

The Swimming pool

The girl walked listlessly through the olive grove, following her long shadow up the hill.

Her sun-bleached hair, deep tan, white t-shirt and shorts gave the impression of a surfer girl, but she carried no surfboard, just a towel; and a well-thumbed copy of Paper Moon.

She saw the tall trees ahead, the last of the sunlight still lighting their very tips like candles on an altar. Behind them, hid the house.

By the time she would get there, she knew, it'd almost be dark. But just as hot.

She found the hole in the fence, crept through into the cover of the trees and watched for movement. The manicured garden was deserted. Only one room in the modern house was lit. Just like yesterday.

The pool area was dimly lit by solar lamps just bright enough for her to read by. She walked out of the shadows and dropped her towel and book on the chaise nearest the pool house, then pulled off her t-shirt and shorts, leaving only her knickers.

She smiled as she slipped silently into the cool, fresh water.

She had been floating on her back for a while when she heard a banging from inside the house. She smiled briefly, but then frowned and spun on to her front, swimming to the edge closest to the house where she could hide. She peered over the edge and saw movement. The door was opening. The deck lighting turned on. A guy walked out, carrying a hammer and chisel. He was good looking, (about the same age as her, maybe early twenties) but the hammer made him menacing. He stood and surveyed the area. Could he see her towel and book on the chaise? He looked at the water, then took off his shirt and pants and walked towards the pool. She submerged herself and watched for his silhouette. It appeared above her and stopped. A hand plunged into the water and seized her arm, but she broke free and swam into the centre of the pool where she surfaced.

"What the fuck?" he said, circling the pool.

"Sorry, sorry, let me get my stuff and I'll go," she said, constantly paddling away from him.

"No. You're not going anywhere." He ran and dived straight towards her. She kicked at him, but missed and he grabbed her round the waist. She squirmed, jabbing him with her elbow, until he let go of her. But then he caught her again and they struggled, pulling them both under. They sunk to the bottom and had to release each other to swim to the top and get some air, before the tussling would begin again, repeating the same sequence. Coming up for air again, she laughed and then he did too.

She swam to the shallow end and pulled herself out, but he grabbed her again and pulled her back in. He pinned her arms to her side and they stared at each other, exhausted. But then she kissed him, and he kissed her back. Their naked bodies glistened in the pool lights as they did a different kind of grappling.

"You're not the owner, so why are you here?" she asked between kisses.

"I'm doing some work for him while he's away," he said, "what about you?"

"It's the only pool for miles."

He laughed and kissed her,

"That's not a reason. A reason would be 'I'm sneaking in for a swim'; or 'He's my dad, I live here'; or 'He's my lover', though that'd be gross."

She laughed and rolled her eyes,

"Yeah, that'd be gross."

She shut her eyes and smiled then said,

"I live down the hill in Città, where it's hot and sweaty and everyone stinks and I just wanted to get away and cool down for a while, okay? It's not the first time, and it won't be the last." He smiled and nodded and they continued kissing.

"I've got to go," she said as she climbed off him, "my dad will be waiting."
She dried off, put her shirt and shorts on, rolled her towel around her book, and walked into the trees,
"See you again?"

As the sun went down the girl walked into the garden and across to the pool. The guy was sitting on a chaise by the pool house, this time in swimming shorts. She waved to him and dived into the water, fully clothed.

Once she was cool, she got out and sat astride him. She kissed him and pressed her wet t-shirt against him.

"I'm hungry," she said, while squirming on top of him, "can I go make a sandwich?" she could feel something going on under his shorts.

"Er," he said, slightly distracted, "I'll make you one. I think he's got ham, or cheddar, or tuna?"

"Tuna," she said, "semi-toasted, with salad and Hellman's," speeding up her gyrations.

"Semi-toasted?"

"Stuff two pieces into the toaster, so they each get brown on only one side—"

He kind of froze beneath her and looked intently at the stars.

