

HOW TO BE WHEN YOU CANNOT SEE

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A poem about how to B when you cannot C

Anxious adjustments
Barely visible buoys blinding bright
 big beach little beach bridge spanning
Cedar avenue congested cars clear lake cloudy vision
Dodging ducks and drifting swimmers
 dark triangular shapes disappearing
Emptied mind, emptied lake, everything erased by
 eroding eyes
Fogging
Goggles getting off course gaining perspective on not
 seeing only feeling
How to swim straight how to be when you cannot see
Isolated isosceles
Jumbled views
Kayaks keeping out menacing boats
Lifeguards lining the course
Muscles moving then stopping to sight mid-lake
 motionless messed up maculas magically
 making bright orange buoys disappear
 reappear then disappear again
Nothing to sight but
Opaque water occasionally the color of
Pea soup thick hiding Northern Pike Yellow Perch
 a percolating panic is
Quelled even as quirky gaps in my central vision
Remain removing random objects, often red or orange
 ones I
Swim without seeing
 showing off strong shoulders and straight
 strokes.

Touching toes testing limits tracking towering light
 poles tired yet triumphant
Unbroken
Victorious
Weightless worry-less wiser
eXiting the water with a silent joyful exuberant
"Yes!" to an audience of
 yellow paddle boats yelling kids and my yellow
 backpack its many
Zippers zipped, indifferent to my effort unfazed by my
 exhaustion

THE BUOY IS NOT A METAPHOR

The buoy is not a metaphor.
Not a beacon of hope.
Not unsinkable resiliency.

The buoy is an orange inflated triangle
sitting on the surface of Lake Nokomis
with two other orange inflated triangles.

Together they mark an invisible path
from the big beach to the little beach
keeping swimmers on course during open swim season.

I look for these buoys
while swimming wondering
will they or won't they appear?

And mostly they don't,
hidden by waves or sun
or my inability to see orange often.

But occasionally they do.
Sometimes just the idea of orange
appearing in my mind.

Sometimes the sense of something large looming.
I lift my head up to sight
and feel one close by.

And sometimes, if a buoy hits just right
in the small bit of central vision I have left,
I see it in the distance.

A quick flash of bright orange
reassuring me
I am not alone.

How is this possible
to be here now
swimming straight when I cannot see?

How do I not panic when nothing exists
but a field of waving blue
stretched out endlessly in front of me?

But I don't panic and I do keep swimming,
trusting straight strokes and
my body's birding instinct to find land.

AFTERGLOW

Reaching
the big beach
for a final time
gravity returns
before I'm ready.
Still unsteady I
stand
then drop
back down
kneeling
in wet sand
waiting for legs
to remember
how to be vertical.

When I
finally exit
the shallow
water
muscles are
grateful
happy to be
used. A gentle
delicious
ache slowly
spreads
not pain or burning
but glowing
satisfaction.

We—me
and muscles—
are pleased
with our effort.
We feel strong
brave
beautiful
enough
more than enough
everything

E N O R M O U S .

Certainly
too big to
fit in such a
small lake.