**Night Swimming**

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The day Jane was not in school

my mom met me at the bus stop

held my nine-year old hand

and explained that Jane’s mom had died

when a blood vessel burst

after a very bad headache.

The next summer

I went with Jane and her dad

to their cottage on a lake.

She and I got this crazy idea

to go night swimming

so we went to ask her dad

and found him in the basement

watching old 8 mm films

in his pajamas

staring at a wobbly portable screen

at his dead wife waving to him

next to a silent, crashing

Niagara Falls.

Jane asked him if it would be ok

if we went swimming.

But his eyes never left the screen

and he said nothing.

Thinking maybe he hadn’t heard

I started to repeat the question

but stopped when I saw the tears

streaming down his cheeks.

Jane said come on let's go.

I wanted to say something to him

but what could I say? Jane said

come on let's just go.

Outside

we ran and leaped off

the rickety wood dock

and into the black water

in our satin skin

slithering like eels

just above and just below the surface

creating eddies that met

then turned and faded away

our giggles echoing all around

until we grew cold

and pulled our knees to our chests

in an upright fetal position

fraternal twins bobbing

in this wide wet womb.

Then separating

to swim a bit longer

we flailed our arms and legs

digging into the surface until

tired and breathing heavy

Jane rolled onto her back

and pointed up at the big dipper.

Growing terrified of what lurked below

and in awe of the great mystery above

I swam to her side trying to float

somewhere between.

I showed her how to use the bowl of the big dipper

as a guide to find the little dipper—

how the little dipper flowed out of

and away from the big dipper

like a child

but with a mom that would always be

right there.

She reached out

found my hand in the water

and held it tight.

It was quiet

except for the sound of small waves

gently lapping at the dock

the wind moving through the pines

and the great horned owl that cried hoo—

who

shall watch over this one?