

The pontoon in the middle of the lake

by Susi Fox

Water trickled down my neck, through the cleft between my newly developing breasts, pooling inside my red polka dot bikini top. I was sitting cross-legged on the pontoon in the middle of the lake, trying to escape the midsummer night heat that hung most heavily in the still caravan air. A splash from shore: Monique swimming out fast and strong towards me as Simon, her younger brother, dogpaddled behind.

Monique slid herself onto the pontoon. Her short dark hair had streaks of blonde intertwined through it. She had three earrings in each earlobe that glimmered in the light of the full moon. Water streamed from her tightly toned torso and full breasts into the lake below. I hadn't noticed her body the last time we'd seen each other, over a year ago.

'You look different, Jane,' she said, eyeing my bikinis. 'You got a boyfriend yet?'

I shook my head then broke her gaze to see her brother Simon reaching the pontoon. With fluff on his chin and acne peppering his cheeks, he was on the cusp of adolescence; a year younger than me.

'I don't do guys,' Monique said. 'They don't interest me anymore.' She turned to face Simon who was clambouring onto the pontoon. 'This is a private conversation,' she said to him.

Simon dropped back into the water and held onto the side with his fingertips, gazing up at me.

I averted my face.

'Watch me, Jane,' Monique said. 'I'm a great diver.'

She stood on tiptoes on the edge of the pontoon and brought her arms above her head, fingers pointing to the sky like a missile. Then she threw herself forward and upwards into a ball, somersaulting ankle over shoulder until she entered the water with the slightest of splashes, the rippling waves glinting in the moonlight like the circles of a target.

'Your sister's amazing,' I said to Simon.

He pushed off the pontoon edge and began to paddle back towards shore.

Monique pulled herself up beside me, the cool of the lake reflecting off her skin. 'Ever kissed a boy, Jane?'

I shook my head. The water was inky below us.

'Then you need practice,' she said, shifting closer. 'I'll show you what to do.'

My hands were shaking. I closed my eyes, felt her hot breath on my cheek then her lips, soft as butter, against mine. She tasted of strawberry lip balm as she drew me into her mouth. The upper surface of her tongue was rough, almost serrated, but she pulled me deeper, into the smooth cavity beneath. My whole body felt as if it were immersed in thick hot chocolate. Then she pushed her tongue between my lips, exploring the inside of my cheeks, the roof of my mouth, the wide gap between my two front teeth.

All at once we heard a noise. Monique pulled away. Simon was swimming back towards us.

'Dad'll kill you,' he called.

Monique stood up to her full height and puffed out her chest. 'Scram,' she said.

Simon paused, treading water. He stared at the two of us, then turned away and headed back to shore.

I shivered despite the warm night and hugged my legs against my chest. I imagined kissing Monique again when Simon was gone.

Monique curled her arm around my waist. I leaned into her. Suddenly she clenched my skin.

'Simon,' she cried out.

Simon's head bobbed under the water, resurfaced then disappeared below the surface.

Monique dived off the pontoon and flung arm over arm. When she reached the spot she'd last seen him, she dove again and again into the depths of the lake, wildly calling Simon's name.

I lunged into the water. As I reached her side, Simon thrust through the surface, close to shore. He turned to us and smirked, then splashed through the shallows and onto dry land.

I reached for Monique through the water but she pulled away and made for solid ground.

I lay awake for the rest of the night, staring at the roof of the caravan, feeling Monique's tongue hot in my mouth.

Her family had already left when I awoke the next day.

I didn't visit the lake again until years later, on the day of Monique's wedding. The pontoon in the middle of the lake was gone. I pointed out the signs scattered around the lake's edge to my girlfriend: *Beware. Deep water. Cold currents. Too dangerous to swim.*