

# The Reflecting Pool

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6.8 josh sommerford gazes into the swimming pool, its surface glassy, reflective, its floor glittering pool of water and sunlight and glass, and time pooling, pooling, in the pool. their pool: that of josh sommerford and josh sommerford's wife, teema; their pool. but it has seen better days. electrically-luminous, drying leaves scuff along the poured concrete in the early autumnal breeze. a skin of dead insect chitin roofs one corner.

1.1 when josh and teema first met, he was certain that the fates must have planned their unlikely meeting in time and space, specifically during their undergrad years at iowa, working in hair nets, bulky, starched-white uniforms, and under tube lighting, at the unfortunately-named burge food service. burge. purge. regurge. ick. this is the earliest of their moments; it is the earliest of the reflections.

1.2 he can see it all as though it's playing out before him; he reflects upon the reflections in his reflecting pool, his and teema's, reflecting the moments — their moments, vivid as the original. meeting her, stunned with her beauty and vivacious energy, teema teeming with life! hair nets and bulky starched things and all, but his vision cut through all that to find him stunned by her beauty. in a hair net! imagine.

6.9+ 1.2 ~~he can see it all as though it's playing out before him~~; he reflects upon the reflections in his reflecting pool, his and teema's, reflecting the moments — their moments, ~~vivid as the original~~. he's not well, our josh, we can see that. his hair is unkempt, the scotch from last night fouls his first-thing-in-the-morning breath, to which he is adding only coffee. the effect is a taste on his tongue, the taste and texture of a skid mark on pavement. he hasn't shaved in a few days — not long enough to seem to be in active pursuit of a beard, merely unwashed and hardscrabble; he looks like shit — because, who's gonna care, right? besides, there are no more mirrors in the house.

x.1 all these moments, reflected . . .

6.4 he sometimes sees himself reflected, sometimes a few years younger, healthier, hair cared-for and beard kept in check. happier times, these, with josh, and josh with teema. he can see it in his eyes in these moments: he felt preposterously lucky to have her, had hardly believed when, after working with her for seven months, he finally worked up the courage to ask her out. he can see that gratitude, see it reflected in his eyes, reflected in the pool, these early, happy moments.

6.5 other times, he sees himself toward the end of their time—his and teema's time—together. if he cared about himself, he would not like what he saw. but he no longer cares. he first noticed the reflections in the pool a few days after teema left, packed up her prius and their dog, boris the borzoi, and, like a wrecking ball to his gut, drove away, boris grinning his canine grin, tongue lolling, as he watched through the rear window and the prius pulled away. pulled away forever. dumb damn dog. josh does *not* feel like joshing. he is, instead, devastated. teema is the love of his life. he cannot come to terms with the notion that she will be absent from it from here on out.

2.1 the swimming pool (josh sees as he reflects upon their lives together) has become the epicenter in their lives. she has become a poet of that rare, publishing kind, and teaches poetry classes part-time at a local college; and he has a dull but well-salaried position documenting an internal software project for at&t in new jersey. the two fling themselves into their new professional lives, gathering a circle of good friends and their families, and begin hosting parties 'round the pool. people bring beer, wine, floaties, kids. it quickly become a community, these people, these drinks, this pool: everything revolves around the pool that summer. everything—

4.2 —at first they do not react to teema's withdrawal from the festivities.

the gatherings, in fact, do go on—

x.2 all these moments, reflected . . .

y.1 all this light, pooling . . .

note 1.1 sometimes, an object can accumulate an extraordinary weight as a story progresses, can become the black hole about which the story orbits, accumulating meaning, waiting to one day, perhaps, suck in the rest of the story, bring it crashing to its demise. Think, e.g., of hulga's wooden leg, in flannery o'connor's "good country people."

3.2 josh sees himself joshing around the pool, sloshing a bit of gin and tonic on the poured concrete surrounding it, he wearing one of his trademark pairs of mirrored sunglasses from his oddly large collection of them. "don't fall in," teema cries, but she's laughing as she does so. and, josh sees, there's that look again in her eyes: a happiness, a wonderment, a vibe. she retreats to their kitchen and returns with a fresh pitcher. boris trots about, the people sneaking him little slurps of beer, tongue lolling through the middle of that borzoi grin—not the smartest of hounds, but a happy one.

6.1 josh is wracked with abandonment, betrayal, dumped, left to die, at this end of the spectrum. teema is gone, and boris the borzoi with her, packed up and left to her parents' home in iowa. teema has left. has left him. teema has. he gathers several pairs of discarded mirrorshades from the previous eve, hurls them to the concrete, and stomps on them. lenses fly. he tosses them into the pool; the mirrored lenses spark up at him from the pool floor. it strikes josh as having an odd, shattered beauty to it. and as this notion strikes him, he catches a moment, a flash—something passing across the lenses. what the—?! he gathers more of last night's glassware from around the pool and begins a rain of shattering glass down upon the pool's floor, a sparkling, electric shower of light captured, however briefly, in slow-motion descent, repeating luminescence through the transmarine atmosphere, a shower of sparks and glints and shards of light.

x.3 all these moments, reflected . . .

y.2 all this light, pooling . . . a static rain of phosphor and moments, water and glass and light . . . a labyrinth of moments . . .

