreamt of feeling before.

None of the gasps were air.

Timmy was limp by the time the lifeguard jumped in and pulled him out. The pool lay still, watching them pound his chest and breathe into his mouth, then began to cry herself silently down her drain. As she shed her final tear and disappeared, she heard Timmy's ribs crack.

The author would like to thank United States President Joseph Biden for inspiring this story.

The Fascination Of The Pool
By Chapin Lenthall-Cleary

I come from an old midwestern town. Decades before I was born, it had been a thriving industrial settlement. Now, it's a ghost town, complete with a pair of abandoned factories, empty houses, and a disused waterpark, one of the largest in the country. Back when the region had a thriving middle class, the waterpark had thousands of square miles of potential customers to support it. But as the factories and the unions left, the waterpark went bust. Just like with everything else, everyone knows it's never coming back.

I only mention this waterpark because it's haunted. Well, that's not quite right: the waterpark isn't haunted, it's the pool at the center of the park that is. The pool, almost a quarter of the total area of the waterpark, has large pistons meant to generate waves, and metal coils at its bottom that can heat up to regulate water temperature. Though it's anyone's guess whether the pistons or the heating elements could actually still work even if the park's electric bill were ever paid again.

Everyone knows the rules of the haunted pool: enter the waterpark during the day, and you'll be fine, but if you're still there after sunset, no matter what you do, you'll be found floating face-down in the pool the next morning. As the town lore goes, a decade or two ago, a town detective, Icarus Quixano Thaddeus, went into the park one night, determined to debunk what he thought was a myth, or beat it if it wasn't. He was clever: he set up cameras around the pool during the day, he brought his service revolver, and he even had a friend watching him with binoculars from the top of a tall building in town, well outside the waterpark.

If you're wondering why I know his full name, it's because I've visited his gravestone. The morning after his mission to debunk or beat the haunted pool, Icarus was found face-up in the water, revolver in hand. Heavy fog had meant that his friend hadn't been able to see anything, and there was no trace of the cameras come morning. Even though I had never met Icarus, out of a certain respect for his effort, I had made a habit of visiting his grave every few months; after all, he was the last legend our town had left. When I had last visited, I could smell the residue of rotten eggs thrown at the grave. Probably just some stupid kids. Everyone knows that you can't beat the pool, but obviously no one would hate Icarus for trying.

That was about two months ago. This Wednesday, as I was walking home from high school with two friends, Tommy and John, the spring air crisp and with a hint of newfound warmth, Tommy suddenly spoke.

"Some guys are going to the waterpark this weekend." If the words came as a surprise to me, they shouldn't've: during the day, it was a somewhat popular spot for high school seniors to hang out. After all, even though the waterslides were dry, the pool at the bottom wasn't.

"That's...not smart," John said.

"We'll obviously leave before sundown. You two should join us."

"I...I don't know."

"Think about it, yeah?"

"Fine." They both turned to look at me.

"Saturday or Sunday?" I asked.

"Saturday."

"I can't. I'm visiting my aunt's family Saturday. I won't get back until evening."

"Come on."

"Can't. Parents are making me." We neared the town general store that we passed on our walk home every day. "Guys, my mom wanted me to get bread on my way home. I'll see you two tomorrow."

"See you."

The owner of the general store had some interest in town history, and collected some various town artifacts: a copy of the town charter from about two centuries ago, a gear from a now-abandoned factory, that sort of thing. The various objects were pinned to one wall of the general store, a sort of tiny museum. There was a short line to check out, and I glanced over the objects as I waited. I almost didn't notice the change. When I got to the register, I asked the cashier about it.

"What happened to Icarus's revolver? Didn't it use to be up on that wall?" The cashier shrugged.

"New owner took over the store the other day. Probably pitched it."

"Huh," I said. Maybe I was just too surprised to muster up a proper response. Maybe I didn't care enough.

"No loss there," the other cashier said. "Guy was kind of an idiot. Everyone knows you're dead if you go to the pool at night."

"Kind of pretentious too," the first cashier said. "Thinking he could outsmart the pool. That'll be \$5.49."

I paid and took the bread, absentmindedly thanking the cashier. I had taken about two-dozen steps for home when I turned around, walking toward the back of the store, looking around.

I last went to the general store this weekend, and I was pretty sure I had seen Icarus's revolver there then. Trash pickup in the town was on Thursdays. So maybe...I found a dumpster behind the store and opened it to a wave of the smell of...well, trash.

I had only looked for a minute when I was starting to question whether this was really a good idea, but then I found it: an old, silver-colored, 6-shot revolver. Spinning the cylinder, two chambers were empty, but four still had bullets in them. Before anyone walked out of the store, saw me holding a gun, assumed the worst and called the cops, I slipped the revolver into my backpack and set out for home.

We had just left my aunt's house after an early dinner when Tommy called me.

"You're missing out here." Maybe there was something off in his tone, or maybe I figured Tommy wasn't the type to call me to gloat, or maybe I just had a bad feeling, but, after a moment, I knew something must be--off.

"What's wrong?"

"Eh, we'll be fine. But a few guys are planning to try to stay until a few minutes before sunset, and John and a few other people have been freaking out over shadows they think they're seeing in the pool for like an hour now." In the background I could hear other voices talking to Tommy. "Hang on. Savanna wants to talk to you." Tommy presumably handed the phone to Savanna, a mutual friend and classmate.

"You need to see this. I swear--I mean, I know it doesn't make any sense, but I swear I saw a ghost at the bottom of the pool for a moment." Looking out of the car window as we drove home, the late-afternoon sun painted the landscape with a soft golden glow.

"I think you should probably leave the waterpark sometime soon." The conversation continued another couple minutes, but there wasn't really anything I could do anyway.

The next call from Tommy comes when I'm about two minutes from home. This time, the vague worry has been replaced with abject panic.

"You home?"

"Almost. Why?"

"We left the waterpark about fifteen minutes ago--"

"And...?"

"John, Savanna, Audrey, Jacob, Ben, and about a dozen other people haven't left." At an optimistic guess, there's half an hour of daylight left.

"Wha--" I stammer. "What the hell do you mean?"

"Most of them said they want to wait as long as they can on a dare or something, but we're waiting outside the park near where we climbed the fence and we haven't seen them yet, so they're cutting it damned close--"

"And the rest?"

"They're too terrified. They won't look away from the pool, not even to walk or run to the fence and get out." As we round a bend, I see my house.

"You need to go convince them to leave."

