

Submarine

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English version by Fernanda Sampaio

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This play was written for specially for the schools participating in the
Conexões Youth Theatre Project Brazil
and it was part of its portfolio in 2013.
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REALIZAÇÃO



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“I wish I could grow into a bird.”

manoel de barros

A swimming pool crowded with students in their bathing suits. An ordinary short-course pool with eight lanes. The sound of water splashing, teenagers jumping into the water.

Characters:

(M1)

(M2)

(M3)

he

(F5)

(F6)

(F7)

(F8)

All characters are teenagers between 15 and 17, and should be called by the names of the actors playing them.

(M) – male

(F) – female

The number following (M) or (F) specifies the lane he/she usually uses.

...

Stage directions may be followed metaphorically. Any action may also be read as a choreographic movement.

1.

(M1) –

It's easier to see underwater. I open my eyes despite the chlorine and there he is, blowing air bubbles through the nose, like when we used to sink and tried to keep our bodies from floating to the surface. Like the day before yesterday. Eight or nine tiles. That's his size. You can count the tiles through him. In a few years, maybe only the tiles will be left, without him. In a week perhaps. But today, he is still there, underwater, submarine. Holding his breath. No breath.

...

2.

(F5) –

His mother sleeps no more. She doesn't even open the tap. Or so they say.

(F6) –

The first thing his dad did was make his bed. Stretch the sheets, take the pillow, fluff it out, then put it back where his head used to be.

(F5)-

I overslept.

(F6)-

Lucky you.

(F5)-

That's why I didn't show. It wasn't a competition day. It was supposed to be just another swimming class.

(F6)-

(M1) was the first one to scream when he understood what had happened. Or so they say.

(F5)-

Didn't you hear?

(F6)-

I was under. My ear started to sting. I spent the week thinking that maybe it stung because I was diving and couldn't quite hear what had happened. Or the opposite: since I knew what was going to happen, I preferred to have my ear ache from all the water than hear (M1) scream.

(F5)-

Better think that. The first version.

(F6)-

I raised my head out of the water. I couldn't quite get what had happened. I had my eyes filled with chlorine and my wet hair sticking to my mouth.

(F5) –

And the ears stinging.

(F6)-

And the ears stinging. Then (M1) screamed for help. Then (F7) mentioned there was blood in the water. (M2) didn't say a word and tried to get the body out of the water. (M1) and (M2) spent some time going under and coming back up to breath at the deep end. That was when I stopped rubbing my eyes and got the wet hair out of my mouth.

(F5) –

It was all very fast.

(F6) –

Almost a minute. Almost nothing.

(F5) –

Did you get him out?

(F6) –

I can't remember. All I remember is his body out of the pool. My feet wrinkled, freezing. And I remember thinking: no class tomorrow.

(F5) –

We didn't have class for a week. That's not enough.

(F6) –

And today, here we are, jumping into the pool as if it wasn't only last week that it happened.

(F5) –

It feels longer. It feels like it was yesterday.

(F6) –

No one has seen (F8) today again.

(F5) –

It's been a while no one has seen her.

(F6) –

Do you know how she is doing?

(F5) –

They had just started going out, going steady, less than a month ago.

(F6) –

That's a long time.

Silence.

(F6) –

How long did you manage?

(F5) –

Almost a minute.

(F6) –

That's enough.

(F5) –

Can you help me? Hold my head. If I tap three times on your thigh, you wait a second longer and let me out.

(F6) –

OK. One, two, three.

(F5) goes under (F6) holds her head underwater. For almost a minute. (F5) taps three times on (F6)'s thigh. She breathes again. She raises her head out of the pool.

The eyes filled with chlorine, the hair stuck to the mouth.

...

3.

(M2) takes a breath.

(M2) –

I used to be able to swim there and back, all underwater. Twice the 25 meters. 50 meters.

(M3) –

You didn't take a breath?

(M1) –

50 meters in one single breath. (pause) Now I have trepidations. I'll try to backstroke it, with my eyes and nose out of the water.

(F8) goes by. They stop talking.

(M3) –

Is she here?

(M2) –

Last week she was here too. It was so silent when she walked in, it felt like everyone was underwater. It was almost half a minute in silence.

(M3) –

Do you want me to time it?

(M2) Nods and starts. Gets into start position on the tiles and signals for (M3) to start. He pushes his feet down, and starts to swim. Backstroke.

(M3) –

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen.

(M2) stops. He waits and catches his breath.

(M2) –

It's been eighteen days already since he jumped in.

(M3) –

You never told me exactly how he... You saw it when he stepped onto the diving board. You saw it when he slipped and hit the back of his head before he fell. You saw it when he was still in the air before he hit the water.

