Lakes I Won't Swim In

Breanne LeJeune

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wake up one day in a Super 8 in Skokie, Illinois on a business trip for Amway, just shy of nine months together; Sentrina, fifty-nine, who fell into a diabetic coma the night of their honeymoon in Traverse City and passed two days later, a record for Howard. Finally, he found Estie. Estie the survivor, the overcomer, the envoy. Estie, the one that would provide children after all these years and who would make his coffee, bleach his underwear, clean his john, wear the occasional Avon perfume. Estie, the one he'd been waiting for to make it all happen for him, now dead like the rest, almost one year to the day.

160. I HAVE NEVER FELT BETTER IN MY ENTIRE LIFE THAN I DO RIGHT NOW. [Y] [N]

He'd answered yes, of course. He had an alive wife with two alive babies inside her that he'd be able to hold and hug and buy teddy bears for and they'd, at least, call him by his first name, if not something close to dad. He was eating three squares a day, sleeping well, doing fine for the first time ever. Asked the same question now, he would've answered no-way-in-hell. He felt like a horrible failure.

Swallow a months worth of Angina pills with some Dixie-Doo Whiskey, hang yourself with a shower cord, volleyball net, guitar string. Howard heard crunching snow, coughs, footsteps. Boots on broken glass. A signal he would live. A signal he might make it to Estie. A hand wiped the snow from the window slowly, as to not knock any broken shards. Howard could make out red and blue lights behind the hand, the strong yellow from the front guiding the police officers, the EMT's, the on-lookers, path.

"Can you hear me? Don't move. Can you speak? Do you know who you are?"

His spine was sore, he began to doze off. "Sure" came out a little lower, a little slower than before.

"He's alive, let's get 'em outta here," he heard the middle-aged man tell the other pairs of boots on glass.

Howard had even failed at dying.

Sentrina Carlson, the ex-wife of Reverend Marcus Carlson. Reverend Carlson left his family—his wife and his son, not hers—for a transgendered alternative lifestyle that neither she nor Howard understood. He was up for "corrective" surgery to make him Marilyn in France when she passed.
in the deepest most dark part of the lagoon
with its teeth bore into my head,
my eyeballs punctured and lopsided,
and my cheekbones visible through my skin
like a bra, through a cheap
torn shirt.

Our lake Silver Lake because of the time dad caught a log by the island
in the yellow boat
and it snagged so hard like a whale was on there
and I thought a whale was on there.
Also because of the dreams that started shortly thereafter—
the shark and large mammal parades in between the island and our
beach,
loud joyous musical celebration parades
that left me utterly terrified
that a whale shark was
and is
living in the shadows, underneath our raft.

Margaret stood frozen before the dead cat. She didn't know what would
happen next. She inched forward to it, afraid, as if a switch may go off
and it would spring back to and claw off her face. She crept to it, stooped,
stuck out one solitary finger and poked it. Nothing. It was dead. She backed
away. The French had murdered Cakes. What kind of sick people come look
at someone's house and while they're there, murder the cat? And to stick its
own leg down its throat. Those sick, sick French!

She called Steve. He told her he didn't know what to tell her. She went
to the kitchen and called the realtor. The audacity they had to leave the card
behind.
The realtor said they had also found the cat like that. She said it was a
little disturbing.
"You're lying!" Margaret answered back, a bit surprised at her own harsh-
ness. Her voice began to quiver just a touch. "Cakes was fine when I left," her
voice disintegrating further. "She was just fine."
"I'm sorry," the realtor said. "I really am, but that's how we found it."
"That cat was murdered and you know it!"
The realtor hung up. Margaret’s tears were full blown now. She called
Julia.
"Hi Mom," she answered.
"Julia, it's your mother," she said, crying still.
"Mom, I know." Margaret was overwhelmed. She sobbed into the phone.
"Mom, what's wrong?"
"Cakes is dead," she said, composing herself slightly.
"Cakes is dead?"
"She was murdered."
"What? Murdered? What's going on?"
"A French couple came to see the house today and when I came back she
was dead. They killed her," Margaret said, now composed and speaking mat-
ter-of-factly.
"What? How do you know?"
"They stuck her leg down her throat."
"What?"