

my body is a tributary

If I do not concentrate on breathing/ I will drown. /In the salt, the distilled water, even tears /*I'll show you how to breathe down here*/after three hours exercise, I, too, can feel/ the tightly drawn marble/of overnight muscles/ my father defends my wearing a blue sports bra/ in the dining room when my older sister questions/ it as indecent/ this from my father, who/ I remember years ago/ watching some moment of television when a woman threw the chocolates in the Nice Guy's face/ to which I said: she should have kept them/and he said: then she'd have to talk to him.

I remember my father telling me how he used to watch me in my walnut crib/ hand on my milk swole belly/ as we examined each other, this small human/ this man with magnifying glasses on his face/ I am afraid of what it means that my mother did not/ hold me, but for someone with so many children/ she is fond of all of them in different ways.

I was shown how to swim when I was five/ and by that I mean that I was allowed to walk out into the ocean/ and my older sister held my hand/ then dropped it/ to go swim with the dolphins farther out/ but I crawled back to the worn red plaid blanket my father laid out, ate some sand gritty tuna fish/ which is maybe why I've hated it ever since./ It was only when an instructor tried to teach me how to swim/ that I started to drown/ and a stranger had to guide me/in how to dive into the water/ and kick off the pool's twelve foot bottom/ to return to the surface.

love takes a vacation for the first time in ten years

i water her plants, ficus, cacti, herbs on the porch, strawberry plants in the front yard, freeze them for her smoothies when she returns. assume she's gone off to visit a friend or raise goosebumps on an acquaintance. i bring in her mail & sign for her occasional package. start tapping my toe & check the calendar, *did she say when she'd return? circle it in red?* i feed & pet her mutt nicknamed Jersey Cow with his lolling tongue & habit of running off to chase white tail deer, bringing back a scratch of fleas and a singular tick on his chin. i fall asleep on her bed, wrapped in her old sweater, the knit one with the roomy pockets; scent of vanilla, cardamon, jasmine, touch of honey. she returns with spring. like light, like sun, like a child's voice in the morning. loud. opening windows. nails making short work of envelopes, frying eggs for avocado toast & slicing red peppers for extra heat. her eyes water when she tastes a seed, round & white like a miniature communion wafer.