

2014

The Pool Party

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Recommended Citation

Luke, Sarah (2014) "The Pool Party," *The Echo*: Vol. 2014, Article 37.
Available at: <http://scholarexchange.furman.edu/echo/vol2014/iss2014/37>

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THE POOL PARTY

Sarah Luke

The pool water was like syrup, just looking into it at night, or a black mirror. We put our toes in first and watched rings of water glide across the surface. It looked like wind racing wind. Lily ran up to the porch and turned on the pool lights, shouting, "My momma's ring fell in the water!" Now the lights were on, and we all saw it at the bottom. Drew jumped in and brought it up, and everyone said, "Now, turn those lights off!"

Boys and girls in a black pool, wet skin and slick hands. Slick lips. "Has anyone here had their first kiss?" someone asked. We all looked around. Twisting around in the water was a slow dance of hair chasing skin. We could hardly see each other. Everyone felt beautiful.

Mark stood with his elbows on the pool's edge, the water like dew in his buzzed hair. Everyone knew he lived in his car, where he slept with a girl from the rival school. Nobody looked at him. Someone asked who gave him directions to Shay's pool.

Helen swam a doggy-paddle to the edge, tucking her hands into the water and tapping her feet on the surface. Mark watched her while she talked to him. He nodded his head and led her to the deep end of the pool. Someone bet he would kiss her. Someone said he wouldn't.

Shay's sister, who was twelve, came outside and sat with her calves in the water, churning it. Shay told her to go back inside and get the ice cream. She disappeared again, and Shay said for us to look at her belly ring, a flat metal elephant sitting in her naval. One of the boys behind her made like he was ripping it out. The girl beside him giggled.

Shay's sister returned with both arms wrapped around a tub of ice cream. Everyone got out and sat around the glass patio furniture. We saw Mark and Helen again. One of the girls ran to Helen and pulled her under an umbrella stand, her lips moving rapidly. Helen tossed her hair around so we couldn't see her face.

Mark said he had to get going. Somebody asked where he had to go; he lived in his car! We watched the headlights like burning bulbs disappear around a bend in the road.

Shay's sister came back with spoons. She dipped hers in the tub once before Shay told her to please, please not bother us. This was a teenager thing.

We watched her walk to the diving board and wave her spoon in the air. She pointed her toes and jumped in. Lily mentioned how sweet she was. The boys kept talking about last night at somebody's lake house, who brought the beer and who wouldn't drink. Lily said she wouldn't drink. Some boy put his arm around her bare shoulders and winked at Drew, who shrugged. Shay's sister jumped again off the board.

Shay said Booker calls her up some nights when he's drunk and wants to do it with her, and that was why she didn't invite him, why he wasn't here. Under his breath somebody said tonight Booker was at another party at a college girl's house, but Shay didn't hear this and said again why Booker wasn't at her pool.

Shay's sister was gone now, and the water was smooth. We got back in the pool, splashing like weights, slipping in like fingers.

Helen asked where the bathroom was. Shay said her sister would show her, and she shouted at the house for her. The TV blinked through the window. Shay said whatever, she would show her herself.

Lily beckoned Drew to the deep end and tossed in diving rings. We'll see who can find more, she said. They disappeared under the surface.

Drew came up first, wearing four rings around his arm. He hoisted himself onto the concrete ledge. Lily emerged seconds later, coughing and spitting up water. Drew pulled her out onto the side, dropping the rings and holding her up with his arms. He shouted for the rest of us.

Lily smacked the concrete with her hands. When she stopped coughing, she whispered so only Drew heard. Under the surface of the black mirror, one of the rings rested on Shay's sister, still as carpet at the bottom of the pool.