When he'd gone inside, she waited a minute, then followed. The house was quiet, except for the kitchen, so she wandered from room to room. In a library, she found his hammer and chisel on the floor by a large safe. She realised the significance and ran, but he was standing in her way and hugged her to him. They struggled for a moment before she gave up.

"So you're not working for the owner?"

"No."

They rubbed against each other.

"You're a burglar."

"Yes."

"Not a very good one, apparently."

"No. It's my first time."

"What's inside there?"

"Valuables, cash, papers . . ."

"And why aren't you worried that he's about to return?"

"I know he's away. His Bentley is parked at the airport."

They gyrated like they were dancing, but without any sound.

"And there's a sensor on the drive which rings if a car approaches."

She nodded and they kissed again, then parted.

"I want in," she said, picking up the hammer, "but we can do better than this."

She looked around the room.

"What do you bet he wrote the combination down somewhere? He's that much of a fool."

"How would you know that?" he asked.

"Er, because I've been swimming in his pool for years and he'd see me and chase me and shout at me and shoot at me and... he always came across as a fool. All the kids in Città call him the fool on the hill."

"Really."

"Yeah, listen, I've got to go now; my mum's not well. But can I help you tomorrow and we split anything we find in there?"

"You're not going to the police are you?" he said.

"God no! This fool deserves it. And he's bound to be insured anyway."

"Cool. See you tomorrow then."

She walked out of the house, through the fence and down the hill, towards Città, its lights making it look like a bunch of Christmas decorations dropped by some passing giant. But then she veered off, out of the olive grove, into a spinney. There, hidden under a camouflaged awning, was an old campervan. She crept under, unlocked the door and climbed inside, then grabbed a couple of things and jumped back out. Once settled at a foldable table she opened a notebook and started to write:

"As the sun went down the girl walked into the garden and across to the pool. The guy was sitting..."

She liked writing about herself in the third person. It seemed to portray her character as she felt

in real life; like she was hovering slightly above her own body, and that it was always five seconds behind, or ahead of what she was consciously thinking. If it was ahead, she would judge her body's choices, the words it used, its stance; if it was behind, she'd judge it for its slowness, its indecision, and its lack of maturity.

Should she write this down too?

Also, wasn't it weird the way they seemed to mostly talk when they were snogging? How could she get that across? You were meant to show stuff happening weren't you, not tell?

It was full-on midday-time when the girl walked up the hill. Wherever possible, she kept to the shadows of the olive trees, and would stop and douse herself when the sprinklers came on intermittently.

When she arrived she immediately dived into the pool to cool down.

She towelled off then found him in the library, amongst a pile of open books, systematically exploring them for a code.

The house was heating up as the sun was more overhead for longer each day, so they took swimming and kissing breaks regularly. A ringing sounded by the pool. A gentle but insistent bell.

"What's that?" she asked.

"That's the alarm," he said, running into the house, "someone's turned up the drive."

"It's not him is it? We've got to run now if it's him! He's a psycho and always has a gun on him!"

She followed him into the library where he had turned on a little portable TV. On the screen they could see a police car sending plumes of dust into the arid air.

"We've got three minutes," he said, closing the windows, then running back to the pool to collect their stuff. She locked the door once he was inside and they retreated to a bathroom near the front door, with the TV. Through the frosted glass they saw the car pull up and two figures getting out. The guy turned a knob and the view changed to the front door. They grew in size as they approached the door and she squeaked when she heard the doorbell. He held his hand over her mouth until they heard them walk off on a circuit of the house. He turned the knob on the TV to another camera and picked them up as they peered in through various windows.

She drew a breath in relief. She could see them both in the mirror, him behind her. She felt something hard pushing against her butt and thought it was his erection, so went to grasp it. But it was a lot colder and harder than an erection. It was a revolver. She grabbed the handle and pulled it out, pushing him away from her.

"You have a gun?" she whispered, pointing it at him.

He instinctively put up his hands.

