

High Board

William Thompson

In the changing room we heard the story
of the boy who belly-flopped from twenty metres
and split open like a watermelon dropped
from a third-story window onto tarmac.

I marvelled at the older boys' casual, running
dives, bombs-away hang time, then
nonchalance. As they glided back towards
their girlfriends, I suddenly felt small,

childish: intimidated by the noise, height
and seeming grown-up-ness of it all.
But then my friend, normally so quiet, led
the way and I found myself following.

Condemned men approaching a long drop.
I remember us climbing slowly: his red,
trunks taugt around his rump, pool water
on his legs like beads of sweat, and his

footsteps vibrating in the glistening rail.
Then arriving on the long, white landing strip
of the top board: its dizzying horizon,
the wet-braille feel of it beneath my feet.

And the surprising, edifying kindness
of the older boys. And finally my friend,
all action, stepping off the end
without hesitation and without looking back.