(M2) –

It was his best dive. He was never that good. At anything.

(M3) –

You saw it when he went down two meters and didn't come back. You dived and tried to pull him by the arm. You tried to pull him by the arm. You tried it about five times.

(M2) –

I didn't know people could be heavy underwater.

(M3) –

He was heavy anywhere.

The two of them laugh.

(M2) –

He didn't like me.

(M3) –

To you he was just a fat guy. You shouted “jump in you whale in a blue speedo” before he jumped. And he jumped.

(M2) –

He didn't like me.

(M3) –

That's why.

(M2) –

You remember when we locked him in the bathroom and how he begged to be let out. Crying. And how we laughed at him crying. And when we made a drawing of (F8) hugging a pig when they were going out together. And we stuck it to the board. And how he didn't say a word, but we could see him swallowing the words. That was cowardly.

(M3) –

He didn't like to make anyone cry.

(M2) –

I don't want to talk about this anymore. If we stop talking, we'll forget. If we forget, we can dive again. Let me go on.

(M3) –

(after a while) The pool gets full in the summer, doesn't it? (pause) Go. I'll time you again. You stopped at eighteen.

(M2) goes back to the backstroke.

(M3) – nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two.

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4.

(F8) –

One month. One month is half the time we went out together. It feels like we didn't go out for a long time. It feels like it's been a long time since we haven't been together. "The distance added us less," I wrote on my profile two days later. But he was the one who liked poems. I'm only good at geography. One month is half the time we were together. A real relationship. Before that there was the Phys Ed. class when he put ice on my nose. And the times when he taught me literature and I taught him geography. And all those early morning senseless messages, with signals and no-words. And the first time we kissed. And all those other times when he thought about kissing me and I never noticed. Some things we only noticed after they are gone. It's almost always like that. It was like that when mom and dad split up. It was like that when I didn't read what he was afraid to write. It's like that when we think we are in a valley and don't realize it's a canyon. It's like that this entire winter month.

When I came back to the club, Thursday, eleven days without going into the water, people stopped talking when I went in. But they weren't talking about him. Tomorrow they would be talking about me. It was the rumour that (F7) had made out with I don't know who, which interrupted my winter. Everyone stopped talking, as though it was disrespectful that life went on. And it was.

I went into the water. I opened my eyes while I was swimming so I wouldn't lose my lane. I pushed the tiles down and got out. I sat on the edge. I laughed at the comment that (F5) made about the teacher's bathing suit. I mentioned that (F7) hadn't come. They told me about I don't know who. (F7) was the talk of the day. (F7) was oblivious to the fact that she was saving me. If you looked from the outside, you might think that he isn't always in the pool, watching me. Like a submarine that comes too close to the shore, unbeknownst to everyone.

(F5) -

Then, she was missing from the party.

(F8) -

What?

(F6) -

What world are you in?

(F8) -

Sorry. I was tripping.

(F5) -

(F7) disappeared from the party and you must have an idea what everyone is talking about, right?

(F6) -

Has anything happened? She never misses our swimming classes.

(F5) -

She sent me a message this morning. She says she has the flu.

(F8) -

To be absent one day before the training, must be serious.

(F5) –

I'm sorry, but can I speak my mind?

(F8) –

You don't need to apologize for being honest.

(F5) –

You have been absent from a bunch of trainings too.

(F8) –

It was serious.

(F5) –

I'm sorry.

(F8) –

It's been a month today.

(F6) –

Is that all? (pause) How about an apnea competition?

(F8) –

OK. One, two, three.

The three of them disappear in the water.

...

5.

(F8) goes on swimming and comes closer to (M1). They finish the race, their arms on the edge of the pool. She wins. After a while, in silence, her hair dripping with chlorine.

(M1)-

Three months.

(F8) –

That's longer than the time we went together. Did he tell you how it all started?

(M1) –

He was always the quietest in the class.

(F8) –

But he did talk to you. I thought you were going together.

(M1) –

He wasn't my type. He was my best friend. The position is open now.

(F8) –

Three months is a long time.

(M1) –

I will wait a little longer to fill the job.

(F8) –

Can I tell you how he asked me to go steady?

(M1) –

If you want to remember.

(F8) –

I remember every day. Almost every day.

(M1) –

Tell me.

(F8) –

We had bet to race each other to the other side of the pool.

(M1) –

He knew you would win. He was never a great swimmer.

(F8) –

I did win. He didn't even let me take a breath and he started talking about submarines.

(M1) –

He liked to copy poems.

(F8) –

He said he had read on wikipedia about the shape of submarines, cigars, you know? I said I knew.

