

Swimming Lessons

by Brian Michael Barbeito

He came up from under the water and looked at us. I asked, Whatcha doin' here? Then he said he was going for a swim because the water was warm.

Mickey and I looked at each other.

He is going for a swim because the water is warm, I told Mickey.

Then his friend came peeking a head over the fence and said, Lets go.

The police came past and then took a walk over to the party. We followed down a summit, across a patch of blackness which I had never traversed during that hour. It was an area where not even a hint of electric light or moon brightness reached. Though it was for obvious reasons different than the day, it seemed more foreign than a place simply devoid of light should appear. It felt like something else was happening all around.

We went up the hill on the other side to where it was loud and confused because of music and a crowd of people. The one in the wet bathing suit said to the officers, You better not step on my property and you better also leave, cause you are interrupting our party.

A dog that belonged to a friend walked onto their lawn and one of them said he was going to kill the dog. Mickey said in a calm voice, If you kill the dog, then right after that I am going to kill you.

The cops stepped between them. Mickey called the guy that threatened the dog a low-life, and the guy said that Mickey was the low-life.

Do something, Mickey said to the officers.

But the officers left without doing much of anything at all.

We went back over our way and loaded a rifle. We sat quietly in lawn chairs. We decided that if they came back they would get one warning shot into the air, and the second shot would be a try for a foot or leg.

We waited.

Mickey was chomping at the bit, hoping for them to come back. I didn't know either way, but would have supported Mickey in any decision. He was much older and I had no other real anchor in the world. It would take a lifetime, if it could happen at all, for me to see him as anything other than all-knowing.

Sometimes, though it was a peculiar thought, a notion that I knew in fact to be nonsensical, I wondered how the larger world functioned at all without Mickey's help, advice, and most of all, his action.

We had never troubled trouble until trouble troubled us. But when it had we acted. We had run a few cars off the road and things like that. This was the first time we might end up killing someone though. I figured it would be okay to seriously harm one of them because there were so many of them. Upwards of fifteen of them, and two of us. Our friend with the dog had opted out. He was an electrician, and they weren't too much for that sort of thing I guessed. Besides, the dog belonged to him, and maybe he was worried about that. Nobody is perfect, but that dog was close to it, roaming all around, always curious, always searching for small adventures. It was a friend to all and a good solid friend at that.

The night rolled on. Their music boomed across the ravine. It is an incredible thing how many people think everyone else should have the opportunity to listen to loud music. And it is usually bad music. A thesis paper for a social scientist, that. Someone should study the whys of that dynamic. So, blared and blared it did, and I couldn't imagine how their immediate neighbors felt.

The hours went on and I grew to understand that there was something besides the regular darkness of the night. It was difficult to name, but it was there and all around. It waited in the water and it waited in the trees. It was in the black railings and the wood of the balcony above. Even and all around the plum and cherry trees it lived and I thought it must also be in low things like the rebar and limestone. By keenly and honestly looking, I was surprised to see that it also came from the firmament and beyond it. The thing was, in fact, when sensed and investigated with clarity, inseparable from

other things, in that it swam through all and everything. As the hours stretched out even longer, I began to sense that this was not a new thing, but an ancient thing. It was, I felt then, only my awareness of the thing that was new.

The swimmers didn't show.

A dawn I thought might never fully come to term somehow began to birth itself.

Mickey put the gun away.

We would have to wait until another day to get a bad guy.

I wondered if we were really made for the suburbs.

The morning quelled the night with its brilliant summer star.

