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## A SWIMMER

*by*

Zac Cianflone

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He knew that the guys on TV were hacks, amateurs. Sure they were fast, but they practiced a mongrel method. They treated the water like a mere medium between two walls, a barrier between a goal and a stopwatch. He swam at the local Y, but there too the hacks congregated, forever fighting against the water and babbling like idiots in the cramped sauna. He avoided the sauna. He showed up to the pool in the early morning, around 5:30 when the place opened. The air was murky with chlorine and sometimes the surface of the water was smooth—the hacks still tucked away in bed, he chuckled to himself. Usually though, he wasn't alone, an ambitious kid here or there getting in extra pool time, etc, and they were even talking about starting up some kind of early morning water aerobics class. One day he would retire and dig out a single lane in his backyard, he thought as he lowered himself down. He swam now.

At times the tiny bubbles delighted him, cascading off his thumbs like an endless stream of carbonation from

the bottom of a glass. But they alternately dismayed him to no end: to cut the water was an art, a bubble an imperfection.

In the end, two ambitions tormented him.

One: to disappear into the water, to cut the liquid clean with the plane of his outstretched fingers—to be swallowed into the wakeless mass.

Two: to totally give into the imperfection of bubbles, to be dissolved whole and destroyed by the mad water like a tablet of Alka-Seltzer.