(M1) –

Yeah.

(F8) –

That shape, better known as “tear hull”, was inspired by the body of whales. Also, the hull is covered with a rubber lining, anechoic coating.

(M1)-

What is that?

(F8) –

I asked the same thing. He was silent.

They are silent for a long while.

(F8) –

He said its purpose was to deflect sound waves. To be silent?, I asked.

(M1) –

To be silent, the best is to sink in the water, let all the air out through your nose until you are at the bottom of the pool and be quiet until you feel you are going to pass out. And then wait a little longer.

(F8) –

That was his answer.

(M1) –

We were such good friends that we enjoyed saying the same things.

She laughs.

(M1) –

Go on. Tell some more.

(F8) –

So I laughed and said I was going to sink his head in the pool so he could be silent. He asked about my mom and dad. I said they were splitting up. He said he knew; he wanted to know how I was doing. I said no one had asked me that before. Then I told him how I was feeling.

(M1) –

And how were you feeling?

(F8) –

I said I would have to draw a map to explain it. He said he would like to see that map. We must have been almost half a minute in silence. There was almost no one there and I felt like kissing him and I told him that. He asked if I didn't mind him being fat. I pulled him underwater and kissed him. I never thought I could do that, I cared. When we caught our breath again, he said he wanted to be my

boyfriend. “If you don’t tell anybody...” and I sank his head in the water, so he would be in silence.

They are close to half a minute in silence.

(M1) –

There’s almost no one at the pool.

(F8) –

You don’t mind that I was his girlfriend?

(M1) –

I never thought I’d tell you this, but I do mind. But I think he wouldn’t mind: I was his best friend.

They go under and kiss. They come back up.

(F8) –

You can hold your breath longer than me.

(M1) –

It’s been three months. I’d like to be your new boyfriend.

(F8) –

If you don’t tell anybody...

(M1) laughs and pushes her head in the water.

...

6.

(M1) –

He's the only one who knows. It's easier to see underwater. I open my eyes despite the chlorine and there he is, blowing air bubbles out of his nose, watching everything I do, everything that he might be doing. I stole his last month from him. Eight or nine tiles, that's his size. In a few years, there may be only the tiles and not him. But four months later and he's still there, except that almost no one remembers. Not even us.

...

7.

Two actions happening at the same time: (F5), (F6) and (F7) swim in the pool. (F8) is at the other end, out of the pool.

(F7) –

It's true. So they say.

(F6) –

At the ladder in three.

(F8) –

At the ladder we tell secrets.

The three girls swim to the ladder and whisper, in secrecy.

(F5) –

But did they have a relationship or were they just going out?

(F7) –

(M2) saw them together in the pool the other day. They kiss underwater. Or so they say. They sure can hold their breath.

The three girls laugh

(F8) –

Underwater no one can see. Only him.

(F6) –

Are you sure? He was his best friend.

(F5) –

Maybe that gives him the right.

(F7) –

They say they've been together for two months, but only now did they start telling people. Because of the accident, whatever.

(F5) –

It's going on to close to six months. It's time enough. She's right.

(F8)-

It feels like yesterday.

(F7) –

They say she says it feels like yesterday.

(F6) –

It seems like yesterday that she kissed (M1).

(F7) –

They say that during yesterday's thunderstorm...

(F5) –

I was stuck in the car with my mom. We couldn't even get into the house, on account of it being so strong. The rain.

(F7) –

They say they stayed here at the club waiting for the rain to stop. The two of them alone.

(F6) –

I don't believe it.

(F8)-

My fingers were thin and shriveled from being in the water so long. We were waiting for everyone to leave. And everyone wanted to leave because of the dark sky. The clouds were telling us that all we need to fear is water. It still took a while to start raining. And we kissed on and on secretly underwater. That was the first time only the tiles could see us. The first time he wasn't there.

(F7) –

(M2) saw them.

(F5) –

I feel a little angry that (F8) and (M1) are together.

(F6) –

It's been half a year. We used to talk about him in every conversation. Now no one remembers. That's the way it is.

(F7) –

She wrote on her profile today: "the world outside is screaming. Everything the same."

(F5) –

Half a year ago she got into her head to copy poems. The way he used to.

(F8) –

I didn't want to forget him. I was afraid I had already forgotten.

(F7) –

It's a way to say goodbye.

(F6) –

Can you apologize for time?

...

8.

They all swim as if nothing – ever – had happened. Or as if they had already forgotten.

...

9.

(F7) –

They say it was October 17 or 18 – almost no one remembers the date anymore. It's been about eight months since the accident. (M2) got into the pool, stood up in front of his lane, lane 4. All the other lanes were taken. And he laughed out what he wanted to shout out, what everyone already knew: that (M1) and (F8) were together.

