

## Antonia Banyard / FIVE POEMS

### SWIMMING UNDER, A CONCEPTION STORY

I've always wanted a pool  
in our basement. The slow delicious slide through  
darkness. How can I remember my own beginning so clearly  
when my mother has forgotten? I'm not curious about details  
*of sex, but the moment of me*, hours later — was it really  
how I remember? I know mothers  
whose bodies sent strident signals. One lay  
on a beach in the Caribbean, her toes cleaving  
to the sand, when her body suddenly began  
to peal, a bell in high winds. Another was steering  
a sailboat, felt something slide through  
her belly like a bubble bursting. When she looked  
down, a rope lay wound around her hand, an embrace.

They knew.

My mother just smiles vaguely  
when I ask, continues reading. *Oh, how can I*  
*remember?* she says. *I must have been asleep.* Did my father  
wander the hallway that night, a foot mysteriously  
cramped, was he searching for a lost button? Why do I find  
myself pressed against the glass of aquariums, always wanting  
to dive? Why do I wake to the sound of a key  
clicking into place, iron teeth finding a groove,  
a gate swinging open?

## HOW TO SWIM THE BUTTERFLY

I have always wanted to build a pool  
in our basement. So I could teach you  
the butterfly stroke. After a long day of cell  
phones and car alarms, we would walk down  
the stairs together and I would say:

*forget for a moment*

that for so long your hands have curled  
into fists blunt and square as Mac trucks. Let them unfurl  
in the water. You need big hands. Push  
off the wall and, pulling the water aside, describe  
a key hole the length of your body. Lead  
with your chin, unlock the door. You turn  
into a dolphin, first your shoulders, your slippery  
spine, and finally  
your legs. Your hips are hinges,

your knees an opposing set,

you bend like a Japanese blind. As you break  
the surface, the air tastes sweet  
and brief. Your shoulders lift  
from your body, your arms encircle a rolling globe  
that you are falling over. Reach back into  
the water, search for the key.

OK now. Faster.

Is this where I stroke  
*the butterfly?* you ask.

Not yet, not yet.

## SLEEPSWIMMER

I have always wanted  
a pool in our basement. Somewhere  
quiet to slip into for a moment.  
We all need a dark corner to float. But do not  
think I don't enjoy your company, sometimes I do  
from a distance. Take this evening—I dither  
between eiderdown and mattress, the smother  
of your heat, a cold toe on the outside. Finally, slide  
down stairs into the cool envelope  
of water. Upstairs, you fly beneath feathers. I flip,  
a practised swimmer reaching the wall,  
a fish on the boat's bottom,  
a mind on the verge of sleep.

Close my eyes, dig down  
through water, one breath to go.

## KOOTENAY LAKE POOL

I've always wanted a pool in the basement. Somewhere  
to toss my little boat. Shelter it from storms  
the unpredictable kind that blow up  
on Kootenay Lake on days that look forever.

Or maybe

it's just a canoe, hardly a boat, but enough  
to hold me, my mother, and food for three days.  
What happens if we are stranded for five  
on the far shore, making smoky fires out of damp wood,  
on the pebbly spit? And it spits rain  
on our tent for five days, rhythm like sucking candy.  
And what if our only bear is the packrat who visits  
at midnight to steal our granola and hoarded chocolate?  
And what if my mother swims naked in the lake,  
and I can't? Up to my armpits, I kiss the chop of waves, fill my cup,  
take it home with me.

## HOW TO SWIM THE FRONT CRAWL

I've always wanted  
a pool in the basement.  
Somewhere private to shed  
the daily plod.  
Swim a few laps  
of front crawl.  
Because front crawl is just that —  
face down churning away  
to get from here  
to there and back again,  
to grasp the water  
as if I might catch up  
with the body I used to be,  
if I pull hard enough  
kick fast enough,  
like the teens I see  
in line for the diving board  
awkward, shivering,  
arms crossed to hide  
what I would flaunt now  
if I still had it.  
This is an exercise  
in redemption, or oblivion,  
I forget which.  
I climb out  
into my real life,  
dripping.