

# SWIMMING I WAS

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HELEN LAURENCE

*"Going as far as you can go and still  
come back  
seems a worthwhile motto."*

Dorothy Barresi "For Domenic, My  
1970's"

swimming alone those unprotected  
years (mother where  
were you when all the sand let go?)  
each time going out so far i had to fight  
body and soul to regain shore  
almost always sure of it but  
what a way to learn  
swimming (mother what  
made you so afraid?)

raised to fear: unwilling  
sacrifice raised  
to your harsh Almighty darting  
venomous fangs at exposed infants trying  
to nurse (mother how  
could you reconcile helpless with severe?)  
no wonder  
cancer found welcome  
and i swimming  
smooth diving under breakers  
swam away.

seaweed forest: only the first time fearing  
entanglement (mother why  
were tales of ocean life denied?)  
and the panic of capture  
with legs unable  
fighting for wet space  
dry air. but that was before  
learning the ropes

surging and i remember grunion  
and fires on the shore when sandy  
sweatshirts floated home the best of smells:  
ocean, blackened wieners, driftwood  
smoke (mother when  
did you name the sea your enemy?)  
urgent innocence felt content,  
fulfilled seeing

those moon-silvered grunion racing to renewal  
and not caring how wet my clothes became  
from waves (mother who  
did you believe i was in your story?)