MATTHEW KENNEDY

Some Days the Heart Marches

My grandfather, mid forties, weekly bather at the Arts & Culture Centre, George Street, Corner Brook, would sit deep-breathing, hands on knees, at the edge of the pool—then dive and swim the length of it and back, underwater. So he tells me—we’re treading water now, in the deep end, and he continues, between trips to the bottom retrieving multicoloured rings braceleted round his wrists: one day he told the lifeguard, a young woman, about his adventures in free diving. You are hyperventilating, she informed him, and you might just pass out down there you know. You might just pass out down there, beneath all the dangling feet, I think.

Me—I have these same genes in me!—and all through the third grade’s compulsory swimming lessons I feigned sick and sat it out at the edge of the pool, bathing-capped, deep-breathing like my pop. The next summer, when he told me this story, the two of us were raising Cain on the diving board and rope swing, all cannon balls and pencil dives.

Ah, some days the heart marches!
And some days the lungs swell up, balloon-sized, in a delirious buoyancy—hybris, pneumaticus. It’s those days I play at barrel-chested, keen, self-sufficient, disinterested, but other days I falter, heave, and press my hand hard against my breast, worried sick. Some days the heart marches; other days it swoons and hesitates, and you’re lucky just to be alive.