6.6 and josh sees them: the moments. his moments—their moments together—playing out across the shattered mirrorscape of the pool. these moments, these everyday happinesses, that he thought had disappeared forever, gone down the road toward iowa with the dog, he sees them . . . sees

1.3 —their moments, vivid as the original. a lifeline to these happinesses, these scenes.

6.9 josh fears that if he leaves the reflecting pool, the reflecting will stop. ah—there's the first date, his mistaken impression that a guy friend she knew might instead be a boyfriend, the awkwardness on both sides as he and teema worked up the courage to try some expression of affection, a hand-holding, a kiss, even, maybe, maybe . . . josh feels a panic: he can only see the scene in fragments. vivid fragments, but a patchwork of reflections in the pool, in the shards. he wants it — wants to relive it as fully as he might. into the house he runs, to the kitchen, to the cupboards. he carries glassware out, the long-stemmed ones, the no-stemmed wine glasses, and begins shattering them into the swimming pool, shower after tiny, isolated squall of sparks and memory and light flickering down through the water. out come juice glasses, the blue-glass goblets, the red-glass snifters, and shattering, down they go.

x.4 all these moments, reflected across the pool's surface and its floor.

y.3 all this light, pooling . . . a static rain of phosphor and moments, water and glass and light . . . a labyrinthine, luminous pool of reflections . . .

1.4 there they are. josh can see them reflected in the hurricane of glass and lenses on the pool's bottom: their moments, reflected in a dizzying, dazzling labyrinth of light: a car he can't afford to ferry him to and from her parents' home across the state, in des moines, that first summer.

they spend time together, skinny-dip at a local country club after hours, scaling a low fence and shedding clothing, excitement piqued with the risk. he sees the two, naked in the pool, reflected in his own pool and its reflective glass gazing ground. he can reach out — he can almost touch it . . . almost . . .

7.1 at one end of this stands josh, no job, no degree, no pool, but he's just met a girl. her name is teema. at the other end stands josh, older, broken, stopped making it to work so the degree isn't much use, a gazing pool full of sparks and moments, glittering, electric moments, vivid as the original, and no girl named teema. but he has the pool. he is afraid to leave its side now, afraid the reflections will stop, and he'll be left without her forever.

x.5 hairnets . . . first date . . . first jobs . . . a beautiful, happy, if not very bright, russian wolf hound . . . the pool . . . the people round the pool, the entourage . . . life that summer

~~he can see it all as though it's playing out before him; he reflects upon the reflections in his reflecting pool, his and teema's, reflecting the moments—their moments,—vivid as the original: he's not well, our josh, we can see that. his hair is unkempt, the scotch from last night fouls his first-thing-in-the-morning breath, to which he is adding only coffee. the effect is a taste on his tongue, the taste and texture of a skid mark on pavement. he hasn't shaved in a few days —not long enough to seem to be in active pursuit of a beard, merely unwashed and hardscrabble; he looks like shit—because, who's gonna care, right? besides, there are no more mirrors in the house.~~

surface glassy, reflective, its floor glittering, a coherent pool of sunlight, and time pooling, pooling, in the pool. their pool. josh sommerford; josh sommerford's wife, teema; their pool. but it has seen better days. electrically=luminous, drying leaves scuff along the poured concrete in the early autumnal breeze leaves brown with death

in orbit about the swimming pool . . .

3.1 he glimpses the parties: their friends, their friends' kids, boris the borzoi, gin-and-tonics all 'round, big band music alternating with underground music brought along by the male members of this group, this entourage, in an ongoing competition to out-hip one another, the music swimming out from the house, their house, his and teema's. their entourage beginning to arrive shortly after five, just after clocking out, and, hell, they're friends, so josh and teema show them where the spare key is kept, just in case that godawful central jersey, north-south traffic ties one or both of them up. the gatherings must go on!

3.3 drinks slosh on the poured concrete. tipsy friends occasionally play up their tipsiness, tumbling into the swimming pool in full dress; that gets a laugh every time.

6.7 josh sommerford gazes into the swimming pool, its

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have swirled into one corner, and dead mosquitoes ride the waves nearby.

breeze. leaves brown with death have swirled into one corner. a skin of dead insect chitin roofs one corner another.

