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## Worship During the Rainy Season

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## Worship During the Rainy Season

When the air conditioner cycled on and off  
through the humidity and the dog next door ran  
panicked circles on his tether, I walked the half  
mile to the pool. The life guard straddled a thick post,  
surveying the middle-school girls with squinty eyes  
hidden behind dark glasses. It smelled like melted ice  
cream and hot concrete, mixed  
among

ash, waves and ripples descending into  
sediment thirty feet down, where the stairs shifted  
like teeth during the rainy season. They walked miles  
to Kashi, where it was said that the Ganges could  
cleans the murder of three brahmins. When the water  
rose to Shiva's ceiling,  
they dove

from ten feet into the glass reflecting  
sunlight in tiny peaks radiating out from  
sun-screened limbs. I had the penny tight in one fist, let  
my eyes sting in the haze, cooler than sweat. Shallows-  
stead, I pitched copper in a careful arc to  
splash at the break, half the length away. In the burst  
of swimming it flicked quickly, and I tried to beat  
it to the ear-splitting  
blue depths

of the temple doorway. Somewhere, somewhere  
under the thrust of the flood, the *linga* rested  
in sandstone, and they dove from the banks with one  
huge breath to sink and pull beneath the threshold, long  
enough to paw through Sanskrit papers and touch stone,  
the shaft. It was the first pilgrimage site, only  
one flooded—the scripture said that Shiva lived  
in these temples like sun filling jars of Ganges  
water, shining, spread far  
apart

for the final kick to reach and stretch, clasp  
the penny with cold fingers. My lungs sang louder,  
beginning a chant and inward suck, pulling far  
down and in. I pushed hard against the painted stripe,  
burning now, shooting fast up from the bottom  
to surface, sudden light.

—Allison Armbrister '01