

Deflate

by [Valerie Weaver-Zercher](#) in the [September 19, 2006](#) issue

In autumn I wrestle the plastic water slide
to the ground, my legs like bellows riding the sides,

then pinch the thick airholes into slits
to hear the sizzle of release. A slight wind lifts

my husband's early summer breath
into September air. It is as if

the lung of summer in the body of the world
is collapsing. I grip the plastic and furl

the bottom toward the top, trapping air
too slow to exit. Geese above me flare

and part; a thatch of brown grass below
dies. Those who claim their losses know

the exquisite pain of letting go. I drag
the slide into the cellar, where it will sag

in a dank corner until June, when once again
small bodies will skim down its inflated spine

beyond our reach. *Breathe, boys, breathe,*
we pant, then slacken our jaws, unclench our teeth.