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 (1931-1997)