

Rock-a-Hoola

by Beth Thomas

My cousin Marci wears makeup to the Rock-a-Hoola water park and then refuses to get in the water. She wears a green and pink bikini and walks real slow, poking her chest out so people will notice her. Past the wave pool, the arcade, the big slide, she finds an empty spot in the middle of everything. She spreads out a towel and makes a big show of rubbing tanning oil on her shoulders.

I say, That cloud looks like a bird, doesn't it? She says, Shush, don't embarrass me. We close our eyes and lie there like that for a long time.

Marci has been staying with us for a while. To give her dad a break, my mom says. We used to play basketball and wind up the tire swing and then let go and spin until we almost threw up. But now all she does is put on makeup, curl her hair, test out my mother's perfumes. My mom tells me to leave her be.

Someone says, "Marci." I recognize the boy from the newspaper, he's a tenth-grader on the varsity basketball team. Marci stands up and he grabs her hands and holds them, whispers to her. She blushes and yanks her hands away. He walks away laughing.

Come on, she says, and grabs my hand and pulls me up and away, past our towels, past boys playing volleyball and little kids struggling with their rafts. She bites her lip until it turns white.

Behind the snack bar, she lights a cigarette with a pink lighter and even though she doesn't offer it to me I know that this is a big deal, letting me watch. She inhales, exhales looking up at the sky. She says the night her mother died, a bird flew in the house through an open window. It flew out again a few minutes later. She says, Really, how often does that happen?