"Be careful with that!" he hissed, then snatched it and her in one easy motion, "I found it in the library, it's loaded with dum dum bullets. They split apart on impact."

She winced,

"And you're gonna shoot a cop with it are you?"

He dropped the gun onto a pile of towels and pulled her to him.

She smiled and kissed him. He lifted her on to the sink and she encircled him with her bare legs. They kissed again and rubbed against each other through their shorts. The bell rang again but it didn't bother her anymore, and as the policeman repeatedly pushed on the button, she felt herself coming.

She sat outside the campervan under the camo awning, drinking coffee from a tin mug. The sun was hot but hadn't reached its zenith yet. She collected her stuff, locked the door and set off up the hill.

The pool was so cool, she never wanted to get out again. He came out and joined her and they made love in the water. Made love? That was the first time she'd described it as that. Maybe it was because they hadn't chatted during proceedings?

While he was showering she nervously headed for the kitchen.

Breathing heavily, she entered the utility room, and listened intently. Nothing. She stuck her ear to a wall and held her breath. Nothing. She took a deep breath and then another and tried to calm down. She went to the Aircon control panel and punched a number into a keypad. A hidden door in the wall behind her swung ajar and she nervously stuck eye to the gap. A staircase

descended into darkness, but as she opened the door, it was illuminated, revealing a body lying at the bottom. She gasped, and slumped against the door, closing it. She felt she might cry. The guy stood in the door looking at her, holding a towel around his waist.

"What are you doing?"

She took a moment to say,

"I was trying to get the Aircan going? It's so hot in here."

He looked at her like he was trying to work her out, then turned away.

She stayed sat on the floor, a look of pain streaking across her face, or was it fear? Or self-loathing?

The guy leant against the kitchen counter looking troubled. His eyes kept flitting back to the utility room. She finally emerged and they sat and ate sandwiches in silence.

Occasionally their eyes would lock, as if searching each other's minds for a secret.

"I have to leave early today," she said, going to collect her things, "see you tomorrow." He said nothing; just nodded.

The girl walked up that hill, as though it was a mountain. She'd stayed up late reading her book, waiting to drop off, but she was unable to sleep. She'd woken, when the campervan had got too hot for human habitation.

She fell into the water and floated there for what felt like forever, as it slowly revived her.

The house was starting to look like a bomb had hit it, as he continued to upend every item. She wasn't so interested any more. She took longer swims and food breaks, more interested in her book than the search. In the pantry he found a box of photos and she jumped on them, poring through them.

"What's with the photos?" he asked, "is there something you're not telling me?"

"Is there something *you're* not telling me?"

He advanced on her and pushed her against the counter.

"This guy. He was not a fool. He was a violent fuck and deserved whatever happened to him," she leant forward and kissed him, then, "I think he might have photos of me swimming, and getting undressed and also . . . maybe . . ."

He waited.

"There is something I haven't told you."

"Tell me then."

"Easier to show you," she said, "wait here."

She walked to the utility room and quickly typed the code into the keypad and the door unlocked. She called to him and he came in and saw the door to the basement.

He took a step back in surprise then pulled it open. The stairs led into the dark. He gestured for her to follow him but she shook her head. He started walking down then gasped. She shut her eyes and hugged herself.

He found a light switch then examined the body.

"He's been dead for a while, judging by the smell."

He eventually emerged carrying a box.

"Well it's a full-on fucking horror show down there, but judging by these pictures, you already know that."

She took the box and rifled through the photos. They weren't all of her. There were other girls in similar situations, in similar states of bondage, in similar stages of being dehumanised, abused, fucked and sodomised . . . and some had been killed and eaten.

She looked at her photos but couldn't recognise the girl looking back at her. Her disassociation was complete. That was a third person.

She took the photos of herself and burnt them in a wok, while he watched. Then they went to the pool and swam.

"Hungry?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Come inside in five," she said swimming to the side.

She searched the house for the perfect armchair and found it in a bedroom. She carried it to the library then went to the utility room to get the roll of gaffer tape.