"Dude, I already tried. It didn't work. I'm not going back in there now."

"I'll be there in five minutes." The car pulls into our driveway and my door is open before it stops; I race inside to the bedroom I share with my brother. My parents and brother are still at the door; I grab Icarus's revolver, put it into a coat pocket, then race to the garage.

"I'm going to go see some friends," I yell as I grab my rusty old bike and speed away.

I arrive at the fence outside the waterpark to see Tommy and a half-dozen others standing twenty feet away from the waterpark fence, ditching my bike on the side of the road and running to the group.

"I thought you said something like fifty people were at the park." Tommy nods.

"Most went home. Some are still--"

"Wait, went home whilst there were still people--" I stop myself and focus on the more urgent matter. "Who's still...?"

"Still everyone I told you about five minutes ago...John, Jacob, Savanna..."

I don't realize I'm climbing the fence until I'm halfway up it.

"You're not going to be able to get them to leave," Tommy says. "They're possessed. Don't risk your own--"

"They're not possessed. They're afraid." I hope I'm right.

I jump down on the other side of the fence, in the waterpark. There isn't an unobstructed view to the pool from anywhere on the ground outside the park, but I'm not more than two minutes from the pool at a run. As the sun turns the sky a fiery orange and pink, I bolt between what I think used to be a concession stand and locker room, turning past a building that housed indoor waterslides. Then I see the pool.

About a dozen students are sitting by the pool laughing and talking, but gazing nervously at the sunset and their phones, presumably checking the time and weighing whether it's worth it to leave when everyone else is still willing to stay. *Surely, I can almost hear them say, the others would be leaving if it were really dangerous. I'll just wait until someone else gets up to leave.*

John, Savanna, and two other students sit apart from that group, staring, petrified, at the pool. And as I look at the pool, the shadows lengthening and deepening over its surface, I realize they might be right. I start to wonder what would happen if I took my eyes off the pool. It takes a surprising degree of mental effort to remind myself what I said earlier: *They're not possessed. They're afraid.* Everyone says you can't beat the pool. It's no wonder that some people react like that. I reach into my coat pocket; Icarus's revolver is cool to the touch. I came here to get these people out.

John, Savanna, and the two others aren't really acknowledging each other, but they're sitting in a group.

"You all need to get the hell up and leave with me right now!" I yell at them as I race over.

"But..." John stammers. "...but the ghosts in the pool. I saw them."

"Get it together." Ten minutes ago, I wouldn't have believed that people could react to crisis so badly. But, glancing back at the pool, at the strange shadows or ghosts or illusions or hallucinations at the bottom, and remembering how even Icarus couldn't beat it, it takes all of my willpower, plus a keen sense of why I was there, to avoid joining John and the others in the terror and hopelessness.

"They're...they're coming."

"Not yet," I reply. "Not until sundown." Looking around, buildings and slides block our view to the horizon, but the fading light paints a clear enough picture: we have minutes left. Ten, fifteen if we're lucky. Not more.

"That's an approximation," Savanna says. "We don't know exactly what the rules are. We know that people have left twenty minutes before sundown and been fine; we know that anyone who stays the night dies. We don't know whether it's sundown, five minutes before, ten minutes after, or even some other time that just happens to nearly align with sundown. The ghosts might be here right now." So she's being smart about this, at least in a certain sense. That must be worth something, but it's not enough. She, just like John and the two others, is still petrified.

I grab her hand and pull her to her feet.

"I'm not going to let you die here," I say, barely managing to keep fear from creeping into my own voice. I guess those words are enough, because she seems to snap to.

"Audrey, John, Billy, you all need to come with us," she says, fear still buffeting her words. None of them respond with more than a whimper; she starts to plead further. For a moment, I consider trying to drag the three others out with us, but, even if I manage that, it'd mean minutes more before Savanna and I get out of the park. I interrupt her pleading.

"We need to go right now." She takes two steps, then stops.

"Facetime John's phone." I oblige; she runs to John and asks for his phone. He hands it to her without taking his eyes off the pool. She accepts the call and props the phone on a rusting deck chair.

"Please come with us," she says to Audrey, John, and Billy one last time. "You all don't need to die here." I grab her hand again.

"We need to go right now." She nods; I turn to yell across the pool. The group there has stopped laughing, but none have left yet. "You idiots need to leave right now!"

"Just a couple more minutes," I think one yells back. Savanna and I bolt for the fence.

We make it to the fence with five minutes before sundown. Savanna starts to climb it; I glance back towards the buildings between us and the pool.

"Don't do it," she says. "We don't know how long we have. You might die, and you probably won't save them anyway." I grab the fence and start to climb.

The fence is only around 6 feet tall, and not difficult to climb; it takes less than a minute for us to get over.

"Where're the others?" Tommy asks. I shake my head. He's obviously distraught, but still seems somewhat in shock that I managed to run in and save even one person.

"The Facetime call," Savanna says. I take out my phone. From where John's phone is propped, there's a clear view of the pool, but not of John or Audrey or Billy, nor of the other dozen-or-so people across the pool. "Do any of you know if anyone's tried to film the ghosts before?"

"Icarus did," I reply. "And his cameras disappeared, but I think he just used camcorders that recorded locally. Maybe getting a live view will prevent that." Savanna nods. The Facetime was a clever move, and it might even tell us something.

"Could've been a better field of view," Savanna says, intently watching the pool. After a moment, I answer.

"I have an idea about that. Tommy, take my bike. Find the tallest building in town that you can get on top of and watch the pool. If it's too far to see clearly, see if you can zoom in using your phone camera." Tommy nods and runs over to my bicycle. Glancing at Savanna still watching the picture on my phone and Tommy biking away to find a building, all trying desperately to fight the inevitable, despite the last wisps of sunset vanishing, the world momentarily seems a shade brighter than I've ever known.

Tommy's only about a minute down the road when Savanna calls me over.

"Look." Through the facetime picture on my phone, I can see a faint red glow rising from the bottom of the pool. The four other people still with us crowd around us, looking at my phone.

"It's the--" someone starts to say.

"It's the heating coils," Savanna says. They've somehow been turned on. "That's new, isn't it?"

"I think so," I say.

It doesn't take too long until we can see visible steam rising off the water's surface and the hints of a rolling boil emerge. Then it happens: from the far side of the pool, two of the group of twelve fall into the water from out of frame. Or maybe they're flung in, or pushed in, or are possessed to jump in. All that we can see is that they enter the Facetime picture, land face-first in the water, briefly squirm, then are still. Given the water temperature, it'd be no surprise if they couldn't survive in it nearly long enough to even try to get out.

