

be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” With each reading, I made heretical, exegetical attempts at repeated reinterpretation.

But what to make of Jesus’s prophecy of that very damnation, the coming comeuppance of sinners, frantic, desperate to hide from God’s anger on some apocalyptic judgment day? Luke 23:30: “Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.”

The images are too solid for wishy-washy meanings. The words too plain to need any translation. No alternative interpretation but this: Be baptized or be damned. Covered by water or covered, crushed by stone.

Baptism by immersion, they called it. The pastors, the parents, all the pious adults. Scorning the trickling pours or sprinkling showers anointing baby-soft hair at the fonts of other denominations. Other mistaken cults. The one, the true church: Independent Fundamental Baptist.

I have a healthy respect for water, I tell friends now with nervous laughter. *Respect*—just the grown-up, middle-aged word for *fear*.

The first time I was to be submerged, I toddled small and panicked beneath the party of adults crowding the middle of some church friend’s wood-paneled basement, the blue gurgling of the adjacent underground swimming pool echoing my stomach, sloshing with a hotdog. But the sign says to wait 30 minutes after eating before swimming, I bleated to my mother.

She waved away my fear, and then she was laughing and pushing the innertube that encircled my waist across a stretch of empty, bottomless blue, to her friend who was laughing and pushing me back, and I was flailing my feet and saying, Stop! Stop! No! No! The laughter oscillated on, like the lifesaver, like the water, like the waves.