Survival at Sixteen

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College of DuPage
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In the snapshot, four girls sit around a smoking campfire, sunlight splotching us in patches, each girl hunched and writing in a notebook she will never see again. The trees, cropped by white borders, extend in every way around us. Beyond: slivers of a tea-colored lake, a night screaming loon that wakes us to darkness and reminds us the world is not always what it seems.

In our hunger, we talk and write of our desires: eggs, milkshakes, water not tasting of lake decay and iodine. Evergreen smoke envelops us, but mosquitoes still chase us into our fitful sleep and dreams. I stand on shore and walk into the lake because I have to—down the sloping bottom, down through murkiness, where I think I will die breathing in a world of bluegills, duckweed, and diving loons.

We each drift away from shared words—chew our nails, cattail roots, pens, and one of us chews a small flute like bone. We are burnt through by hungers, lost to the world, only reluctantly returned.

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