

the plunge

by Lila Allen

Pools were made for babies like me: I grew up on pink bottle sunscreen, the sting and the stink of the chlorine, the tug of blue bikinis pulled off by the dogs to expose plump, delicious cheeks like turkeys on Thanksgiving.

Bottom's up, *mon cherie*. On land, I'll grab mine with two hands. But in water, boy, I'm weightless and turning, a regular fish -- afloat, flopping, deboned. I've never combed the water with the grace of other girls, their long arms cutting the water like cake, their long bodies icing the surface.

I like it best below, among the turquoise legs like heavy trunks, the rafts over me like storm clouds, the squeaking rubber amplified to thunder. And when I flip, the surface: one pulsing, dazzling dream of a thing, like memory.

Today we're all tuckered out on chemicals; we're puckered and sucked dry like sticks of jerky. And now, to taste, mommies and daddies, put me in the salt -- where I'll float, held, each taste of the water also a taste of myself.

Throw a baby in water and they just know: no breathing, only the acceptance of falling. Becoming, in that moment, the water itself.

