

No Bikini

By Ivan E. Coyote

I had a sex change once, when I was six years old.

The Lions pool where I grew up smelled like every other swimming pool everywhere. That's the thing about pools. Same smell. Doesn't matter where you are.

It was summer swimming lessons, it was a little red badge with white trim we were all after: beginners, age five to seven. My mom had bought me a bikini.



It was one of those little girl bikinis, a two-piece, I guess you would call it. The top part fit like a tight cut-off t-shirt, red with blue squares on it, the bottoms were longer than panties but shorter than shorts, blue with red squares. I had tried it on the night before when my mom got home from work and found that if I raised both my arms completely above my head too quickly, the top would slide over my flat chest and people could see my . . . you-know-whats.

You'll have to watch out for that, my mother had stated, her concern making lines in her forehead, maybe I should have got the one-piece, but all they had was yellow and pink left. You don't like yellow either, do you?

Pink was out of the question. We had already established this.

So the blue and red two-piece it was going to have to be. I was an accomplished tomboy by this time, so I was used to hating my clothes.

It was so easy, the first time, that it didn't even feel like a crime. I just didn't wear the top part. There were lots of little boys still getting changed with their mothers, and nobody noticed me slipping out of my brown cords and striped t-shirt, and padding, bare-chested, out to the poolside alone.

Our swimming instructor was broad-shouldered and walked with her toes pointing out. She was a human bullhorn, bellowing instructions to us and punctuating each sentence with sharp blasts on a silver whistle which hung about her bulging neck on a leather bootlace.

"Alright, beginners, everyone line up at the shallow end, boys here, girls here, come on come on come on, boys on the left, girls on the right."

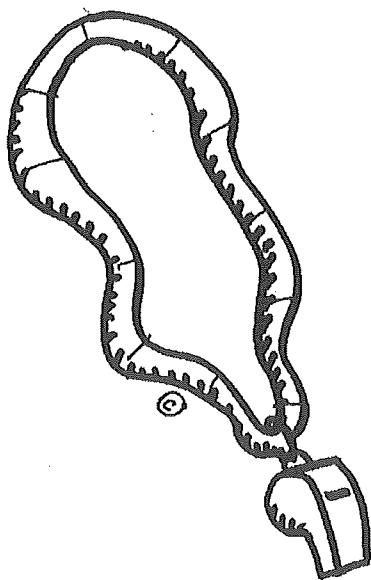
It was that simple, and it only got easier after that.

I wore my trunks under my pants and changed in the boys' room after the first day. The short form of the birth name my parents' bestowed me with was androgynous enough to allow my charade to proceed through the entire six weeks of swimming lessons, six weeks of boyhood, six weeks of bliss.

It was easier not to be afraid of things, like diving boards and cannonballs and backstrokes, when nobody expected you to be afraid.

It was easier to jump into the deep end when you didn't have to worry about your top sliding up over your ears. I didn't have to be ashamed of my naked nipples, because I had not covered them up in the first place.

The water running over my shoulders and back felt simple, and natural, and good.



Six weeks lasts a long time when you are six years old, so in the beginning I guess I thought the summer would never really end, that grade two was still an age away. I guess I thought that swimming lessons would continue far enough into the future that I didn't need to worry about report card day.

Or maybe I didn't think at all.

"He is not afraid of water over his head?" my mom read aloud in the car on the way home. My dad was driving, eyes straight ahead on the road. "He can tread water without a flotation device?" Her eyes were narrow, and hard, and kept trying to catch mine in the rearview mirror. "Your son has successfully completed *his* beginner's and intermediate badges and is ready for *his* level one?"

I stared at the toes of my sneakers and said nothing.

"Now excuse me, young lady, but would you like to explain to me just exactly what you have done here? How many people you have lied to? Have you been parading about all summer half naked?"

How could I explain to her that it wasn't what I had done, but what I didn't do? That I hadn't lied, because no one had asked? And that I had never, not once, felt naked.

"I can't believe you. You can't be trusted with a two-piece."

I said nothing all the way home. There was nothing to say. She was right. I couldn't be trusted with a two-piece. Not then, and not now.

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