
POETRY | FALL 2017

Breathe

By Sheila Kelly

You are floating in the swimming pool again.
Your childhood best friend rises like prayer.

Freckles gather on your cheeks like ants
on a cracker. You vault between your birth

and the blue of god's good humor, your legs
jack-knifing curlicue openings in clouds. You

are a girl in love with floating because your mother
is the wind. This means when you pray, you will

always go back to the headlands searching for
the sea-stack broken off in a storm. Your father,

drunk, falling down the steps again, his hand
bloody from trying to break into a locked door.

Smell of stale beer. Your mother wailing
through the tarry darkness. So you pray inside

clouds again, swan dive to no sound, only filtered
metallic streetlight. She's still cursing and getting

him to bed and you shout to god: *Look at me dive,*
my launch and flight! & your best friend rises like

prayer. She tells you tonight you can put on your
old swimsuit, the one the color of a calm breeze.

She is careful, gorgeous — says lives that make us
can kill us. That you can pray for better endings

or give up the old prayer. You vault between
your past and the blue of your friend's eyes.

You are floating in the swimming pool again.
You learn to pray underwater and still breathe.

Sheila Kelly writes poems and plays and leads generative writing workshops in libraries, community centers, art galleries, and most recently at the University of Pittsburgh's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. She is a retired psychotherapist and believes in the healing qualities of undefended speech that poetry invites and that making art is a birthright and not a luxury. Her work has been published in many journals and anthologies, most recently in *The Comstock Review*, *Paterson Literary Review* and *Pittsburgh Poetry Review*.

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