

dive back to my book. I will not witness this drowning.

I dip my toe in sometimes at the beach. Though I leave my shoes on usually. Either way, the water is cold.

The hot-water heater has limited capacity, my next lover tells me when I suggest the jetted tub in his upstairs bathroom for us on New Year's Eve. An attempted celebration. Or maybe self-persuasion. To try to desire again.

For when he kissed me, weeks ago, for the first time—his the first new lips on mine after the last man I loved had covered them with his hand—I closed the door of my dim new rental unit afterward and fell to the floor, bending over my knees, weeping for my last lost love. A kind of forward baptism.

The waves slosh out onto the bathmat as the new lover and I displace the water, wedge our two bodies within the narrow porcelain. Limbs shifting, blundering, adjusting, angling in the draining tank. Skin sticking, pruning in the cooling water. Which is cold, almost empty, when I stand and wrap the towel to cover my nakedness. From below, his eyes bulge without his glasses, ogling with soggy desire.

I never share a bath, a hot tub, a pool with a lover again.

I go alone to the new bathhouse on each recent birthday. Strip in the locker room. Uncover in public at last. Careless and tired, I guess. Slip into a bikini bottom displaying my naked ass. But it is covered now with the dips, the dents of age. The young, beautiful years all wasted, all floated away.

In the dim, candlelit haze of the underground brick cavern of the bathhouse, my legs descend step by step into each depth. The roil of the whirlpool. The salt of the floating pool. The scorch of the caldarium. The warm