"Oh my god." Only a few seconds later, two more land in the water, then the rest, two at a time, each with a distant splash that's barely picked up by the Facetime call. About fifteen long seconds pass, then the Facetime image flies toward the water, and the call cuts out.

I call Tommy; he answers quickly.

"Can you see anything?"

"Give me a minute or two. I should have a decent view then."

"Get there as quickly as you can. They just died, but we couldn't see how through the Facetime call."

"Who?" It's a dumb question, but I can't blame him for momentarily clinging to the hope it represents.

"We only saw the twelve on the far side of the pool, but it was probably all of them."

"Oh--"

"Get to the top. If you see what happened, at least it'll mean their deaths counted for a lot." Tommy obliges, but his tone makes it abundantly clear that whatever hope we had inspired him with minutes ago is now gone.

"Hard to tell from here, but I think I see--" he pauses a moment to count "--fifteen bodies in the pool."

"Anything else? Anything around it?"

"Nope. Just the corpses." Tommy's on speaker-phone, and Savanna and the four others can hear his reply. For a moment, it seems like everyone is looking at me, placing a great weight upon my shoulders. Or maybe I'm just imagining that. Either way, I realize what I have to do.

"We just lost fifteen of our friends to this waterpark. We all know that they're never coming back. This park isn't just haunted; it's wicked. And whatever just murdered our friends; I'm going to go kill it. But I need you all to help me figure out everything there is to know about these ghosts or ghouls or whatever. The only way I have a shot here is if I know what I'm up against--"

"You want us to go back into that park?"

"No, not at night. That'll just be me. But I do want you all to help me figure out everything there is to know about how the haunted park works. Old newspapers, death reports, town lore, I want to know it all. If these ghosts have a weakness, I need to know it." The four, and maybe also Savanna, look at me like I've lost it. Maybe I have. Then the four glance at each other.

"You're just going to get yourself killed."

"All those people who died wouldn't want that."

"You expect us to figure out how to kill ghosts? They're ghosts; everyone knows you can't kill them."

"The last thing we need now is your arrogance." And the four leave.

"Look, let's talk tomorrow," Tommy says, and he hangs up.

"I'll...uh..I'll look into it," Savanna says. "And thank you." Then she walks away too.

I didn't get much sleep that night. I doubt any of us did. And, horribly, there was a voice in the back of my head that kept saying *These people lost over a dozen of their friends and fellow students, and you immediately saddled them with responsibility for taking on what's a long shot at best and your suicide at worst. You're being cruel to all of them, especially yourself.* But the worst part was that part of me

hoped that voice was right. It would've been so much easier to throw away Icarus's revolver and declare the matter hopeless, and not just because it would save me the horrifying prospect of facing murderous ghosts.

After I finally fall into a fitful sleep, I wake to the sound of my phone ringing. I answer; it's Savanna.

"I've been at the library all morning," she says. "I looked through archives of the old town newspaper that went out of business a few years ago. It's only a start, but I think I've pinned down a beginning to the pool being haunted."

"Oh?"

"There was an accident. The pool was closed for the evening, and they were testing the heating elements, and four people snuck in. They didn't realize how hot the water was until they jumped in."

"They died?"

"Doesn't say that anywhere, but presumably."

"Was that what caused the waterpark to close?"

"Might've been the straw that broke the camel's back, but the park was doomed by that point anyway. The waterpark tried to cover the incident up."

"Guess they were kind of successful, since we're only learning about this now."

"Yeah." Savanna pauses a moment, then continues her explanation. "Several park workers who must've stayed late died soon after that. At first, it seems like people wrote them off as further accidents, and didn't care about the pool since the park was shutting down anyway. But when deaths kept happening to anyone who snuck in after dark, even after the park was abandoned, people realized it was haunted."

"Okay. That's something. Other than Icarus, has anyone tried to beat the pool?"

"Don't think so, but I haven't looked through all these newspapers yet."

"So Icarus goes to the pool. Either by back luck or some power of the ghosts, it's too foggy for his friend to see anything. The ghosts or ghouls or whatever get him, but he fights back, and gets two shots off before they kill him."

"What? How do you know that?"

"I have his revolver. I noticed that the museum at the general store pitched it the other day, so I checked in the dumpster out back. When I found it, it had four bullets left."

"Oh." We both have the realization almost simultaneously.

"On the Facetime video, the people were thrown into the water two at a time. Assuming one ghost can only throw one person into the water simultaneously..."

"There are two ghosts..."

"But four people died..."

"We're missing two ghosts..."

"And two bullets." Almost fifteen seconds pass before she replies.

"It's still a bad idea. Icarus was a trained cop. He knew what he was doing. Had experience sorting out mysteries, dealing with tough situations, and shooting under pressure. And he only managed to take out two of the ghosts."

"Everyone watches the pool," I reply, surprising myself. "He probably did too. Think about it: you and John and the others were transfixed *by the pool*. Even Icarus probably expected the ghosts to come from the pool, but he was probably trained to pay attention, so he noticed the ghosts behind him, but not with enough time to kill all four. He had no way to know that the ghosts wouldn't come from the pool until it was too late..." Savanna finished my explanation.

"...But we saw a video, and they weren't there. We know."

"Right."

"It's a good working theory. It all adds up, but you shouldn't risk your life on it."

"But I--"

"Seriously. You shouldn't risk your life on being right here. It's not worth it."

"These ghosts are evil. They killed our friends, not to mention many others over the years. I can't let them keep killing people."

"We can warn people to stay away from the park. There are more prudent ways to do this."

"That wouldn't work, not for everyone, not forever. Besides, this isn't some sort of natural disaster. It's murder. I have to fight back."

"So you're going to go fight those ghosts with a revolver you have no practice using and...you at least got more bullets for it, right?"

"Can't. I don't turn 18 for another week."

"At least wait until you can buy more bullets and spend an afternoon practicing with the revolver."

"Fine."

"Oh, and buy a second gun. If you're going to do this, I'm backing you up."

"I'm not risking your life too. Besides, if it turns out we're wrong, someone needs to make a plan that'll work."

I had spent almost all of my savings on a second gun and a couple boxes of bullets. Savanna met me outside the fence in the late afternoon the next weekend. I had tried to convince Tommy and a few other friends to join us, but all had told me, most in as nice a way as they could manage, that they thought I was being a pretentious idiot. So it was just us.

