

Almost Pentecostal

Rita Grabowski

Mrs. Robinson sang in the choir.

In the church, my face, my husband's,
and one other white couple on the stage.

I was clearly the minority,

but I swayed with the singing,
the cadence and crescendo, and The Oratory rolled.

Women in suits, dresses, heels and hose, many with queenly hats.

Children with tiny tambourines, rows of metal circles jangle
harvest-moon brassy. I liked the *Amens* and the *Hallelujahs*.

Chords progressed on grand piano, stops pulled out on the organ,
and, *Would You Come Down and Testify?* I thought, "Why not?"

my hand wrapped by a slender brown one, praying on my behalf,

Would you like to come to know and love the Lord?

I wanted to be matter-of-fact, while amplifiers
spun out organ swells, and I meant it when I whispered, *Yes*

Then, catacombs. Muffled organ chords replaced shouts and stomps.

Led to a small room, every item of clothing I wore replaced
with folds of cotton to clothe me from the skin out, soft and white.

I thought to myself, "So, this is swaddling," feeling new as baby Jesus,

women led me up some steps, narrow and wooden,
near the edge of the white and cerulean pool.

Two men in suits, wet to the waist each touched an elbow,
the way one guides a blind person.

They advised me to take a deep breath.

The water was cool, and chlorinated. I breathed out, and counted,

"one-thousand-one," layers of cotton from head-wrap to socks,
cool and wet, my elbow cradled.

I felt like an albino dolphin. Gently escorted to change back,

my own clothes felt warm, and dry,
and different.

Sister Gladys and Reverend Thomas invited me to stay and talk in tongues.

I demurred it was late; we had a distance to drive home.

But I felt a warmth and a calmness for days.