

Swimmers

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In the dream, headlong, we plunged into a pool on an icy day.
Mountains glimmered both far off and near, a bleak mist

at the periphery of vision, mysterious as mountains should be.
We grazed them when we glided out, the breaststroke

beat us back. When we spoke it was grating, a language
we'd just learnt. So we relied on smoke signals to speak.

I was 12 when I saw my breath hang in cold air, in Hyderabad,
my father's town. I fumbled with the latch of the iron gate,

to be let in or out but which it was I do not know. It was a miracle
to have a trail of vapour speak for me. The swimming pool

in the mountains, its elegant swimmers indolent with rest: these
I have imagined. If you believe in magic the trickster will believe

it too: a confident magician, his baton's dark flourish
takes on the lyricism of drama, the theatre neither absurd nor

riveting. It is impossible to look away when he draws out
the limpid sleeping animal for inspection. You must decline

to name it. This is a dream after all. Look! The haze of mountains
disappears and the pool holds no reflection. The landscape will turn

to vapour and buoy you into that dream you dreamt when you were 12.
You will enter, at last, the realm of the living, you will remember

you had parents, children, some happenstance strokes of
good fortune, but it will be as if looking at the world through glass,

the forms billowing into apparition, their sweet faces twisted into ellipses
wispy beyond recognition, opaque as smoke. Such will be that sweet

forgetting. The world will separate, at last, into the realm of light and
the realm of water, the peripheral at last resigned to where it belongs.