

I Like it This Way

by Tina Barry

We stepped slowly into the chill of the moss green lake. Me first. I held my sister's hand. The sun beat hot halos on our hair. We attempted a whirlpool: our feet thumped the sludgy water's bottom, first one circle, then another as if our small bodies could churn the wide expanse of lake. The murmured conversation of adults, snippets of gossip spoken carelessly: "She didn't!" "You saw them?" Laughter, sharp and bright, bounced off the water. We glided around a small curve shaded by a willow. Through its branches we saw a couple. Teenagers, narrow and pale, two young birch trees, their roots twisted, submerged in the water. With a single toss the boy's hair fell flat and tight against his head. The girl faced him, her head tilted back. His hands pressed hers against the damp lip of the lake. As his mouth moved down her neck, she emitted a low-frequency hum of pleasure. The boy yanked up the girl's top exposing one breast. Before he put it in his mouth, the nipple was pale and plump. After: a knot tight and red.

We tittered: me with excitement, my sister with fear. They turned toward us, startled, their moment broken. Their expressions mimicked ours: two big-eyed, nosy owls. "Beat it!" the boy said, splashing us before they swam around a bend.

Sometimes, when I remember that day, I leave my sister out. Her fear is a distraction. I close my eyes and linger on the path from the girl's neck to the moment when his mouth finds her breast, and I pause the picture right there.

