

CHILDHOOD MEMORY THE POOL

Dear Pen Pal, My head hurts kind of bad tonight, but everybody keeps telling me that I should feel lucky. And, I suppose that's true 'cause I could be dead. Dead is one of those things you get when you're not careful. That's what my mom's always saying, "Now watch out or you're going to kill yourself!" Getting dead must be about one of the easiest things a person can do, or moms wouldn't be wasting so much breath saying those kinds of things. She's even saying it to my dad all the time.

The doctor said I should just lay real still for today and I'd be OK. So, I'm laying around here in my room now, but I'm not getting too much rest on account my head is hurting so much. See, this morning my older sister, she's thirteen and her name's Birdie—that's short for Bertha, but everyone calls her Birdie—anyhow, my sister and her friend, Butch—his real name's Sherwood, but he doesn't want too many people to know that—they asked my mom to take us to the swimming pool. Already this morning it was good and hot, like it always is in summer here in Kentucky, and when it's hot we're always asking our mom or someone else's mom to take us to the pool. Mostly they say "No" and ask us if we think money grows on trees. And this morning we keep on begging and my mom, and she gets mad at us being so noisy about it and starts telling us to pipe down. But finally she says, "OK," and we ran for our things before someone decided not to go.

And so there we all were at the pool having a real good time. There was my friend, Janis, her little brother who's only five and he's a real pest and his name's Jimmy, and my little brothers, David and Robert, and they're both brats, and my sister Lynne, and I already told you about my other sister Birdie, and they're OK, and then me, too. Oh, yeah, and Butchie came too. My Aunt Peggy, she came by just as we were leaving so she said she didn't have much to do, so she came too, but she didn't have a swim suit, so my mom said she could wear her old pink one with the butterflies on it. That's a yucky one, but Aunt Peggy said it was OK. So then we all left in our car. It's a station wagon.

Mostly we all swim around and stuff in the part of the swimming pool that's for kids, on account of it's not very deep, cause none of us can swim, really. But we're always practicing at home. We lay on our stomachs on the old hassock and move our arms and legs pretending like we're in the water and turning our heads to the side and down and to the side, you know, so we can breathe right in the water. We can get going pretty good at home, but in the water, it's kind of different and my mom's always fussing so about us drowning or getting dead there. So, we just splash around a lot in the shallow part. My mom won't let us go in the deep part anyways.

Now, Butchie—that's what we call him sometimes cause mostly he doesn't like it and we laugh when he gets all red and mad—well, he likes teasing me and my sisters. See, he's older than me—I'm eleven—and he's thirteen like my sister, Birdie. But he's always acting like he's so big. But mostly, he acts stupid, I think. He says girls are weird and so he's always doing dumb stuff to me and Birdie.

Mostly, I like it at the pool. I like the smell of bleach in the water. It kind of makes everything smell funny, but the smell makes me think of summer. But mostly, I like the way the swimming pool water turns Birdie's hair green. She says it's on account of she's special cause she's got blond hair. Not like mine—I have brown hair that kind of looks like mouse fur. Well, that's what Birdie says. But brown hair won't turn green in swimming pool water. But part of the pool I don't like so much. That's on account it's inside a big building. Sometimes on real hot days it gets to smelling like Butchie's socks 'cause he doesn't like putting clean socks on every day. He says clean socks are scratchy. Well, I think he's nutty. And we don't let him take his shoes off in our house. My mom makes us put on clean socks everyday, even if they got holes in them. And I hate the way it feels when my toe goes poking out a hole.

Anyway, we're at the pool and splashing around in the baby pool—that's what Butchie calls it. He's always hitting or spitting, or something dumb like what boys are always doing. He gets to splashing and teasing my sister Birdie pretty good, and she's at first pretending she's not liking it so much, and she gets kind of giggly. And she's pretending like she's trying real hard to splash him back, but I know she's scared to really do it. Then he starts splashing tons of water on her and she's starting to not be so giggly, and I can tell she's getting mad at him cause she's having some hard time breathing with all that water splashing all over her. She snorted up some water in her nose and started coughing and yelling at Butchie to cut it out. And, besides, sometimes she's real fussy about getting her hair wet, course Butchie when he finds that out, he wants to be sure her head looks like it comes straight out of the shower. So, he's beating the water really hard and it's spraying just about anybody in his way. The moms with their little babies in the baby pool are getting kind of mad at him and they're telling him to cut it out. And I know pretty soon my mom will be yelling at us to "Pipe down."

Now, I'm trying to help out my sister and I'm splashing water behind Butchie while he's busy splashing water all over Birdie. But before I know it, he's turning around and he's splashing water on me, so I quick jump out of the pool and start running around on the wet cement to get away from him, but he's right behind me yelling real loud that he's going to get me good. But there's rules at the swimming pool and no one is supposed to run around on the wet cement 'cause they might fall down and get hurt. The lifeguard is always blowing his whistle at kids who forget the rules. And I'm forgetting all about the rules cause all I want to do is get away from Butchie cause I'm only a girl and I know he can pinch real hard if he catches me. Then I hear the lifeguard blowing real loud on his whistle and yelling at me and Butchie to cut it out. And my mom and Aunt Peggy are piping out real loud, too, so I jump right into the pool, not paying attention to how deep it is, and it's right in the deep part. And Butchie jumps in right behind me but his foot kicks me real hard in the head. He didn't mean to do that, it was just an accident. But, the funniest thing happened right after his foot kicked me. I felt like I sunk straight down to the very bottom of that pool and I could touch the bottom of it. I remember I was trying and trying to get myself back up to the top cause I didn't take any breath before I jumped in, I was in such a hurry. And I was splashing my arms hard as I could and kicking my feet to get me to the top as fast as I could, but it seemed like I was in an ocean and the top of the water was clear up to the sky. And so I just kept telling myself to keep splashing my arms and feet real hard.

Then, I felt someone laying me on the wet cement flat on my back. Now this was a funny thing 'cause I don't remember getting out of that pool water. I felt real kind of woozy and funny. Things were fuzzy, but I could see the lifeguard and Aunt Peggy was standing there looking down at me, and lots of other people too but I couldn't tell who they were cause my eyes were kind of fuzzy. And they were all asking me if I was all right, but I wasn't sure where I was or what was going on. All I remembered was my lungs felling about to bust open when I was trying to get to the top of the water, and then all of a sudden there I was laying there, but I couldn't remember how I got there. After a while, I sat up and was coughing raspy and my nose feeling like it sucked up the whole swimming pool inside of it and boy was my head ever hurting. Now I couldn't even remember why I couldn't get to the top of the water and that Butchie's foot kicked me in the head. I couldn't remember that for a long time after I was sitting there on the wet cement trying to figure it all out. But everyone was telling me all about how I was just laying there in the water not moving a muscle. Birdie was real proud and said it was her who first saw me there, acting kind of funny and she started yelling for my mom and Aunt Peggy. Birdie said Aunt Peggy, she jumped right up and jumped into the pool. And Aunt Peggy she pulled me out of the water. Then I started remembering about Butchie chasing me and jumping in and all that stuff.

Now, how come all of them were saying that I was just laying in that water like a rag doll with lead in her pockets, sinking to the bottom. Maybe I couldn't remember much about why I was out of there and all that stuff, but one thing I can't forget is how I was so scared and splashing my arms and legs so hard to get to the top of that water. I couldn't hear my mom yelling those things about "You're going to kill yourself!" but I knew this time she was right and I'd better get out of that water or maybe she couldn't ever say that to me anymore. So, how come I can remember all that, but none of them saw me splashing my arms and legs so hard? Now, that's what I want to know.