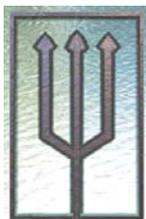


# Pierced Heart



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**Robin D. Laws**



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Written by Robin D. Laws

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# I

A boom box, a flotation device, a purse; these were the things she carried with her into the pool area of the Bienvenidos Hotel that night. The already-inflated flotation device was shaped like an inner-tube and colored to look like a hollowed-out lime slice. The small purse was made of transparent plastic. It was empty except for a vial, also made of transparent plastic.

A large sign warned her, in eight languages, that use of the pool outside regular hours was at her own risk. She checked the times posted on the sign to make sure that no lifeguard would be on duty. She stepped quickly through the shower area. She had already taken a shower up in her room, washing herself very thoroughly.

Once into the pool room itself, she checked to confirm that she was alone. As she expected, the place was empty. It was eleven P.M. People vacationing in the Edge had better things to do at eleven at night than splash around in a pool. Or worse things, depending on your outlook.

She walked over to the pool's edge, tossing the inflated lime slice onto the water's surface. It landed with a gentle slap. She set the boom box down on the blue ceramic tile floor. She squatted and gazed down into the bright blue chlorinated water. She reached forward and swished the water between the outstretched fingers of her right hand. It was very cold. She figured the management of the Bienvenidos didn't really like people using the pool. Or maybe they were just cheap. She wanted the water to be warm and welcoming, like a bath. But perhaps cold was the thing. It would make her numb.

She pulled her plain white sweatshirt over her head and slipped out of her gray fleece sweatpants. Underneath she was wearing a modest one-piece navy blue swimsuit. She was in her late twenties, very pretty, without cosmetics or other adornments. She dipped the outstretched toe of her right foot into the water and shivered, hugging herself. Then she leaned over and hit the boom box's "play" button.

The silence of the pool room was filled by the plaintive first notes of Vivaldi's *Stabat Mater*. Although she herself was a musician — a singer and guitarist — she didn't know much about classical music or own a lot of tapes like this one. She picked it up on a whim a couple of years back, during a tour in the UK. It caught her eye because of the