I hand Savanna the second gun.

"I really hope it doesn't come to this, but, if I fail here, you need to figure out what went wrong and go kill those ghosts."

"It's a good plan," she says, taking the gun. "You'll get this back." I start to climb the fence. "Accept my Facetime call. Keep the phone in your back pocket, with the camera pointed behind you. I'll watch your back." I oblige, then climb the fence into the waterpark.

When I reach the pool, I see fifteen bodies, drowned and boiled and starting to rot, still floating in it. Whenever anyone had been killed by the ghosts, people had come by the next morning to deal with the bodies. But after the pool claimed fifteen lives, I guess no one would set foot in the park, even during the day.

As the sun dips below the horizon, I catch a glimpse of a red glow behind me. Almost instinctively, I start to turn around toward the pool.

"Don't look at the pool," Savanna says through the call. "Make sure you--" The call cuts out. I take my phone out for a moment, glance at it just long enough to see that I've lost service. Go figure. Well, I never expected this to be easy.

Two figures, cloaked in shadow, emerge from a building to my left. I notice them immediately. Somehow they manage to simultaneously shamble and sprint towards me. Icarus's revolver hasn't left my hand since I entered the waterpark about an hour ago; I raise it toward one of the figures and pull the trigger.

I miss. Maybe I should've spent more than an hour practicing. As the two creatures rapidly grow nearer, I get a better view of them: humanoid, but with mutilated features and badly burnt skin. They aren't ghosts. Demons, maybe. I suppose it's possible that these really are the living people who barely survived an accident in the pool and decided to spend their days hiding out in the park inflicting their fate upon others.

But I doubt it. Looking into their eyes, I can't imagine them being anything but demons. I cock the revolver's hammer and fire again. Another near miss. The two demons are getting close now. Forty, thirty, twenty feet.

I fire another shot. One of the demons collapses, but the second is almost upon me. I cock the hammer on Icarus's revolver again, keeping it pointed at the demon as it somehow manages to weave and dodge without slowing its run toward me. The last demon isn't five feet from me when I get a clear shot at its chest. I fire.

The Fascination of the Pool
By Alicia Lopez

Something thought *light* and with a little coaxing, the sun rose for the first time and began its unfamiliar path across what would one day – perhaps tomorrow – be called sky. And when day was done, the sun slipped past the Western horizon and out of sight of its starting place not yet knowing it would retrace the same path the next day and the next. And it was good.

The Earth spun round and the sun rose again, following yesterday's path, but this time it passed through the sky, blue in some places and stormy in others. Down below, the sun saw water covering the entire Earth and its rays reflected off of it beautifully, making it shimmer as it moved. The sun was pleased with the sky and with the water. And it was good.

On the third day, the sun watched in fascination as tiny rocks began to emerge from the water. By noon the rocks had grown into islands. By dinner the islands had grown into continents. The water, once everywhere, now pooled here and there. It funneled itself into oceans and rivers and lakes and lagoons. Sometimes it moved and sometimes it stayed stagnant. Plants, tall trees, twisting vines, plants with branches heavy with fruit grew on the land. The water and the land and the plants were beautiful. And it was good.

The sun spun round and the sun rose again and found stars had joined it in the sky. The stars, the sun knew, would provide light even when the sun was on the other side of the Earth and would ensure that the world was never without light. And the sun thought about the stars in the darkness and knew that it was good.

On the fifth day, birds and fish filled the skies and the seas. The birds swooped through the air, diving to catch fish in their beaks or gather nuts on the land. The oceans teamed with life as fish, squids, starfish, urchins, and all the other sea creatures claimed their domain. And the sun delighted in the birds and the fish. And it was good.

The sun spun round and the sun rose again and saw more animals – the smallest bugs and the largest mammals. Monkeys swung from the trees while goats bleated in open fields and millipedes marched dutifully across the forest floor. In the evening, the sun saw humans, a man and a woman on either side of a clearing. They looked tiny among the towering trees and like children, nature filled them with joy. Hardship had not been invented yet and the man and the woman ran from hill to hill, exploring their new world. They tasted the fruit of every tree, they rolled in the grass, they watched the other animals with amazement. The sun was watching the moment they discovered each other.

The woman saw the man first and cried out to him. The man turned toward her call and, breaking out into a run, raced toward her. They met in an embrace, tears of joy streaming down their faces and kissed each other. The sun saw all of these things in their full splendor and knew that it was good.

The man and the woman explored together, hand in hand and nature provided all the food they needed. They spent their days exploring the best places to walk, the best places to rest, their favorite foods, and the rhythms of the animals. They created a language of words, signals and facial expressions and fell in love. Together they slept in the sun and walked the world unknowing of their nakedness.

In their paradise, the man and the woman found a shallow pool, the most beautiful pool they or the sun, who could see everything, had ever seen and decided to make it their home. The pool was secluded and shaded and the water was serene and still. Lonely willow trees rooted themselves around the pool's banks and dipped their leafy branches into the water. The pool's surface was glossy, almost reflective. There, for the first time, the man and the women saw themselves. The woman began playing with her hair. The man ran a hand through his beard.

The man and the woman spent hours at the pool's edge looking at it and at themselves within it. They admired how the sun's rays shone off of the surface. They drank in their own appearances. They often bathed in the pool and they admired the way the pool's droplets shimmered on each other's bodies. On the bank of the pool, with their reflections watching, the man and the woman knew each other for the first time.

As months went by, the woman grew with child. The man and the woman continued to spend their idle time near the pool admiring the reflection of the woman's changing form on its surface. They eagerly awaited the birth, desperately wanting another person to share their paradise with. They imagined introducing their child to the plants, showing them which fruits were ripe and which were not, to the forests, imitating bird calls on slow afternoons, to the oceans teaming with life. They hoped the child would love the pool as much as they did and imagined their child safe, shaded by the willows, splashing in its shallows.

But as the woman's stomach swelled, she grew weak. No longer could she walk the many miles she and the man had become accustomed to walk. Certain fruits she once loved she now could not stomach. She spent long, uncomfortable days laid out staring at the pool drinking little and eating less. As the weeks went by, the man grew fearful that if the woman did not eat enough she and their child would die and he would be left alone. He brought her every kind of food they had available but she could not eat any of them.

At night, the man looked at the woman and saw that she was weak and in pain. Desperate to help her, the man resolved to climb the highest mountain, search the deepest parts of the ocean, scour every nook and cranny of the Earth and bring back every fruit, nut, so that his wife and child might live. In the early morning, he told the woman of his intention and promised to be back by nightfall.

