

Tiny Fish

by Jonathan Krauss

Greg fetched two towels from the hall closet. He gave me a white one with blue stripes and took a pink one for himself. I put on my flip flops and put my towel over my shoulder. He closed the door behind me.

Greg was the one who said we should go to the beach. I didn't like the beach much. It smelled funny. People at the beach were big and monstrous. They'd lie on their backs and turn pink as pigs. But we were going to the lake, so I knew that the water wouldn't smell bad and the big pig people would be sitting on their bums and not on their backs.

It was a weekday and sunny. Little clouds would walk past the sun so if you looked right at it you would see an eye with a funny pupil. Then the funny pupil would be in your eye for a minute or a year. Greg and I walked down the hill past the outdoor store. Greg had let his car run down the hill and break the window of the outdoor store last winter. I didn't tell Mommy or Daddy until Greg went away.

The hill was steep with a sidewalk paved with bricks the same color as the church. The bells rang all the time. They would play Bach and Christmas songs. The bricks on the hill went into the town. They lead us to the lake.

The lake was really a pond, but everyone in town called it the lake. Lake is a bigger word, and people want to feel big so they can lie down on the beach and turn piggy colors. I followed Greg because he walked faster than me. He was wearing sunglasses and a red shirt. His hair was shorter than mine.

There were other kids at the lake. People were jumping off the dock as fast as they could. The lifeguard chair was empty. Greg and I put our towels over the chain link fence and went to join the others.

I didn't know any of the kids. My friends were far away, in places like Kansas and Connecticut. I was smaller, and Greg was too, but he jumped in with the biggest splash of them all. He'd yell "woo-hoo," and I'd go "ya-hoo" and jump in after him. I could see in the water. It didn't hurt my eyes like pools did. Pools make my eyes pink and tired.

There were tiny fish in the lake. Mommy used to talk about swimming across it, and every year people came up to swim back and forth for hours in a race. They also biked and ran and smoked and drank big drinks with whipped cream that I wasn't allowed to try. Mommy doesn't swim any more.

The water was greener than last summer. Daddy says it's because little plants grow in the water. I liked seeing green. Grandma has a friend who sings songs and wears pink glasses. He should wear green ones.

Greg and I pushed each other in. The other kids tried to copy us. One of them hit their foot on the side of the dock and had to put a band aid on. She stopped swimming. She sat on her towel hunched over hiding her face behind her knees.

Greg took his towel and rubbed it on his head. I shook my hair like a dog. Greg took the towels, and made turbans on our heads with them. Mine was tall and floppy. We walked under the bridge back into town with them on our heads. I giggled the whole time. People looked at us and said nice things.

"Those are some great hats!"

"Wow, look at that!"

Some of them spoke with their faces only. They'd open their eyes too much, or smile with their teeth, or show the dark in their mouth.

Greg took me to the Mexican restaurant with pictures of dogs on the wall. He got me rice and beans and I ate all of it. He ate a quesadilla and I named all the dogs wearing cowboy hats in the pictures. He took the towel off his head, but I kept mine on. The lady at the counter said I looked great with it on.

We went back to the house and Greg put the towels in the laundry room. I never went in there because I can't do laundry and it smells bad. One time Greg and I went into the basement through there, but it was dark, and I don't want to go back.

It was cloudy now. It got cold in August in the summer around four, so I put on my sweater upstairs. When I got downstairs, I saw Greg in the kitchen. He was washing spoons in the sink. He told me he was going to get ice cream. I told him to get me a cup of brownie batter. That's my favorite. He said he'd do it.

He came back at dinner time so I couldn't eat the ice cream until I ate my lasagna. I like lasagna, but I like ice cream more. Uncle Bill yelled at Greg a bunch, but he stopped when he saw me. Greg had more hair on his face, and he wore round sunglasses indoors. My daddy said Greg had three o'clock shadow. I didn't see any shadows, and it wasn't three o'clock.

I ate my lasagna. The ice cream was in the freezer too long, and when it came out it was too hard. The shape was funny, and the outside was all frosty and gross. We were all mad at Greg, but Greg was gone. He'd taken Grandma's car and Uncle Bill's spoons. Uncle Bill wanted to yell, but he wouldn't do it when I was in the room.

Mommy says that when she was little, Uncle Bill would sleep walk. She would

wake up early and see Uncle Bill opening her door. Uncle Bill never went into her room. He would stand in the doorway with his eyes closed for a minute or two, and walk away.

Now Uncle Bill never sleeps. Mommy says it's fine, but I don't think it is. I get cranky when I don't sleep. Maybe that's why he was yelling so much.

I heard Uncle Bill swear from upstairs. Mommy tried to make him quiet, but he kept on getting louder. He said he made Greg bad because he wasn't good enough. I stopped listening after that. There were some slams and stuff, but nothing I wasn't used to. I went to sleep in the pink room because Greg was in the blue room.

I woke up hearing the stairs creak. They sounded like old cats. Grandma had an old cat, but she killed it when she ran over its tail with her wheel chair. Mommy and I took it to the vet, but Grandma can't hear so she did it too many times and the cat died.

I never liked the cat because it always looked at me funny. Whenever I pet the kitty, it wouldn't purr. It would hiss and growl like a big dog. I was thinking about cats and dogs when the door creaked.

I turned my head to the door. Greg stood there with his eyes open. I couldn't see them, but I know they were open. His head lowered to his shoulder and I tried to go back to sleep. I heard a *drip, drip, drip* on the floor, and a *thump, thump, thump* from the yellow room.

Someone turned the light in the hallway on. Uncle Bill started to yell, but he stopped. He started praying to Jesus and ran for a telephone to call the doctor. Greg's eyes were all black, and there was blood coming out of his mouth and one side of his nose. Mommy said Greg's friends weren't really his friends, and that Greg had made them angry. Mommy told me not to steal, and I promised I wouldn't. I told her I was

always the cop when we played cops and robbers. I told her that she shouldn't be crying if nothing was sad. She hugged me like a stuffed animal. Before I went to sleep again, I made my blankie into a hat like Greg did at the lake. It fell over, so I used it as a really warm pillow. I named all the dogs before I went to sleep.

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I woke up early like I always do. The sun was just peaking at me through the blinds. The pink room was very pink. There were pink toys, pink books, and pink curtains with pom-poms hanging like fresh apples. Daddy never buys Mommy anything pink because Mommy hates pink.

I went over to the doorway and saw dark dots on the carpet. Now the room was a little bit less pink. Mommy would be happy, maybe. I learned at school that maybe always means no.

I went downstairs. The stairs didn't make cat sounds when I stepped on them because I'm light as a feather. No one was in the kitchen, so I poured myself some orange juice. I spilled a little on the counter, but I cleaned up most of it. There were still spoons in the sink. There were also lasagna plates and wine glasses.

Greg was asleep on the couch in the living room. He had bandages and slings and stuff all over. He slept with his mouth open, and he drooled on Grandma's fancy pillows. It smelled bad in there. It always smelled like cigarettes and sweepstakes because that's where Grandpa used to open his mail. He still had stacks of it behind the couch.

Uncle Bill was in Grandpa's chair. He was leaning back, staring at the TV. The TV was playing infomercials for growing better grass. His eyes were wide open. I didn't

say anything, but I sipped my orange juice. The grass on TV grew like magic.