

## *EVERY EDGE*

*By Gabrielle Marceau for the Learnt Wisdom Series #3*

It was a rectangle really, a 3 dimensional rectangle full of water on the corner of Dundas and Bathurst where we climbed the fence: Jamie, me, and some whose names I've forgotten. It was in a series of firsts; first time I stayed up late enough to see the morning, first time I kissed someone whose name I didn't know, first time I told someone I needed them. Climbing that fence to swim was in a long line of risks taken in the name of something abstract, unidentifiable.

Tim and Sarah watched us from the other side of the fence. There are two kinds of people I guess, but there are several ways of getting over a fence, or getting through a hole in one if a resourceful stranger brought wire cutters. However you get in, it always requires a leap. This is the bliss of the other side, you survived and now new things are possible. Once you stop seeing fences you start seeing the way a city can provide; a place to be, things to drink, ways to loiter.

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Last summer we climbed a fence near Korea Town because Jamie, Clara, the bartender and I decided to swim. It was 3 am and you know this story. You've heard it before from friends, beaming with the pride of someone who for one night lived, lived more than anyone else before them (except for everyone else who came before them). "We were so hot" they say, "the bars were closed, we were bored". What they're really saying is once they were scared and climbed a fence to prove to themselves that they were brave enough to do it.

Not to deny that swimming itself isn't worth the risk. What is better than it? There's a rectangle of blue somewhere right now and if you get in, it'll hold you. If you get in, you'll forget your body has a specific weight and name. It's a pleasure understood by anyone with skin. Maybe trespassing is a pleasure only understood by the young and those who long to be.

Clara and I were keenly searching for the most pleasurable thing to do in that pool, the water slide had been turned off but someone was pouring beer down it and if you took a running start you'd slide down, veering precariously up the sides of the slide. I was most proud that I made it down without spilling my drink. All three of us kissed the bartender. We stood at the top of the slide and threw the half full bottle of gin down at the dozen other swimmers.

The night passed and when the sun came up cold we put our damp clothes back on.

I fell climbing back over the fence, I still have a scar on my knee. At the top of the fence I looked down and thought; it isn't that far. But it was 12 feet and I landed hard. When I got up I had blood on my sneakers. Reckless courts chaos I guess.

I'd like to keep my friends from knowing the other side of risk, the one where you reach a hand out in the dark and it gets bit.

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I'm not the first girl to think pool hopping is great, you could get this information from a music video or a jean commercial. But it still impresses some of my friends, the ones who worry they're missing out on their youth. In her book, *How A Person Should Be*, Sheila Heti wrote "if there's a pool and people are in the pool and you're not in the pool, you want to be in the pool just like those people in the pool. It's just a fact of nature." The fear of missing out propels many of us out our doors on Friday nights and keeps us way late on a street corner or in someone's kitchen waiting for the thing that'll make the waiting worthwhile.

There are people on one side of the fence, and people on the other.

But is it so different? How many times have you heard that Iceland is magic. It's a place where it's customary to smash bottles and glasses on the sidewalk after last call. I can see the appeal,

the possible catharsis. But in the morning the streets are littered with *just* shards that you have to walk over on your way to work, to the cafe, to a friend: to whatever you do every day.

The thing about risk is it only works if you truly don't know what will happen. It isn't climbing the fence that's the risk, it's doing something new. It is good to test your limits, to see what you're like at the edge. But after 25 years of saying yes to the fence, the tattoo, the guy, I can't help feel a little eroded. Sometimes you end up in the pool and you don't really know what to do next, so you get out and dive in again and then again. So much of reckless abandon is really avoiding making a decision, the only one actually: what next?

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There are days where even waiting for the bus without a book or a phone is unbearable, where your own company is too demanding. I was instructed by a counselor to sit and do nothing for four hours. Once I stopped thinking of all the things I would do once the time elapsed (dishes, maybe a face mask, maybe write to *him*) I started thinking about what I should think of next and if those were the right thoughts, or if thinking at all was the right thing to do. I lasted 10 minutes.

Being isn't a fixed state, it is that question repeated: what next? I still think about that night at the pool last summer and I find myself, with a new summer approaching, gripped by a peculiar panic. I cannot recreate that night and its feeling. To feel that again will I have to go deeper, higher, harder? We're young, we don't belong to anyone and we don't really worry about being good. Clara and I threw that bottle from the waterslide like it meant nothing that it might hit someone, we chased after it like it meant everything who drank it.

I have a friend whose penchant for chaos is unparalleled, if he isn't held down by a job or a boyfriend he spins so far out it takes weeks to come back. The center doesn't hold. We think that happiness requires balance and balance requires boredom and so we listen to Lana Del Rey

songs and we style ourselves as artists and libertines. But you have to wake up every day a little older, a song only lasts a few minutes and doesn't ever need to grow up.

I won't tell you rotely that to take risks one must maintain a center, the whole idea is to go beyond comfort. But I will say that it is good to tend to the question when you're alone and there's no fence. We are alive only because we desire and desire moves us, our minds and hearts and those of others. Movement requires risk, it also requires a core. Maybe the work of life is learning from the leaps taken so we can to move incrementally towards, but never fully arriving at, a self.

I still don't know what it means to be good but for the first time it seems worthwhile to find out.