

**Howard Nelson**

## **LAKE WATER**

The water was clear. Gold sand out maybe thirty feet, then the dark swirls of weed. You could see the still, dark coils well in fifteen feet of water. A little kid would be proud the first time he dove off the raft and came up with a long, hairy streamer. The weeds were a place for musk turtles to disappear into, and who knew what else had disappeared there? We loved to dive down and swim just above the weeds, but never reached down into them. I think only once in all those years I thrust my feet down to push off. They sank deep into muck and icy springs, and I paddled quickly back up to the air. When I stood on the raft, the soles of my feet were dripping with a cold mystery.

We shared the water with sunfish. Mostly, during the day, they would be sculling under the dock, primitive watchers, our contemporaries. Sometimes, if you lingered too long on the ladder, one would dart out and bite you, hard, on the nipple or a mole. In the evening, they would filter out into the water where we had been swimming. Sometimes, in a classroom in the middle of winter, a slow clock above me, I would wonder about the sunfish, in the mountains, under the ice.

I jumped and dove into the clear water of that lake thousands of times, multitudes of bubbles fizzing along my body. Every summer, I was alive in that water. Thrashing along, making a long rip in the surface with crawl stroke and flutter kick, sprinting in a game of tag, was good. So was swimming in a slow, even stroke out to the solitude of the middle of the lake, the bottom far down, indistinct, the people tiny on the beach.

But it was swimming underwater, in the liquid dimension, being *inside* the lake, where you could glide in any direction, flip and fly as you pleased, that gave you an idea of what heaven was like. The strong snap of frog kick, arms sweeping from the farthest point you could reach ahead in full arcs back to your sides, hands cupping the water; the great gulp of air in your chest; the otherworldly hum that reached

all the way to the coves; the long glide after each stroke, sailing forward like an arrow or a fish, through water as deep as sex would be.

Though it was only two months of the year, I spent more than half of my childhood in the cool embrace of the lake, nearly naked, much of it completely under water, inside the jewel. You notice a strange greenish light in my eyes? From the hold of the water, I think I have never quite recovered.

**Elliot Richman**

### **CAMERADO IN CAIRO**

The young couple still in their California tans announce  
They are going to sleep under the pyramids  
To derive the hidden power of the Pharoahs.  
I, in turn, choose to sleep with you  
And idly chat about Whitman  
Before we make love.