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## The Strong Swimmer

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Kim Barnes

## *The Strong Swimmer*

I could tell you how he came  
from that water, pressed his cock  
against my belly and licked  
my eyes like salty stones.  
Beyond us, the drowned boy  
he had thought to save  
rode the deep current, pulled  
by waters I'd never known,  
the only tide of my life  
a swirl in my hips  
for the one left at fifteen.  
And if he did not lay me down,  
if I have only dreamed him slick  
as a dolphin, have forgotten  
his guilt, the emptiness he swam through  
to clasp the cold hand of his friend,  
then let me say I desire him still,  
would suck every breath from his mouth  
and teach him the ways of water—  
how an open palm can float a body  
through nights moonless  
as sea caves, can trace the heart's ebb  
and flow to its coral roots.  
Laredo, the strong swimmer. Laredo.  
Listen. Laredo, his name  
like a pearl. Judge its weight  
and tell me it is not worth the drownings.

we rise to, the surface a wet kiss.  
Tell me I cannot carry him home in my arms,  
call him lover, cannot wrap him in sheets  
and rock the sin from his soul.  
Laredo, the life you lost has made another.  
See how the water moves on.