

I am afraid he will push me in, though, stride up behind and shove my body into the deep, off the scorching pier where I retreat to wait for him to return to himself, to the man I love, after the first time he hits me. A punch to my sloshing stomach. In a coffee shop. On an average Saturday afternoon. A kind of upside-down drowning. My breath forced up. Out.

My breath is suspended again afterward. The night his palm covers my mouth on the couch—a revision of the baptismal nostril pinch. Or the morning his hand covers my face with a pillow—a dry approximation of the holy water closing over the head.

And then his fingers cover my neck, all the way around, the choreography finally, completely contorted, one average sunny Sunday morning in our bed. Time and life suspended, strangled in his chokehold as he hovers over me. This, my brutal baptizer.

The air rushes out from our shared apartment, from our shared future plans. Until he releases me, and I rush out, too, breathless, directionless.

I do not know why I turn toward water.

*Hot tub? Jacuzzi? Whirlpool?* I ask of hotel reservation pages, the flood of online deal aggregators, as I search, floundering, for the lifeboat of a temporary home. Why do I want one or two lonely late-night hours, before the facilities close, in an echoey, chlorine-choked chamber?

To imagine the enveloping fluid as the warmth of his once-loving body, when it would wrap, cover mine in our bed? To sway, rock, keen with the comfort of the waves? To weep tears from every orifice? To reenact my survival of his fearsome wrath, represented by this fearsome water?