

Coming from California

Winter seems to reappear
Month after month here. The old snow
Lingers in patches. The sun stays low.
Gray coats the dampened trees in blear.

It's April and I've been thinking of home.
These dark and darker months in Boston
Have been too long, too easy to get lost in.
To Berkeley streets and Stinson seafoam,

I miss you. But pride and age and some
Fascination with red brick
Pushed me here, and I need to stay.
The ache of being far away
Is cold and falls and seems to stick,
But I know it comes with the coming from.

Hiking

In Haiku

Climbing the sand dunes,
she squints at an amber world
of infinite noons.

Meanwhile I'm flushed,
my skin damp, burnt, and cracked as
my legs scratch the brush.

A lizard arrives,
and she sees kaleidoscope
skin and gray-green eyes.

I slap a bug from
my arm, smudge the blurry speck
off with my small thumb.

She follows along
the crooked lines in the sand,
like rivulets gone

or paintings evoked.
I stop to drink some water,
my t-shirt sweat-soaked.

She goes on, dreams up
dunes as melting pyramids,
hopes for mourning doves.

I'm glad to think and
look at things the way they are.
Sun is sun. Sand, sand.

Soon, we'll be leaving.
But she sits on a dune's crest,
still, bright, glad, seeing.

Elmwood Cafe

There is the always shortish line in front
of the pastries: cookies, lemon currant scones,
and only a few chocolate coffee cakes
left today. And there are the big, round cups
with faded yellow patterns round their rims,
filled to the brims with different shades of warm
brown-beige, a sprig of sage drawn out in white
on each of their nervous, foamy surfaces.

And there are the old men with salt-and-pepper
beards and unkempt, emphatic eyebrows wrinkled
as they talk morning paper politics;
and teenagers with eager fingers clasped
around their pretty lattes; two women, happy
and complaining: work, the kids, the gym, the drought;
a writer splitting time between her muffin
and her poem, brushing crumbs off messy pages.

People in coffee shops seek different things.
For me, this is the world of little joys:
the bit of sugar that lingers at the bottom
of a coffee mug, the smell of peaches baking,
the quickness of a whisk against a bowl,
a ripple in a passing cup of tea,
the happy murmur of all the working and thinking,
all the talking and nodding, warm and sure and always.

The Pillbug

When we were young, we liked to play with pillbugs,
Those little armadillos of many nicknames.
We really only liked them for their one trick,
The one we learn in the dirt by the sandbox. Well,
Trick or torture, I never could decide.
But still I poked them, thrilled by the perfect globes
Of their bodies. They never learned that giant fingers
Were not to fear. We didn't hurt them, really.

More fun was when we turned one on its back
And watched its legs, thinner than the wrinkles
Of our palms, its translucent abdomen stretched tight
Across its underside, like cellophane.
What kind of stuff is underneath the skin
Of something with an exoskeleton?
What was it like, to see the whole world flipped?
And could it back-flip back to life? And how?

It didn't look like much. But then, somehow,
It worked. This bug flipped, it somersaulted!
It carried on, unfazed: its shell still smooth,
Its legs still quick, its thin antennae reaching
Calmly, matter-of-factly, like before,
Towards green and rain-soaked earth, towards dirt, towards home.
Its legs all pattered down my palm. *Squash it!*
Said a friend. But I let it go instead.