

Island in a Lake on an Island in a Lake on an Island

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The illegality of the scene
doesn't strike me –

knees scraped raw on the clay-covered rocks
bikini string sticking to his chest
my unrehearsed hips inch
up and down, forward and back
like a cheat code I'm practicing.

Any family on a pleasant walk around the lake
could spot us, hedonistic lizards
splayed out in the sun. Children's laughter
pings off hot slabs of rock

carries over the roaring waterfall;
it mingles in the muddy pool below
indistinguishable from sediment.

I am caught between a rock and a hard place
eyes snagged like fishnet on his stubbled chin
the ink rendering of an eagle
encircling his navel. I picture it swooping through the thick
July heat, plucking me
off this stranger, claws fastened to my scapula
to devour me in a faraway nest. He says something that makes my mouth open.
I feel like a mouse or a phoenix.

Back on the shore, I rinse
orange clay and blood off my legs
and hearing his benthic snores
I slip off my bottoms and wash them too,
the water slimy and metallic. I am ageless and burnt clean.
For now, I don't think
about the eroded skin
on my knees, how I will explain this to my mother
as a hiking accident, how they will burn
and sting in the shower, take days to form scabs
and months to heal (because knee-skin is always being stretched)
only to leave stubborn scars that no amount of vitamin E oil
will fade. In the coming weeks
the knees become a joke
a testament to my desire, my lack
of self-preservation and awareness.
The stranger becomes equally strange but familiar.

I climb up to the waterfall
and its heady plunge drowns out sound. We both knew how this day would go

long before we hatched
 a plot to swim, before a movie-like exchange –
all sidelong glances and wit – was teased
 out of electric-shade, before I asked
 how old he was, and he didn't
and when he grabs my wrist, pulling me
 down from the precarious ledge
moss-wet and slippery, down
 into the vortex of his damp chest
some law of attraction at play
in the interstitial voids of breath,
 his mouth a current against mine,
I have already known this to happen:
 the inevitability of gravity and potential of empty space.