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THE BAPTISM

I practiced in the shower. Pinching my nose. Sealing my lips. Bending my knees. Then tilting my head back into the prickling, unrelenting stream. Again and again and again. My naked body rising back up through the downpour, through the years, growing from girl to teenager, ascending toward the torrent's origin. Toward God. Then bowing down backward before him. Over and over and over.

The fear did not wash away.

Would the water be cold? Would I swallow it? Would I inhale it? Would I drown?

The water would have to cover me. All my vulnerable openings. The five of my face. The three below. Where danger or desire could enter, if left uncovered.

Cover—to clothe nakedness. Cover—to protect from what is feared.

Ironic, or perhaps apropos, to fear the rite that might deliver one from even greater fears: From the wrath of God, poured out like water. From the waterless, paradoxical Lake of Fire.

My unbaptized, uncovered childhood was choked with the words of one terrifying Bible verse: Mark 16:16: “He that believeth and is baptized shall