

The Lake

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This girl I hardly knew, taller than I was
and skinny, who made us boys
puff ourselves up and show off how far
we could throw rocks, or how many times
we could skip stones across the choppy water;
this awkward kid I'd never really spoken to
asked me one afternoon to swim across the lake with her.
We were sitting on the dock. It was chilly, but I said
I would do it, though the other side was hazy — almost
out of sight — and it would take us until dark
to make it there and back. So we dove in and started off
slowly. As we swam, mostly breast stroke, she talked
about the lake, how old it was, what sorts of creatures
lived there now, how it had changed
over its lifetime, the depth of its ice
in winter, how the fish huddled down on the bottom
between the ice and mud. And then she asked me
what I knew, and I had to say, *Nothing in particular*.
And then, despite myself, I made up a story
about the stars: I heard myself singing a song
I made up as I sang, about the constellations,
and soon she was singing with me. We reached
the middle of the lake, out of breath but singing,
and realized the other side was too far. We treaded
water there, then turned and headed back, quiet now.
We were tired. We climbed out and walked our separate ways
home through the dusk light to our families
in silence. No goodbyes. And we never spoke again.