On the first day of his quest, the man walked to the west. He walked through marshes and mud and jungle gathering beans, cantaloupes, rice, carrots, onions, and oranges. Late at night, after a full day's expedition, the man returned with his bag filled with what he had found and saw his wife lying

on the edge of the pool staring at her reflection on its surface. He presented her with the food he had collected but try as she might, she could not eat them.

On the second day, the man woke early, told the woman of his intention and promised to be back by nightfall. This time, the man walked to the east. He walked through lush grasses, forests, and glades gathering cherries, chestnuts, pears, plums, radishes, cabbages, and grapes. Just as on the first day, he returned late at night with his bag filled with the food he had gathered and found his wife lying on the edge of the pool staring at her reflection. She looked paler than she had the day before. The man presented her with the food he had collected but try as she might, she could not eat them.

On the third day, as before, the man woke early, told the woman of his intention and promised to be back by nightfall. This time, the man went to the south. He walked through open fields, deserts, and heat gathering watermelons, yams, coffee, peas, and okra. But when he returned with his bag brimming with food, the moon as his only light source, he found his wife looking paler and frailer than he had ever seen her, lying on the edge of the pool, he presented her with the food but still she could not eat.

Long after the woman had fallen asleep the man continued to toss and turn, too worried to sleep. Silently, careful not to wake the woman, the man got up and walked out in the moonlight. Lost in thought, the man wandered without paying attention to the direction he was walking and soon found himself somewhere he had never been before. Here the trees were twisted in abnormal patterns, the man saw no animals, and for the first time in his short life, he felt cold. Despite his discomfort, the man folded his arms for warmth and forged on.

The rocks beneath his feet grew sharper, the wind, usually a gentle breeze, was now harsh and piercing. The man was about to turn back and return to his wife and the pool and the familiar world but a flick of movement from the corner of his eye caught his attention. A huge, diamondback snake slithered by him continuing in the direction he had been walking. The dusty brown and green scales pulsed and stretched as the snake propelled itself forward. Lured by the beauty of the snake, the man walked after it cautiously.

The man followed the snake for many minutes taking care not to get too close, but always keeping it within sight. After what could have been hours or minutes, the snake disappeared into a crack in the rock face and the man found himself at the edge of a clearing. The man took in his unfamiliar surroundings. In the center of the clearing stood a single tree unlike any other tree the man had seen before. It was in season and had the most lush, delicious red fruit the man had ever seen on it.

He thought of his wife at home lying bloated and uncomfortable beside the pool. He picked one of the fruits and found that it was ripe. He picked another and another until he had picked all of the fruit from the tree. He hurried back home to the pool, racing over the uneven terrain, not even stopping when he cut his feet as he scrambled back over the rocks. The man raced back to the pool

where his wife was sleeping. She looked clammy and pale in the moonlight. The man gently woke her up and presented her with the fruit. She smiled weakly and made an effort to sit up.

The man's feet, cut from the rocks, bled down the clay banks and into the pool as he pressed the first fruit into the woman's hands and she slowly raised it to her lips. She bit into it. It was sweet and it was good. The red juices ran down her face and spilled into the pool and she smiled. She hungrily took another bite and life returned to her eyes. She signaled that the man should eat the fruit and he selected one from the pile. He bit into the strange fruit and savored the unfamiliar taste. It was sweet and it was good. The red juices ran down his face and spilled into the pool.

When all the fruit had been consumed, the woman smiled at the man. She leaned back, licking her juice-stained fingers and wiping her juice-stained mouth. The man smiled back at her through juice-stained teeth. He reached for the woman but as he laced his fingers in hers, she screamed and doubled over in pain grasping at her stomach. The man and the woman had felt very little pain before and the man did not know what was wrong or what he should do. Red blood poured from between the woman's legs and spilled down the bank into the pool and the woman moaned, lolling her head and thrashing about.

The blood continued to spill, and the man sprinkled water from the pool onto the woman in an attempt to cool her. The water was no longer clear and juice and blood and gore marred the once-transparent pool. The woman flailed in pain and hit the pool, causing violent waves across its surface. The man slipped into the pool, disrupting the still and submerging his bleeding foot. Announced by the woman's exhausted cry, a head appeared between her legs and at last, the first child was born, covered in blood and afterbirth. The father bathed the child, slick with gore, in the pool, cleaning them off and proudly holding them out towards the mother.

The mother, weak and exhausted, held her hands out toward the child and held him at her breast. The father watched the mother with her red fingers, red teeth, red lips, and red legs and a clean child on her chest. He surveyed the pool, once crystal and now bloodstained and saw that it was still. The water had settled and he could once again see his reflection. It was red and the baby cried.

Come morning, the pool was still bloody and red. The mother and the father knew they could not raise a child on its bank. Silently, the mother and the father packed up their few belongings and began to walk, resolved to find a new home for their child far away from the blood and the gore of the pool. As they left the pool, the wind blew and chilled them deep into their bones. When they stopped for the night, the mother made a fire to keep them warm. The father, with his stained, red hands, caught and killed a rabbit. He and the woman ate the tender meat, bloody juices mixing with the stains on their face. He wrapped the child in the rabbit pelt. It wouldn't be long before the man and the woman fashioned their own clothes. The days came and went and the sun shone down on them as it always had. But for the first time, it seemed that its rays weren't warm enough.

So each day the father and the mother with the baby in the rabbit skin held to her chest wander, searching for a new pool they're always hoping is just over the next hill. And each day the sun watches the trio march as it makes its own journey across the sky until inevitably, evening falls, and it descends out of sight.

The Fascination of the Pool
By Eric Tao

****A Work In Progress****

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ROLF, *a young sardine*
LIESL, *his sister, a little older than he*
MARIE, *his mother*
GABRIEL, *LIESL's grandson (role doubled with ROLF)*
LIESL'S GHOST (*role doubled with LIESL*)
SARDINES, *various community members*
HANS, *a little human boy*
OLDER HANS, *the same boy but now around 50*

SCENE I.

(*A pond, whose surface is a translucent green, buried deep in the Schwarzwald. SARDINES swim randomly in the background as the action unfolds. MARIE is busy collecting algae and other food from the water when ROLF and LIESL enter from stage left.*)

ROLF. Liesl, stop nipping at me, it's unbearable!

LIESL. I can't help it if you've got yourself so dirty. You should be thanking me! You've never looked so clean.

