

Shadi and The Pool

Shadi and I are always at the pool on those too hot Saturday mornings towards the end of summer. We walk in with the four towels and two grocery bags full of food that Shadi's mother has given us just in case we get hungry. We set up our spot just under one of the trees and scope the place out like we hadn't come here yesterday, the day before, the day before that.

The sign that runs the pool always has something new on it. As well as, 'No Diving, No Running, No Eating in the Pool', 'No Lebs' has been written in and crossed out, 'No Rangas' has been written in and crossed out, 'No Asians with gangsta tatoos' has been written in and crossed out, until everyone has decided on the one thing they can all agree on. 'No Fat Chicks.' It stays there like a warning to all the girls pulling their bikini bottoms out of their bum cracks and nervously sucking in their bellies.

Shadi takes off his shirt and rubs the bit of his belly that's hanging over his waistband. He stares at the grass and grins. He's always grinning like he can see secrets everywhere or something. 'Think I'll have something to eat first,' he says sitting down, rummaging through the bags of food. 'Right,' I say 'I'm going in.'

Shadi grunts at me, his mouth already filled with Leb bread. I walk over to the shallow end and slowly slip myself in. In the corner there are a few of the girls I recognise from around the block. They're just wading around in the water, trying not to get their hair and their makeup all messed up. I look at them and smile, and one of them, the one with the thick brown curly hair, smiles back. I watch her stick her head under the water and swim across the pool. She's the only one of the girls that doesn't seem to care about getting her face and her hair all messed up. When she pops her head above the water again her hair and her face are all shiny like she's a car hood that's been waxed down. She looks over at me again real quick like she doesn't want me to notice her noticing me. None of the girls ever pays much attention to me and Shadi when we're here, but a smile or two and we'll have something to talk about later on the walk home.

I stick my head under the water and try to make my way through all the legs and arms for a while, ducking my head in and out. Everything above is loud and bright, everything below – just whispers. When I look over towards Shadi, he's making his flabby way over to the pool. That's when two guys from school come over and knock him straight backwards on the pavement. By the time I swim over towards him, they're sitting on his chest so that the wind has flown completely out of him and he's lying there, gasping in pockets of air.

Before I can reach him, there's this skinny woman life-guard rushing over with a megaphone, yelling at the two boys to get off and remove themselves from the pool grounds. Me and the woman life guard take each of Shadi's arms and help him back over to the tree. She puts her hand on his chest and tells him to breathe, breathe slowly, and I watch as Shadi breathes again and smiles. And I know he's smiling because this woman is standing there in her swimmers touching his chest and I worry that he'll start hyperventilating with the excitement of it all.

When she leaves, Shadi's still smiling. I hit him in the shoulder and say, 'You alright?' and he keeps on smiling through his wheezing. After we've been sitting under the tree for a while, that girl comes over: The brown-haired wax girl from the pool. She's wrapped herself up in her towel like it's a dress and she comes and sits next to me, pushing her knees up underneath her chin and says, 'Your friend alright?'

'Yeh,' I say looking at the creamy bits of her knees under her chin.

'Yeh,' Shadi chimes in and we all look out to the water for a while, watching where her friends are looking at us.

'I'm Mo,' she says, 'short for Monique,' and me and Shadi just keep staring at her, until we remember to introduce ourselves too. Shadi pulls out three of the cans of Coke his mother has packed us and gives us each one. She puts the cold can to her forehead and rubs it down her cheeks.

'Hot?'

'Yeh real hot,' she says and I roll my can of Coke down her arm, and she lets me, and I feel like the world is all full of possibilities.