4.1 the entourage, you see, come to admire josh and teema, this ideal-seeming young couple, recently married and still shining like a honeymoon, come to idolize their marriage, see it as an example of how best to go about the business of lifetime partnership. that radiance, that clear affection, drew the entourage into an orbit around them, each friend alight like a tiny nova, luminous, alive. they could never conceive of life after work that summer, around josh and teema and boris and the glimmering pool, as finite, endable, mortal. these moments were their moments, too. which is why—at first—they do not react to teema's withdrawal from the festivities.

—the gatherings must go on!

4.3 they want to ask what's wrong, what's bothering teema, the first day of her withdrawal. they want to, but they do not. they want to on the second day, too, and so on, but because bad news about josh and teema would be a heretical thought, they do not ask him, and she does not appear.

0.4 everything begins to zero here—

6.2 and josh begins to see them: ~~the moments. his moments~~—their moments together—playing out across the shattered mirrorscape of the pool. these moments, these everyday happinesses, that he thought had disappeared forever, gone down the road toward iowa with the dog, he sees them ... sees, horribly, himself: disheveled, unshaven, skin flaking, hair a stalled hurricane of dandruff.

6.2, addendum he can't stand the sight of himself, his ruinous face a reflection of the lives he's ruined, a reflection of the ruin he has wrought upon himself, the ruin he has, himself, become. he roams the house, smashing mirrors and tossing the shards into the reflecting pool.

0.3 everything begins to zeroes here—

x.6 all these moments, reflected . . .

0.2 everything begins to zeroes here—

0.1 everything zeroes here—

0.0 everything zeroes here—moment zero—

josh sees her, reflected in the shards of light and reflection, a mirror of shattered glass and transmarine, see the look on her face when she realized the truth.

x.7 all these moments, reflected . . .

4.4 —the gatherings must go on!  
the gatherings, in fact, do go on—

5.1 the entourage keeps the fire burning, keeps the gatherings going, though a few raise eyebrows when teema's prius isn't in the driveway one day when they arrive, and thereafter does not return. they keep bringing the beer, the drinks, the so-hip mix cds, and themselves. but then josh stops coming out to the pool, as well.

4.5 —the gatherings must go on!  
the gatherings, in fact, do go on—

4.6 someone leaves an old fedora on the kitchen counter, near the screen door, so everyone can pony-up for things like paper plates and plastic glasses. what the hell? they have the spare key. they clean up after themselves diligently. but after a few days an unease creeps into the entourage—for who are they entourage to, if both josh and teema have withdrawn?

4.7 —the gatherings must go on!  
the gatherings, in fact, ~~do~~ don't go on—

they peter out as the members of the entourage begin to contemplate the heretical: josh and teema have had a falling out. the last of the die-hards calls it a season when josh, who has been out of sight these past few days, suddenly reappears, litters the pool bottom with the shards of the house's glassware and all of the reflective lenses from all of his sunglasses, and takes to falling asleep in a lawnchair by the pool,. he is not well, our josh; he hasn't shaved lately. his hair a blizzard of dandruff, always about in the same pajamas and robe, all sliding toward ruin. he can't stand the sight of himself.

x.8 hairnets . . . first date . . . first jobs . . . a beautiful,

happy, if not very bright, russian wolf hound . . . the pool . . . the people round the pool, the entourage . . . life that summer in orbit about the swimming pool . . .

and teema's voice, like winter wind across razorwire, a sound so sharp and crystalline it threatens to shatter in to a blizzard of tiny, blazing crystals of ice and fire: "why the hell would you ever do this to me?"

. . . finished. in the reflection of the reflecting pool, josh sees the tale-end of his time with teema. her name is ghislane, she works with josh, and when teema finds the hotel receipts there is no consoling her. josh, unable to admit the scope of his sin, simply returns to the party. for a time, anyway. teema does not.

7.2the whole of it has become a much, much narrower passage than before; he can only go back as far as meeting her, and never makes it past the first reflections in the pool. at the far end stands josh, no job, no degree, no pool, but he's just met a girl. her name is teema. at the other end stands josh, broken, stopped making it to work so the degree isn't much use, a gazing pool full of sparks and moments, glittering, electric moments, vivid as the original, and no girl named teema. but he has the pool. this is all he has left now; it is the last of their moments—the last of their reflections. he is afraid to leave its side now, afraid the reflections will stop, and he'll be left without her forever.

x.9 all these moments, reflected . . .

note 1.2 sometimes, an object can accumulate an extraordinary weight as a story progresses, can become the black hole about which the story orbits, accumulating meaning, waiting to one day, perhaps, suck in the rest of the story, bring it crashing to its demise. think, *e.g.*, of ~~hulga's wooden leg, in flannery o'connor's "good country people."~~

josh and teema's pool; it is a finite pool, a gathering of shards, moments, and light, shattered glass and mirrors, hairnets at one end and unkempt psychological ruin at the other: the end of their moments, all swirling now in the far corner with the leaves, brown with death, and the chitin bodies of the season's mosquitoes.