

After the pastor, mouth set in a mean, hard line, had pulled my father into some corner, some back pew perhaps, and informed him his daughter would be welcome no more to worship in the church orchestra, to play a hymn on the piano or flute up on the stage. Up in front of the baptistry.

For how could I spit into my instrument in attempted worship of the fearsome ruler of the universe when God's spit had never covered me? My father had spit bitter, hunched-over words on our way out to the church parking lot. I had concurred with the banishment.

After all, *Baptist* was listed out front in the name on the church sign. And even Jesus humbled himself under the hand of John the Baptist, under the waters of the Jordan River. Could not I?

Unlike the flowing river, though, the stagnant waters of the previous Baptist church's baptismal tank, high above the stage, had lurked murky, mysterious, behind an impenetrable half-wall. The pit rectangular, narrow. Like a coffin.

Buried with him in death. In dirt.

Grayish-brown scum floats to the top of my memory of the tub in the upstairs bathroom of my childhood home. Back when I forced myself to dip my hair back to rinse in the dirty water. Contaminated with the detritus of my entire body. The mud under my toenails. The sweat beneath my arms. The excrement between my legs.

I strained my face to stay above the pulpy waterline. My mouth and eyes and nose open to hold, breathe the air. Until the relief, when I was deemed old enough by my mother to stand alone in the clean, aerated stream of the downstairs shower.