Ten meters to the right, (F8) at the last lane, he felt like crying. He went under and opened his eyes underwater, so he could tell people his eyes were red on account of the chlorine. Ten meters to the left, (M1) at the first lane. He pushed the edge of the pool down and raised his whole body to get out. So they say.

(M2) –

I won't forget that day. I won't forget that I pulled him out of the water as if my neck was bleeding. As if I had slipped. As if it was my head that had left blood on the diving board.

That's why I shouted out what everybody already knew and said what everybody must have been thinking. A whale is too big to forget that easily. Sorry.

It wasn't my fault. I repeat that every day. To convince myself, to keep myself from forgetting. (F8) is fucking (M1). (F8) is fucking (M1). (F8) is fucking (M1). (F8) is fucking (M1). And no one says anything. How can you go on diving after that? Can anyone tell me: How can you go on diving after that? (F8) is fucking (M1). No one will forget that.

(F5) –

(F8) went under. Only when she came back up did we see that she was crying. What we should do is hug (F8) and go under with her, to be silent, not to hear anything anymore. But nobody did that. I didn't.

(M3) –

All we could do was stare at the cold water, thinking that (M1) would dive in and hold on tight to (M2). And they would fall in the pool, trying to drown each other, shouting stuff we couldn't understand, splashing water so we couldn't see that they were hurting each other. Like in the movies. But he didn't. All he did was get out of the pool. No one understood. No one understands anything.

(F6) –

That too was life moving on, except that no one knew that. Everyone knew that it didn't make a difference that lane 4 was empty. But no one liked to know that.

(F8) –

I dived in. First to stop from hearing, my ears stinging. Second so no one would see me cry. So no one would see me. I opened my eyes underwater – it's easier to

see. He was there, about seven tiles in lane 4, looking at me. And he hugged me and told me everything was going to be fine, that all I needed to do was to breath again. When I got my head out of the water – I don't know if it was the wet hair on my face or the chlorine in my eyes, but I swear I didn't see (M1). He was gone. And I was alone. Again.

That's when everyone turned because of the noise coming from the glass door. A bird, flying it did not know where – like me, like us – had hit against the glass. Sometimes you think you are in a canyon, but you are in a valley.

...

10.

(M1) –

The bird had hit its head hard against the glass and fell to the ground, dizzy. No one remembered anymore what (M2) had said. What interrupted our little dilemma was something bigger: the bird on the ground, kind of dizzy.

It still tried to fly again, but it just broke the air, aimlessly, kind of blind for the blood in his feathers. It flew low. And fell again. And again. Until it fell in the pool. The bird almost broke the glass trying to get into our aquarium.

The wet feathers made the animal even more panicky. Wings flapping, water splashing.

So I shouted: help me and I jumped in the pool. (F7) said there was blood in the water. (M2) didn't say a word, jumped in tried to help get the bird out of the water. We spent some time going under and back up to breathe, at the deep end.

That's when (F8) finished rubbing her eyes and got the wet hair out of her mouth. I took the bird in my hands, hard, and got it out of the water. It was not breathing.

...

11.

Carrying the dead bird, (M1) climbs up to the diving board. He stays still, ready to jump.

(M1) –

It seems funny to bury an animal that drowned. (pause) One year today. The game is to imagine future “goings under” for him.

Slowly, all of them get in start position at their lanes. They are ready to start a race. They laugh, happily, ready to jump into the pool.

(F5) –

I start. He died at 78, a stroke, like my granny. I didn't go to the funeral because I don't even remember my own name anymore.

She dives into the pool and starts to swim.

(M3) –

He was five months old when he died, in his sleep. Till today his mom doesn't understand what happened. Till today she can't sleep.

He jumps into the pool and starts to swim.

(F7) –

They say he died while he was crossing a deserted canyon. His wife never found the body, but she collects geographic maps.

She jumps into the pool and starts to swim.

(F6) –

He died while his son was spoon feeding him. He was over one hundred years old.

She jumps into the pool and starts to swim.

(M2) –

He died at 34, watching a play about a boy who died in a swimming pool. People only realized it when the play ended.

He jumps into the pool and starts to swim.

(F8) –

He hasn't died yet. Some say he turned into a tile. I say he turned into a bird.

She jumps into the pool and starts to swim.

(M1) –

He died very old, alone at home, not a word to anybody. He never liked to make people cry.

He observes the others swimming. He still has the bird in his hands.

(M1) –

They swim as if nothing had happened. As if life went on. And it does.

He makes into a position to dive into the pool

THE END