

The Pacific

There were no road rails.
I remember no road rails & the death depth off the cliffs
we motored along.
I remember speed in a parched Chevy clunker that could not have sped,
& bench seats, & no buckles, & bare thighs peeling off faux leather
at every hairpin. Every elevated, canyon mile was a feat
but a breath of less slickened air too, less cog & fume—
a winding away from
the wavering, sea-leg steam off blinding sidewalks,
infinite sidewalks & other shoeless kids
kicking rusted palm leaves outside infinite apartment complexes. Away from
our corner
of the valley of concrete corners, of
no evidence of valley besides boulders stacked in the distance of every vista.

The driver was a stranger, was my mother after my whole life had passed
with stranger after stranger,
was my mother after seven years, & me at seven years
with her driving that snuff-colored Nova from her blinding valley not a valley—
through Laurel, Topanga, Malibu
canyons all the way to some fantastic, to her beloved
blue—eucalyptus
choking local growth the whole trek. & the cooling air as we efforted west,
& the jolt of a castle, *The Castle*,
in a distant crook of a range that hid the slate of the ocean,

made me want to stop moving
but not stop here. I remember hoping
to find hermit crabs the size of the mole on my right side chin.
& if I tethered them to a stick they'd line up by mass & trade shells, find homes
that fit. & there'd be one left without, one torn out. A book said
a scientist leaned into wet sand, watched a torn crab die
in the beak of a gull. I can't remember if I saw that death or read it. I remember

watching a wrong castle tucked into a wrong mountain notch on the chin of the sky,
like the hermit mole on my chin
if my face were the sky. "It's a beauty mark,"
my mother had said, "Don't pick at it." I eyed that smoking stranger at the wheel
& dug my nail in
as the Pacific swelled into view that first time.

Inspiration Point

Pacific Palisades

We'd stare at horses at Will Rogers Park, then hike
the Loop Trail to Inspiration Point, &
I'd lag back
to be a kid. Alone. & under that aloofness—hid
vengeance. A rusty burr or two
in my left sneaker. & under that—anxiety. The salt
dripping through chaparral
brows, into my brown lashes. &
under that—rage. A perfectly purple
shell some kid favored & lost.
& under that—hope. The pounded
ground. & under that—a vast
clearing on the cosmos, also called Inspiration
Point. A gorgeous, inner hill

with a curious figure
taking in the Pacific view.
Breathing chicory & chamise. Naming
every wind-boarder near Catalina
Island. That high-noon, far-sighted figure—seemed
a bit burnt, but warm. A bit divine.
But—sometimes—I didn't find that figure
wow-ing at a thing
no one had ever seen—at a new bird
better than a phoenix. (*There's something better than
a phoenix!*) Sometimes, my hand
stretched towards some nether new
creation & I was the figure
who named it.

The Pacific

Without a boogie board,
you'd fling your body
into the curve of the Pacific.
Without baby oil, you'd still burn
& be tender for days.
Without a blanket, you'd drop
your faded Eddie shirt,
sit—& later, shake it out,
mop off the salt. Without
shades, you'd razor
your hand like a visor—squint
at five footers rushing up,
at gulls. Without money
you'd drink from a fluoridated bubbler—
you'd eat that deflated pb&j,
box of raisins, yellow apple.
Without a comb, your hair would turn
to loose dreads—damp
with foam, with mist. Without shoes,
your hot, calloused,
hobbling feet
would be fleet, would crave
the Pacific. Without a boom box,
you'd hear other people's music—
& walk the slanted shore
till you found your Summer
song. Without some body's love,
there'd be a miracle—
there'd be today.