

## THE SWIMMING HOLE

I'm not sure what got into me that day. It was more than just the beautiful Spring day or the next to the last week of high school - "Senioritis," we called it - more even than the thrill of getting away with something. I agreed to play hooky for all those reasons, of course; but truth be told, I think I just wanted desperately to let go of trying to be good. My father ruled with an iron hand, sometimes literally, and always me rather than my sisters, so it's not like I didn't know I'd pay a hefty price if caught. There was just something about the day: thousands of flowers blooming everywhere, warm sun, four friends laughing over packed lunches, a boyfriend I really liked, my father safely ensconced in his downtown office miles away.

Someone, I think it was Mary Ellen, said, "Let's go to West Virginia." The three of us stopped in the middle of our laughter and stared at her. Eddie, my boyfriend, said immediately, "I'm in." Butch, a tall, skinny boy, whose grades were questionable, said, "Ditto." All three turned to me. I was sure they could see my heart pounding through my blouse. I took a deep breath and said, "Sure! When?"

"Right now," Mary Ellen said, "Who's driving?" Mary Ellen was a fairly close friend, in the same group of girls that I loosely belonged to when I wasn't being grounded by my parents. I admired her decisiveness in situations and was completely awed by it in this case.

It was decided that Eddie would drive, that we would meet at his car in ten minutes and be back from West Virginia in time to walk home from school at 3:30, as though we'd never left. Butch knew of a great place in the country, just over the Pennsylvania line, with a swimming hole, even a tire tied to a tree for jumping in, and lots of privacy so we could go skinny-dipping. I gulped and said, "Great!"

Eddie was my boyfriend throughout our senior year, though I was rarely allowed to go out on a date with him because he didn't fit the image of the "right kind of boy." It's true, Eddie wore tight jeans with white tee shirts, his pack of Lucky Strikes rolled up in one sleeve, and was not what you'd call a good student. Today, he'd be referred to as a "badass. But he was crazy in love with me and treated me with tenderness, and I loved him for that. His car matched him perfectly, a 1951 Ford with a rusted out muffler that announced its arrival blocks away.

We spent a perfect afternoon at that swimming hole, an afternoon as innocent as it was glorious. Mary Ellen and I sat on a blanket and talked about things high school girls talk about, while the boys went skinny-dipping. Butch and Eddie joined us on the blanket after the swim, and all four of us talked about our plans after graduation. For those few hours, I was happy, if one can be truly happy knowing full well that a tornado is approaching.

We followed the plan, with Eddie dropping us off a few blocks from school around 3:30. As I walked toward my house, my sense of dread deepened with every step, so that by the time I was close enough to see my father sitting on the front porch, I was near cardiac arrest. It came as a no shock to anyone but the four of us that the school principal had called our parents as soon as it was evident that we were AWOL after lunch. And, since we were seniors and it was only days before graduation, Dr. Wisner, a humorless, by-the-book sort, decided we should be made an example of what happens to kids who don't follow the rules. We were suspended for a week. We were also called into Dr. Wisner's office, where we could apologize for our misdeeds and throw ourselves on the mercy of the one-man court and earn a lighter sentence. Mary Ellen, who was savvy when it came to knowing just what adults wanted, apologized

profusely and promised to mend her ways. Butch, in his slow, affable manner, agreed cutting school was definitely wrong. Eddie, of course, stayed strong and silent, one could even say, sullen.

When it came to my turn, I looked around at my cohorts in crime, all three staring at a spot on the carpet, while Dr. Wisner eyed me coldly. I don't know what got into me here either, as I heard myself saying,

"We didn't do anything wrong; we just needed to get away for a little while."

I don't have to go into detail about what happened at home after my parents were informed of my performance at the meeting. On top of playing hooky, I had defied authority, and not just any old authority, but Dr. Wisner, the school principal. I was grounded for what seemed like a life sentence, though it was only for most of the summer. My mother did manage to talk my father into a short reprieve to attend a graduation party, on condition that I obey a 10 p.m. curfew. I was also ordered to break up once and for all with Eddie, who was deemed an extremely bad influence: the obvious cause of my sudden transformation into a problem teenager.

The night I delivered the edict, Eddie and I sat close in the Ford at are favorite parking place behind the YMCA

tennis courts. The car windows were open to the early evening sounds and smells of new summer around us. When I told him I wasn't allowed to see him any more, he cried.

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