

Pulled

By Leslie Amminson

I dangle my feet over the edge of the wharf, tentatively.

“Minnie!”

My brother calls me further into the water, and I can’t help but break into a nervous smile. He looks so silly with his uncut black bangs dangling in front of his eyes, soaked from the river that he has plunged into.

He was always the strong swimmer, and the braver of the two of us. He and our neighbours, Christine and Jack, are already swimming around in the icy September current, splashing and dunking each other’s head underwater.

At last Marty swims over to me, puts his hands on my ankles and tugs gently.

“Come on, sister” he says playfully, a sly smile slipping over his face. I sigh and smirk at him, still shaking from the cold and, embarrassingly enough, from my nerves, “you know it’ll only be harder if you go slowly.”

He tugs a little harder. I hold my breath and let him pull me into the water, my long black hair flying out in all directions away from me. My body makes a big splash and we scream and laugh. Everything disappears then, there is no fear and nothing else in the world matters.

I don't open my eyes underwater anymore, but when I do I swear I can see the shadow of a dark slippery creature. Sometimes I feel its icy stare, and I rush to lift my head above the water and away from the unknown. I never wanted to lose these moments. But they slip quietly away, as if into the current.

We lie on our backs on the cool wooden wharf, and the air feels almost warm in comparison to the river's current. I glance over at Christine. A cigarette dangles from the edge of her mouth and her blonde hair is effortlessly beautiful even when it's soaked. My brother is kicking a ball around with Jack behind us. Their laughs and taunts seem distant in the haze that follows a dip in the pond. I take a breath. Christine blows smoke rings.

In bed at night I dream of slippery sea women, clutching at my ankles. I scream but the water fills my lungs and I am pulled deeper into the abyss. I awake in a cold sweat, as if the water has attached itself to me even though the dream has ended.

A hot shower calms me down. I cannot remember the faces of the sea women, but their bodies are covered in colourful patterns, of turquoise and deep blue, and each one has hair long and dark like mine, though I can see the blue tint on theirs as though the sea has embedded itself in them. Though dawn has barely raised its head, I don't try to lull my mind back to sleep. I make a cup of coffee for myself and stand outside on the front porch groggily. A shiver slips itself coolly down my back. In my mind I hear my father's voice saying I'll catch my death out here. It makes me smile now. His words evaporate into the wind.

My little collie ambles out of the door and circles me eagerly. He has big brown eyes and has no trouble using them to get what he wants, so it doesn't take much to convince me. We start walking off towards the woods, Storm leading the way in bounds of excitement. He is getting old but you can't slow him down.

The woods are quiet and calm. I catch sight of purple and white crocuses and smile knowingly.

I know Jack is there when I see the purple petals turning up unexpectedly. I smile to myself and glance among the tall sturdy trees.

"I know you're there!" I say, and close my eyes, inviting him. He rushes out of the trees and throws his arms around me, lifting me up, and I am laughing. Suddenly we are kissing and we are on the forest floor, holding each other.

I stand up and whistle for Storm. The wind is howling now and it seems as though a squall might be coming. The wind is whispering and I cover my ears against it. The dog lopes over to me and we take off back towards the cabin.

At home I seal all the windows shut and firmly tighten the locks on the doors. The rain is falling now, blowing around fiercely and taking its orders from the wind that comes off the coast. I hate storms, so I move upstairs to lock myself in the bedroom.

I undress.

I long to change my appearance. I wish I were taller and that my cheeks were fuller. I wish I had nice long legs and beautiful eyes.

I look in the mirror. I am wrinkled and my body has lost its natural, youthful beauty. One time I longed to change it, and now I wish for it to return to what it was. I search for my black strands in the grey that now frames my face. I search for the rosy cheeks I once had, the eyes that lit up when I was laughing.

I feel like time is pulling at my ankles, pulling me down into the unknown. I might not resist it if I knew they were there. There is nothing left for me here.

I put on my raincoat and my boots. I pry the door open, the same one I had shut tightly moments ago to lock myself in. The wind is howling again, pushing so hard that I'm not sure I can even open the door. My grey hair flies out around me. I tighten my jacket against the wind and head for the river.