ROLF. Mutti!

MARIE (*continues collecting food, looking away*). What is it, dear?

LIESL. Don't bother mother! Can't you see she's busy?

ROLF. I wouldn't have to bother her if you would stop nipping at me!

LIESL. I'm just trying to get the dirt off of you. You're unpresentable. Honestly!

MARIE (*distractedly*). Listen to your sister, dear.

ROLF. No!

LIESL. See, Rolf?

ROLF. No! No, no, but this is unfair, you're not even looking, Mutti!

LIESL. She doesn't have to look, just let me tidy you up.

ROLF. No, stop! Get off of me, you—you, you forager!

LIESL (*gasping*). What did you just call me? Get that word out of your mouth! Mutti, did you hear that? Rolf just called me a forager, the insolent boy! (*Waits for a response.*)

MARIE (*nonplussed*). But you are one? In fact, you should be proud of it; my mother was a forager and her mother before her.

ROLF. Mutti, look what she's doing to me! (*ROLF runs in front of Marie and suddenly shifts in mood, pausing.*) Mutti, what's wrong? You look sad.

MARIE. I'm fine, dear, I just wish you would get along more with your sister.

LIESL (*running to come see*). Rolf's right—by the Nixen, Mutti! What happened?

MARIE. Really, nothing, there's nothing to worry about.

LIESL. No, Mutti, really, tell us.

ROLF. Yes, tell us!

(*Pause while MARIE looks at the two children, overwhelmed.*)

MARIE (*quietly sobbing*). You fingerlings!

ROLF. Mutti, did we upset you? I'm sorry. What can we do to help? I'm sure Liesl would be glad to do extra chores to make up for it. (*ROLF and LIESL exchange argumentative glances.*)

MARIE. No, you fingerlings, you're just so... so observant. And understanding. And empathetic (*ROLF looks in puzzlement, not knowing what these words mean*). I raised you well. The truth is... well, I had better just get the words out. I've hid it from you for long enough. The truth is that I got fired from my job three days ago.

ROLF and LIESL. Fired!

ROLF. What on pond bottom for?

MARIE. Well... the boss called me into his office—kind man really, I can't cast even a shadow of ill will onto his name—and told me that my work was—well, how should I put it? For lack of a better word... fishy.

ROLF. Fishy! The liar, I'll find him right now and ask him, how dare he insult you like that! (*Runs into the crowd of SARDINES in the background and begins his search.*)

MARIE. Rolf! Rolf, come back!

LIESL. Oh, Rolf. Well, I'm not about to run off like him, but my thoughts are of one mind with his! How dare that man speak to you like that!

MARIE. But he's right, you know, how can I help it? I am in fact a fish.

LIESL. Well yes of course, but... but so is he! He should be proud of fishiness! His ancestors were fishy, and their ancestors before them!

MARIE. Yes, yes, ancestors (*falling into a vexation*)... But not their ancestors before them, or at least isn't that what Viktor was telling me just the other day, something about On the Origin of Pilchards and so on... Oh! It was so dreadfully boring. I wished to myself right there and then that we had never left land to begin with.

LIESL. You're drifting, Mutti.

MARIE (*confused*). Well, that's quite natural, isn't it? We're sardines, it's what we do, we're drifters.

LIESL. No, not your body, Mutti, the conversation. What are we to do now?

MARIE. Oh! Excellent question. (*Pauses.*) I haven't the faintest clue. Maybe the first thing we should do is find Rolf.

ROLF (*running back downstage*). Mutti, would you happen to know, the man who insulted you, yes, well, I was looking for him, just now, before I swam in here, and I had the simple question that, well—well, what does he look like?

MARIE. Oh, come here, fingerlings. (*They all embrace.*)

(*The stage begins rumbling. SARDINES randomly scramble and gradually drift away stage left as the following conversation unfolds.*)

ROLF (*screaming*). What was that?! Mutti, what was that?!

LIESL. Rolf, stop being so cowardly! But Mutti, feel free to answer the question, for his benefit alone.

MARIE. I think we'd better run out of here until it passes. I hope Wilhelm's flowers don't get damaged.

LIESL. Flowers?

MARIE. Oh yes! I forgot to tell you, Liesl, your charming friend brought you some kelp flowers. I told him you weren't home.

LIESL (*blushing*). Did he stay long?

(*The rumbling intensifies.*)

ROLF (*runs over to MARIE*). But what is it?!

MARIE. I'm not sure, Rolf, but if you stay with me, we'll all be safe.

ROLF. You don't know?! I'm scared, Mutti, don't joke with me, I'm as frightened as a mackerel!

MARIE. Now, now, this way, ... (*starts heading towards stage left*).

LIESL. Right, okay, I'm glad we agree. I'll go investigate what it is immediately.

MARIE. Liesl! Come over here, just what do you think you're doing?!

LIESL. I want to know! You just said, we have no idea what it is.

MARIE. And you know what they say about curiosity and the catfish?

LIESL. I'll be fine, I can take care of myself.

MARIE. Nonsense! It's not worth the danger, Liesl, come with us (*tries to drag LIESL with them*).

ROLF. Mutti!!! It's coming!!! (*Dashes stage left and exits.*)

MARIE. Rolf! Liesl, come with us, please!

LIESL. I'll be okay, Mutti; go calm Rolf down.

MARIE (*sternly*). Liesl! I'll only repeat this once more: come with me right now.

(*LIESL ignores her and walks towards stage right. MARIE glances at her and glances at stage left trying to find ROLF. After a pause, MARIE swims off stage left. The SARDINES have completely left the stage by now.*)

LIESL. On my own! What a strange feeling, utterly queer, as if the entire world were filled with the blackest of oil and then in a single moment cleared away into transparency. My mother gone, my brother (thank the Nixen!) gone, and now, I am free, I live, I dance,—

(*The shaking of the stage increases in intensity.*)

I am made to tremble by the force of powers beyond my sight—what incredible shaking! What reckoning has descended upon this pond? The gravel separates from the sand, and my very soul is sifted through. How serene is the silence, the complete and total silence that follows each quake, before the seeds of the next tremor begin to make themselves seen! Yes, run, Rolf, run, Mutti, for I understand

now, I see the world for what it is for the first time! My happiness is beyond measure!

(The shaking of the stage stops, and HANS, remaining offstage, begins to speak in a booming voice.)

HANS. This water is gross! It's all green!

(Pause.)

LIESL. Did I just hear correctly?

HANS. Everything's so slimy! What disgusting creatures could possibly live in here?

