For Julia, In the Deep Water

The instructor we hire  
because she does not love you  
Leads you into the deep water,  
The deep end  
Where the water is darker—  
Her open, encouraging arms  
That never get nearer  
Are merciless for your sake.

You will dream this water always  
Where nothing draws nearer,  
Wasting your valuable breath  
You will scream for your mother—  
Only your mother is drowning  
Forever in the thin air  
Down at the deep end.  
She is doing nothing,  
She never did anything harder.  
And I am beside her.

I am beside her in this imagination.  
We are waiting  
Where the water is darker.  
You are over your head,  
Screaming, you are learning  
Your way toward us,  
You are learning how  
In the helpless water  
It is with our skill  
We live in what kills us.

—John N. Morris