

# SWAN

Rachel Gaddis



I danced a bit on the steaming pavement as my toes turned pink. A hairy high-school boy was blocking my view. I peeked around him. The line of boys was growing shorter, and I was inching closer to the board. The smacking of tanned summer skin on water gave me goose bumps, screaming for me to forfeit. Nervous but determined, I chewed a section of my tangled, wet hair and reached for the railing.

After climbing two tiny steps, I stood on the board. It was coarse and scratchy beneath my tender feet. The onlookers surveyed me from their plastic chairs, a few snickered in the shallows, and Casey waited patiently in the concession stand. I could make out his sun-bleached hair and white lifeguarding shirt, but his face was shadowed. He held the boom-box mic in his hand. I couldn't back out now, I couldn't be a wimp. Besides, Airheads and a free Coke were at stake.

I raced toward the edge, measuring my steps so I would run the full length of the board, and then leapt, swinging my arms to the puffed clouds and blue sky. I felt the sting on my neck first, then my chest, belly and thighs. A lump racked itself in my throat, and salt-water tears leaked into the chlorinated pool. I floated beneath the surface for a moment, with arms still outstretched, before opening my eyes to see if I was still alive.

I made my prickling limbs pull me to the top. There I felt the warm sunshine and the onlookers' cheers. Casey cleared his throat, but I could hear his grin through the speakers of the boom-box, "Come claim your Coke and candy!"

My legs burned, but I managed to walk to the concession stand with some grace. Casey smiled at me, really making me burn all over. *If only I could be older*, I thought. Then again, I doubted I would impress him with a belly flop if I weren't in the fourth grade.

"I have never seen a flop quite like that," he quipped as he placed the prize in my hands and winked. "It looked like a swan dive."