LIESL *(fuming)*. Who said that?!

(HANS jumps in surprise. The entire stage shakes.)

HANS *(frightened)*. Who's there? Show yourself!

LIESL. Who's there, is it? Who's there is the disgusting creature that you so haughtily identified just one moment ago!

HANS. Is that coming from inside the pond? Is there a woman in there, God forbid?

LIESL. Yes, a woman! And quite an insulted one!

HANS. What woe! Are you drowning? I'll come help you right now!

(HANS jumps into the pool looking for the voice. The stage shakes, and HANS dives onstage from stage right.)

Where are you?

LIESL. Have you no eyes? I'm right here.

(HANS looks around, blankly.)

Here, you clownfish!

HANS. Am I dreaming? Is that a sardine talking to me?

LIESL. Well, is that a bottom feeder talking to me?

HANS. But this is impossible! How can animals talk!

LIESL. You're talking right now, aren't you?

(*Pause.*)

Unfortunately.

HANS (*aside, in disbelief*). Wow! Not just an animal that talks but one that sounds like my father!

LIESL. So you were the one causing all of the quaking!

HANS. Quaking?

(*LIESL imitates the quaking sounds.*)

Dear God, what are you doing, are you okay? (*HANS rushes over to help LIESL.*)

LIESL. Get your paws off of me! Where did you come from? What is your business here?

HANS. I've never been to this pond before.

LIESL. I extend my sincerest welcome to you. Now, what is your business here?

HANS. I... I don't have business here. I just needed to get away.

LIESL. From what? Are you a criminal?

HANS. What? No, I—

LIESL. Don't try to deny it. Oh! I know now!

HANS. Know what?

LIESL. I know, you killed someone—I can see everything clearly! A devious trick with fatal consequences! The victim, they were making venomous comments concerning your (what does one call it?) hair, and after they went home, in a fit of rage, you planted mousetraps outside of their door, but what you hadn't foreseen, is that the mousetrap would infect them with the scourge of tetanus, thereby—

HANS. Stop! You're crazy! You're insane! There's been nothing of the sort! Besides, what's the matter with my hair?

LIESL. I'm crazy! Who's the one talking to a fish right now? Your heart is filled with impure intentions. I can see it in your eyes.

HANS. Liar!

LIESL. Then what, exactly? Care to correct me?

HANS. How can you even see my face? This water is disgusting.

LIESL. If you don't like it, you may leave.

HANS. Fine!

LIESL. Excellent!

(Neither HANS nor LIESL move.)

Well?

HANS. No, I can't... I can't go back. I can't. (*He starts tearing up.*)

LIESL (*mockingly*). I can't, I can't! What's your name?

HANS. Hans.

LIESL. My name is Hans, and I'm a dirty criminal! O pity me, inferior species!

HANS. Quit it. Besides I never said you were inferior.

LIESL. No, you didn't say it; you only believe it.

HANS. Why are you being so cruel to me? Can't you see that my heart is filled with sorrow?

(Long silence.)

It's my mother.

LIESL. What?

HANS. My mother's drinking again.

LIESL. Drinking what?

HANS. She's a monster when she drinks. And my father is too weak to do anything about it. Blessed be the meek.

LIESL. Father? What's that?

HANS. What?

LIESL. What's a father?

HANS. You must be joking. Don't you have a father?

LIESL. Just a mother.

HANS. I'm sorry.

LIESL. What is there to be sorry about? I've never needed a father before. Yours doesn't sound

pleasant.

HANS. My father is a good man!

LIESL. That doesn't sound like how you described him earlier.

HANS. He's just too kind sometimes. But he is honorable and virtuous, and there is no one in this world that I love more.

LIESL. Than me? How kind of you.

But tell me, what does the world look like out there?

HANS. Out where?

LIESL. Outside this pond. I've never seen anything out there before.

HANS. And what's your name?

LIESL. It's... Liesl. But tell me, please.

HANS. I ran past it all in such a haze... let me look now. Oh God, my clothes are heavy with water. And I must wipe away these petty tears. It's miraculous, the same ancient trees I've always seen before—when I look at them now, they're more beautiful than anything I've ever seen in my life.

LIESL. But how?

HANS. They're chivalrous warriors whose branches hold up dark, cloaked spears. They stand tall knowing that they shall never be conquered, nor their homeland, nor their pride. They sway and laugh in the wind with unabashed joy, celebrating all that is good and wonderful and bountiful in life, holding fast with their roots to the undying Earth.

LIESL. But the sky! What of the sky?

HANS. The sky... its clouds are the thick, grey beard of a poet who has seen, written, performed everything. With titanic grace, it laughs at our tiny, quotidian lives and in the next moment bathes in

the most serene silence. But then! Then out comes the Sun, the burning heart of the poet, eternally young. How quickly the entire landscape changes when it shows its face! For one fleeting moment, all there is is brightness, opulence, regality; in that moment, the heart reigns, it reigns above all else!

LIESL. But the animals, tell me of the animals!

HANS. There, there, an alpine swift soaring! With one gallant swipe of the beak, it swoops, catches, and devours a spider in the blink of an eye, and then—there, a squirrel scurries up the bark of a tree, chasing after another in a wild frenzy! And under my feet, the earthworms crawl. Down, they burrow, burrow, away from harm, and make their home.

LIESL. O take me, let me see it! Let me see everything that you're seeing, live through everything that you're living—

HANS. I'm running away from the life that I'm living—

LIESL. And, and feel all of the wonder and splendor of the world! Take me in your hands!

HANS. But—

LIESL. Please, I've never left this pond in my life, it suffocates me! I must, I must escape this paltry muck; don't withhold the beauty of the world from me!

(HANS cups his hands, LIESL swims into them, and HANS raises his hands out of the water. LIESL's eyes widen and then she suddenly begins gasping and flailing in search of water.)

HANS. Liesl! Liesl!

(HANS uncups his hands, and LIESL's body drops back into the pool. She flops, then stops moving, belly up.)

HANS. Liesl! I'm sorry, Liesl, I'm sorry! Are you okay? You're not moving, I'm so sorry! *(HANS begins crying again.)*

LIESL *(coughing)*. Why...

HANS. Liesl!

LIESL (*continuing to cough*). Why did you put me back?

HANS. You were dying!

LIESL. For the first time in a long time—no, for the first time in my life, in those few moments... I was free! (*Fixated on that word*) Free!

HANS. You foolish fish, you were dying!

LIESL. Go!

