

God Water

Lane Kareska

Angela sits naked on the edge of the diving board, twelve feet above the water. It's late. She tells me about the time her older sister killed herself. I listen and act compassionate. My erection is equally compassionate. She speaks with her hands, sculpting the story out of the thick air. She's nineteen, and I'm sixteen.

I sit next to her on the board, both of my white legs over one side. The country club, now closed, looks freshly dead. We're trespassers. The moon burns skull-white and the pool water shimmers. I try to light a soggy cigarette while Angela talks. She misses her sister. She's vague about the suicide details.

"We used to sit on the porch for hours just talking. We'd talk about God and cheerleading." Her eyes fix on the water below. She mouths her dead sister's name: Mary.

There are questions I should ask and ways I should behave right now. Someone sixteen-years-old should be asking the naked girl next to him if she has a boyfriend, what kind of music she likes, which sports she plays. I'm not doing any of that. My head bobs with the rhythm of what she says, like I'm constantly agreeing with each syllable and breath. Angela's hair is wet and still. Strands cling to her face in dark loops. I shiver. Again, I try with the cigarette. My fingers are wet and the paper begins to unravel.

"The whole day was dark. It started raining an hour after she left the house." Angela blinks. "When the police came over, one of the officers was shaking. He didn't come in. He wouldn't even look up. He just stood in the doorway with the rain falling behind him."

My lighter snaps and sparks.

"It was like she just turned herself off. Just stopped."

Holy people do that. Like those foreign monks who light themselves

on fire but feel nothing, they sit and crumble.

The cigarette catches, I inhale and feel better. The smoke spreads in my chest like a fist uncurling five long, dark fingers. I drag and narrow my mouth and point the smoke at the moon. The smoke billows in the air, pulses blue, disperses. Angela looks up at me for the first time in an hour. Her blue eyes narrow until they seem lioness in shape and intent. I'm caught. Angela just looked up from her history and found me not caring. She has found me naked and hard, smoking the dampest cigarette and looking only to involve our bodies.

Now she's thinking about herself, not the dead sister. She's not thinking about me. She stands and I watch the cold water run down her shape. The diving board bows.

"Angela?"

She folds down then lifts up into the air and pounces perfectly with both feet on the sweet spot, dipping low. Angela springs out into the void. She tucks into a one-and-a-half. Her body blades and cuts into the water. The physics of her bounce casts me from the board. The tobacco scatters in the air and I fall.

I land hard on the side of my head into cold, chlorinated water. There is no splash, just the hard smack of my skin against the water. "Pancaking" they call it. I'm briefly blind and embarrassed because somewhere in this water, Angela swims. And if she ever looks up, all she'll see is me, naked and kicking.