

Afterward, beneath the showerhead in every one of my rented apartments, gray dirt smudges the floor of the tub where my feet get planted. Black mold grows up around the rim, seeps into the grout, covers the curtain. A double covering.

The dirt on purpose, perhaps. My stinging squirts of bleach cleaner inadequate. Sporadic. Though my scrubbing, sweeping, vacuuming of the remainder of the apartment repeats every Saturday morning like some sort of religious ritual.

My tub is too dirty to take a bath in, I say. But maybe I am just afraid.

Even sometimes in the shower steam, when it fogs without warning, I gasp. My lungs closing, drowning in the watery air. And then my heart is panicking in my throat and my hand is tearing at the curtain and my head is thrusting into the sudden brightness of the tiled white bathroom. A gulp of dry, cool calm.

I stand laughing, half-dressed on the bathmat beside the half-open shower curtain and lather my next lover. His long hair streaming just beneath the showerhead, the dark curls across his chest foaming with soap bubbles, dripping down, down to the swirls between his sturdy legs. My hands cover everything.

When we are no longer laughing, when his eyes glisten with workweek fatigue, when his lips spit with startling, unexplained anger, I take him to the lake, the waves sloshing, rocking like a giant tub, and my hands hold his head, his frown, his furrowed brow, dipped backward like a baptism in the dry basin of my lap on the sun-warmed grass or sand. We never wade into the water.

Also: He never tries to teach me how to swim.