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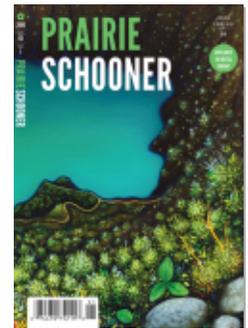
His Next Girl, and: Let Go

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Prairie Schooner, Volume 93, Number 1, Spring 2019, pp. 147-148 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/psg.2019.0022>



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His Next Girl

I like to imagine that before you met him your family vacationed at Lake Huron. You stayed on the Canadian side. You can't remember the name of the town, though you remember eating a kind of cookie with chocolate on one side called a digestive biscuit.

We're from western Pennsylvania—you and I—and all the lakes here are manmade, muddy, with beaches of squishy grass that stain your bathing suit. I bet you'd never seen anything like Lake Huron. Maybe you mistook it for the ocean, or thought it went on forever.

Your parents rented a cabin. You slept on the fold-out couch with your sister. Is your sister older? Yes. She is older and makes fun of you when you get your period for the first time on that trip. But also shows you how to use a tampon, tells you to relax as you try to force it.

You are terrified it will fall out and a dog will find it, carry it along the beach. The beach is empty so when it does, you just kick sand over it and dive in. You are strong from being on the swim team. No, you're not on the swim team. He'd avoid girls on teams. Maybe

you swim alone after school at the Y while your sister takes Zumba. The important thing is you are a strong swimmer. Because I need you to get out there into the stinging cold of Lake Huron. Your sister too, the both of you breathless, laughing at your recklessness. So far out

they can't hear you. You get all the way out there and it is fine. You fight the waves back, return ravenous, eat two hot dogs and fistfuls of chips

in your still-wet suit. You tell your mom you need a pad and squirm in her hug.
I imagine this because I need you to have a memory with a vibrant color,
something to float in, since I left you nothing—not even a cry, not even a warning.

Let Go

I lay back and watched light scan the ceiling
as my boyfriend shaved me.
He said he preferred things *a little neater*
and I had been told relationships
were all about compromise. My skin
scaled like a burn, too tender to fuck
though seeing me bare turned him on.
Studying myself in the mirror, I thought
about children and what people do to them
and how I am a messy, unruly thing. The itch
was unbearable. After he left me,
I *let myself go* as they say, became shaggy
and silky. When I stretch, my armpits
unfurl their soft tongues and peeking
out from behind a curtain makes me
feel like a shameless flirt again.