

The bathroom is beside the bedroom. It's papered in small blue flowers, forget-me-nots, with curtains to match. There's a blue bath mat, a blue fake-fur cover on the toilet seat; all this bathroom lacks from the time before is a doll whose skirt conceals the extra roll of toilet paper. Except that the mirror over the sink has been taken out and replaced by an oblong of tin, and the door has no lock, and there are no razors, of course. There were incidents in the bathrooms at first: there were cuttings, drownings. Before they got all the bugs ironed out. Cora sits on a chair outside in the hall, to see that no one else goes in. In a bathroom, in a bathtub, you are vulnerable, said Aunt Lydia. She didn't say to what.

The bath is a requirement, but is also a luxury. Merely to lift off the heavy white wings and the veil, merely to feel my own hair again, with my hands, is a luxury. My hair is long now, untrimmed. Hair must be long but covered. Aunt Lydia said: Saint Paul said it's either that or a close shave. She laughed, that held-back neighing of hers, as if she'd told a joke.

Cora has run the bath. It steams like a bowl of soup. I take off the rest of the clothes, the overdress, the white shift and petticoat, the red stockings, the loose cotton pantaloons. Panyhose gives you crotch rot, Moira used to say. Aunt Lydia would never have used an expression like *crotch rot*. *Unhygienic* was hers. She wanted everything to be very hygienic.

My nakedness is strange to me already. My body seems out-

dated. Did I really wear bathing suits, at the beach? I did, without thought, among men, without caring that my legs, my arms, my thighs and back were on display, could be seen. *Shameful, immodest.*

I avoid looking down at my body, not so much because it's shameful or immodest but because I don't want to see it. I don't want to look at something that determines me so completely.

I step into the water, lie down, let it hold me. The water is soft as hands. I close my eyes, and she's there with me, suddenly, without warning, it must be the smell of the soap. I put my face against the soft hair at the back of her neck and breathe her in, baby powder and child's washed flesh and shampoo, with an undertone, the faint scent of urine. This is the age she is when I'm in the bath. She comes back to me at different ages. This is how I know she's not really a ghost. If she were a ghost she would be the same age always.