When he came into the house, she called him into the library, where she smashed him on the head with an iron frying pan. He half crumpled and she said, "Oh no, what have you done?" while she led him to the armchair, where he passed out.

When he awoke he was taped to the chair by his arms and legs. He struggled and shouted for her to release him.

"I knew you'd killed him," she said.

"Killed who?" he shouted.

"The owner of the house. My captor. You killed him. Had he escaped when you arrived and you shot him?"

She waved the revolver towards him.

"I didn't kill him. I thought you did," he shouted, struggling against the tape.

"No, I didn't kill him. I just left him locked in the basement."

"Then go look at him," he screamed, "you'll see he wasn't shot."

Still carrying the gun, she walked into the utility room. It took ages to make it on to the top step of the stairs into the basement, where she'd spent far too much of her life. She sat on the step, then slowly lowered herself on to the next one.

Then the next. She kept her eyes averted from the body of her abuser. The man who threatened to kill her if she didn't do exactly as he wished?

Was this why she was what her therapist called a people pleaser? Why she'd come on to this guy from the moment they met? Because that was the only kind of relationship that she knew?

She made it to the bottom and crawled over to the body. It stank and was decomposed but it was all too clear to her that it wasn't her abuser.

It was her captor's pervy son.

She ran up the stairs and out of the utility room, breathing the fresh air in the kitchen. Then she ran back to the library to find a man standing over the guy. He turned when she heard her, but she raised the gun and fired a warning shot into the floor, creating a jagged hole the size of her fist.

"Oh, it's you darlin'," he said raising his hands, "where did you get to? I've been so worried?"

She pointed the gun at his heart and started to squeeze the trigger, but he didn't seem frightened.

"And who's this jerk? Did you find him ransacking the place and tie him up? He's very noisy isn't he? I had to tape his mouth."

She said nothing.

"Thank you anyway darlin', now put the gun down and help me clear up will you?"

She lowered the gun, because she'd always done exactly as he said, but she did it reluctantly as she knew she wasn't meant to listen anymore. She raised it again, pointing at his heart.

"I said put the gun down!"

She lowered the gun.

She raised it again, pointing at his heart.

"I said put the gun down!"

She lowered the gun.

He came towards her with his arms outstretched, smiling that smile, and she pulled the trigger and shot him in the groin.

He collapsed to the floor, screaming in agony. She advanced on him and he tried to retreat, but his legs were useless. She could see a bloody hole where his genitals and spine used to be.

She put her foot on his stomach, pressed down and he simultaneously screamed and burst into tears.

She went over to the armchair and took the tape off the guy's mouth. He smiled.

"Shall we have a look in the safe?" she said, crouching in front of it.

"But we never found . . ."

She punched in the same code as the Aircon and the safe opened.

"I told you he was an idiot," she said as she pulled out a pile of cash.

"What else is in here?" he asked as she scooped more stuff out. He rifled through various papers including share certificates and bearer bonds, then smiled.

He held up his Birth Certificate stating that the man on the floor was his father.

"Holy shit!" she cried.

"I wanted to use this to get him to help my mother, but I'm not sure she'd want it now. But half of all this will help."

They called an ambulance then left him lying, crying on the floor with the box of photos.

They walked down the hill together watching the sunset through the olive trees.

As they came close to her campervan, she steered him towards it, saying,

"I know we're not snogging right now, but I still have to talk to you, confess a couple of things to you." She led him into the spinney and pulled the camo off the van.

"I don't live in Città."

He smiled.

"I already knew you didn't."

"How?"

"Because I live in Città! I'd have noticed you!"

They both laughed.

"Well, I hope you find this confession as funny as the last one."

He waited for her to speak . . .

"There's a reason the cunt didn't kill me like the others."

He waited. She said nothing. He took her hands in his, and waited . . .

"Because he's my father."

"So we're . . ."

They stood there, holding hands as the sun slowly dipped over the horizon.

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