

Drowning, Transposed

1. The water overtakes you.
 - a. water is grasping toddler hands with a vice grip.
 - b. some ways this happens:
 - i. a sweeping force, like a flash flood or a hurricane or a malicious stream.
 - ii. slowly. you fall asleep in the bathtub. a mother drowns her son.
 - iii. swiftly.
 1. when I was ten, my brother fell into a pool. I didn't understand what was happening until I saw my mother screaming. throwing herself into the water. my brother didn't die but likes to say he almost did.
 - iv. a side effect. an alligator drags you under.
2. At some point, you breathe.
 - a. intentional
 - i. I used to live on a grassy hill overlooking a river. every few years, a big boat would chug up and down with a net attached, scooping out waste. mostly plastic bottles and garbage bags. but once, in the wild part of the river, they found a car from the 70's with a skeleton inside.
 - b. unintentional
 - i. my brother came out of the pool gagging on chlorine and spit. my mother, five foot four, placed him on the concrete and sank back under, adrenaline fading.
 1. by then, my uncle had noticed and put his wine glass down. he watched.
 - a. when my mother was eight months pregnant with me and this uncle was seventeen, he was playing pickup basketball with some cousins and my mother got out of a car. he called her over and launched a basketball into her fat stomach.
 - ii. sometimes when I'm at the store I see the yellow paint buckets with a picture of a child drowning in an inch of water on the side and I think *why is this not considered graphic?*
 1. it is not considered graphic because a lot of children have drowned in yellow paint buckets.
 - a. there are signs by the water at the lakes I swam in as a kid that show a silhouetted child falling in, grown-up silhouettes standing in the background.
 - i. I can't tell if they're oblivious or watching.
 3. This first breath is painful. If the water is cold, it's as though you've swallowed a bucket of fire ants and broken glass. If the water is warm, it's like you're puking in reverse.
 - a. when I read the news article about the dead car person, it doesn't say if they were a man or a woman. I think the news doesn't know. I think it doesn't matter.
 - i. it just makes picturing the car skeleton's death harder. I don't know if they pushed back long hair or loosened a tie. I don't know if they thought about

their children or their mistress. I think it doesn't matter. I think they were probably afraid.

- b. my uncle's wife was in the marines. the one time I visited the house they share I was overwhelmed by the swords on the walls and the fact that they named their blonde miniature dachshunds Beast and Bandit. Beast had previously belonged to my grandpa and was called Toby back then.
4. The pain begins to pass as you take in more water.
 - a. do it with me. *in, out, in, out.*
 - b. when I was six, the big kids were playing a game of chicken. I wasn't playing because I was still a baby. my uncle (at the time, age 22) thought that his brother's daughter needed to learn young that the world will not spare you because you are small. my uncle picked me up and threw my body, log-stiff, into the water. I didn't know how to swim. my mother shouted from the shore, too pregnant with my brother to do anything to help.
 - i. the difference between me and my brother: I was left to drown and came back again. he was saved.
 - c. after my mother saved my brother's life she went on a walk alone. I didn't understand why at the time. she was a hero! she saved her son!
 - i. I later came to understand that it is very significant to create something and to watch it sink.
 1. my mother has always processed her feelings best on her own.
 - a. I've learned this from her. this is how I handle men: I punch their arms, smile. if they knows they scares me, that will be a small victory, a notch in their belt.
5. The pain is gone now. Breathe. It tastes like air.
 - a. there is a man who died on Mount Everest decades ago whose body is still preserved. he is entombed entirely in ice except for his feet, clad in green boots that still stick out of the snow. this dead guy is a landmark for climbers. funny, how a body is so temporary until it dies.
 - i. my uncle deployed to Cuba so he could authorize drone strikes. how that works; he inputs people into Excel and presses the *return* key. he learns how many of them will die. the general asks *should we launch the bomb* and my uncle says *yes* or *no*.
 1. this job was the promotion the army gave him. he's good at it. feelings don't get in the way.
 - b. lucky you, no sunburn.
6. There comes a point in the drowning process where there is no more pain, they say. It's like euphoria, they say. The pressure leaves your chest. You look up, you probably see light. Have you ever taken a warm bath with bubbles and expensive soap? Drowning is like taking a warm bath with bubbles and expensive soap and an untuned violin. Drowning is turning yourself inside out and evaporating into seaweed. Drowning is being able to see your own blood suspended in the water and find it a pretty color. This is all conjecture.
 - a. I cannot ask someone who had drowned and died what it's like. I have not drowned and died myself.

- i. I asked my brother. he scratched his head and said *it's scary. it feels like you're being sat on.*
 - 1. my brother is not a reliable source. ever since his incident he has stayed on a leash, addicted to video games. some mornings I open the window in his room to air it out.
 - a. even while I was in her body, I got basketballs.
- b. I tried to drown myself when I was seven. I went into the ocean off Key West, where the water is warm, and I pushed away from shore. I did not know how to swim when I was seven. my family was drunk or otherwise distracted, so I drifted further and further out. I puked seawater in reverse. a surfer found me and took me back.
 - i. I don't think they realized that I could have died. I wonder who I'd be if they realized that I almost died. I know I can't ever tell them what it's like.