

LEARNING TO SWIM

C.J. Farnsworth



Image: “Sunline” by Annie Kuhn. “Learning to Swim” was written by C.J. Farnsworth for *Rattle*’s Ekphrastic Challenge, June 2021, and selected as the Editor’s Choice.

Mother fast-friended Daddy’s distant pool cousins
So to be sure we could swim
In their inground kidney with a corkscrew
Slide we bit our tongues as mother jerked
Orange floaties up to our throats
And yanked our hair under latex blossoms
We kicked and screamed and held
Our breath with arms over our ears
As they roared *kick/jump/keep your mouth shut*
While Daddy’s-Mama’s-Brother’s-Girl
Smoked menthols on a chaise
In a gold bandeau drinking
Gin after gin after gin
Because, Mother said, once upon a time
She was a beauty queen before
She had a boy with sugar they called ‘Tink’
And Katrina with gold skin
And gold hair and gold ankle
Bracelets (a trophy come to life)
Who sometimes showed up
With a long-haired/shirtless/round-shouldered boy
To pick-up a few bucks
While I snuck into the house
To use the drowning-in-pink
Bathroom that was *inside*
Daddy’s-Mama’s-Brother’s-Girl’s bedroom
To sit at her wicker vanity wondering
Why the sun made my skin red not gold
To clip on earrings that hung
Like bunches of purple grapes
Before sloshing out the sliding doors
Connecting the bedroom to the slab patio
Right *beside* the pool
Convinced Daddy’s favorite Frank Sinatra’s
Bedroom must be just like this
Until Mother announced it was getting late
Until we packed into our green Pontiac
Until Mother, as heavy as the wet towels
She piled in my arms
Told me to put ’em up
Until I pinned each towel
Until all the corners touched