

A sprinkler is oscillating in my memory of the backyard patch of grass at my family's first home, where laughter—of children this time, my brother's and mine—was dashing back and forth, back and forth, and my legs were dancing and my one-piece was skipping, skimming through the glittering drops, as they fanned out like the pages of an open book.

The Bible church that my parents attended then dealt only in the eponymous book—the dry sacred pages. The church held no opinion on water. On covering.

But when the ship of the moving truck ferried our future to the new house on the dead-end peninsula of the cul-de-sac, we were submerged in an unearthly world. One block from the funeral home. Two blocks from our new Baptist church. Its stubborn stone front rising from a sea of grass. The vaulted auditorium an inverted canoe. My kindergarten Sunday school classroom a tiny lifeboat.

There in the new house, as my father washed the wide kitchen floor on Saturday afternoons, we children pretended the displaced chairs, aligned away from the table to make way for the yellow bucket, had become some sort of wooden train. Or, better yet, a bridge, above the endless lake of linoleum. We leaped from seat to seat to keep our feet dry.

We never learned how to swim.

Mixed swimming, they called it. The parents, the preachers, the polemics from the pulpit of the new Baptist church. The sin of mixed swimming. Wherein the bodies of boys and girls, mingling, mixing too close together in the too fluid medium of a pool, went uncovered. The swimsuits, the water not coverage enough. Naked desire filling up the eyes, the minds, the hearts, like a drowning.