HANS. What?

LIESL. You heard me, leave! Now!

(*HANS scrambles stage right.*)

HANS (*aside*): My clothes really are wet all over. It's absolutely disgusting. I've been the true fool! Talking to a fish, telling it the tale of my life, as if it would listen, as if it could help, as if this fish would give me all of the answers I've been looking for! But the answers to what? What are the questions? To whom do I owe a response? My mother must be waiting for me. I know she will be angry at me for running away when I come home. Why do I keep coming home? Why do I subject myself of my own accord to more and more agony? But what's the alternative, to wander around this forest in the darkness looking for something whose nature I haven't even the slightest grasp of? Shall I go about asking the deer next? Or the grass that they chew perhaps? Is it loneliness I'm trying and failing to evade? That deep dark feeling of isolation inside me. Inside my gut. Could it be? Could it be that behind it all, all this vanity, is a faint hope that by addressing all my pains to a captive audience in a sublime and flighty monologue, the anguish could be made to finally and irrevocably dissolve, and I too could become at peace? But where to start with it all, the years that fly through my memory's eye, one image after the other. Familiar objects, sounds, turns of phrase, I have all of these keys on my keyring. Which one fits in which lock? It's dark now. I can barely make out the path I took. My footsteps are just faint indentations in the grass now. (*HANS reaches down and touches his footsteps.*) But that's what I must start with, going home.

(HANS walks to the edge of the stage, pauses, turns again towards the audience, takes a low silent bow, and exits.)

LIESL *(getting up)*. He was right, I am a fool. I know now. To escape, it's not enough to know that you want to leave. You have to know where you want to go too. But I don't see where to go. At night, all I see is a long dark corridor which keeps going, going, going...

(MARIE enters with ROLF, stage left.)

MARIE. Liesl! Are you okay? Liesl! *(No answer.)* Liesl, don't you ever run off like that again! You look okay, I'm glad. Liesl, can you hear me? Look, Liesl, I brought you the flowers. From Wilhelm. They fell and scattered when all of the quaking started. But I picked them up and reorganized them for you. Aren't they beautiful?

LIESL. I have to go, Mutti.

MARIE. What? What do you mean?

LIESL *(exiting stage left)*. I have to go.

ROLF *(rushing after her)*. Liesl! I'm sorry!

MARIE *(swimming after them both)*. Liesl, not again! *(Aside to audience)* The life of a sardine is hard. *(Exits.)*

SCENE II.

(This scene follows the previous scene with no break, although around forty years have passed. SARDINES fill the stage and swim about. After a while, OLDER HANS wades into the pool from stage right, causing SARDINES to rush around chaotically, gradually exiting stage left.)

OLDER HANS. Those sparkling lights! Could my mind have deceived me? In broad daylight, no less. A faerie seems to have guided me into these waters. Whether a well-intentioned or a mischievous one, only time can tell. Something is very familiar about these strangely brackish waters, with scum the color of imperial jade. It tickles something vaguely in the very rear of my memory, as a wine glass hums when it hears the right tune. No, no, the fog thickens in my head. I must sing it away.

The Fascination of the Pool

By Izzy Weiss

it stares back, it looks it looks it looks
i stare down, i look i look i look
and it slips through my fingers, it falls it falls it falls
and i slip through its body, i fall i fall i fall
and i breathe in its tears
and it breathes in mine
and i lose myself to it
it lost in time

it swallows me whole, it takes it takes it takes
i swallow its water, i take i take i take
and it floods my mind, it fills it fills it fills
and i flood its depths, i fill i fill i fill
and i open its eyes
and it opens mine
and i lose myself to it
it lost in time

The Fascination of the Pool
By Max Weiss

I have more in common with my dad than I'd like to think.

The thought comes to me, unbidden, on my slow trek around the pool. For the last twenty minutes, I've been taking small, shuffling steps around this thin slab of concrete, complying with the boring but necessary task of keeping my circulation up without raising my blood pressure in the week after having surgery. In my mind's eye, in the same sad orbit that I'm making, I see my dad walking, thick-calved and farmer-tanned. He laps me, and I see the flash of his beat-up New Balances and basketball shorts, his strides springy and efficient.

I stop in the one spot of shade left in the midday sun. I bring two fingers to my throat, feeling the gentle thrum, watching my dad, arms pumping, continue to walk. He stops, too, across from me, and sits with his feet in the water. An enviable position-- I want to do the same, but I'm not sure I'd be able to haul myself to standing again. I feel his eyes on me, and start walking again.

I wonder, at times like this, which one of us is a reflection of the other.

This path, it's true, is one that he blazed. His insistence to build a pool, his laps around it in the hot summer when the road's asphalt proved untenable, him, the path's roadblock, set in a beige reclining beach chair. And yet I know it was my own jogs down blistering streets that made him take up these laps again. The camaraderie of physicality undergirded by the peculiar jealousy the old feel towards the young.

I feel old myself today. Twenty-two, with lungs made ancient and tight by the stiff fabric of a surgical vest, legs uncertain from their stay in a hospital bed. I see myself, grey and wrinkled, hunched over a cane. Tottering. My dad laps me again.

His father, my grandfather, did not live to see himself aged. Raced to the grave by chronic depression and a pack-a-day habit, he was dead before sixty. In the glint of the water, I see the three of us reflected, each in bed in the long dark hours of the afternoon. Not asleep. Not really awake, either. Trapped in the chemistry of the brain and an ancestral penchant towards despair in moments of inaction. The water ripples softly in the breeze and the image distorts, or finds clarity, *him-me-them-us*, before falling away.

In the same breath, he's there on the path, too. I have never seen my grandfather at this house before, though my sister purports to have smelled his cigarettes in the early hours of the morning. He stands opposite my father, and the two regard each other across oceanic fathoms. I find myself frozen, observing. One gaunt chest, one gold crucifix, one lit Marlborough in a smoke-weathered hand. My father, broad-shouldered, profoundly atheist, devout non-smoker. Our three sets of bare arms, densely freckled, sparsely haired, immobile. As one, we begin to walk again. This time, my dad does not lap me.

The Fascination of the Pool

By Alan Zhang



“Diving”



“Drowning”



“Pooling”

The Fascination of the Pool

By Anonymous

The pool was fascinating
The pool was interesting
The pool was very fascinating
The pool was very interesting

Water, blue, water
Water, rippling, water

The pool was fascinating
The pool was interesting
The pool was very fascinating
The pool was very interesting

Fascinating.