

Oracle

We pull onto a narrow shoulder
by a bend in Highway 1
where fog grips the chaparral
above the ocean cliffs.
We hike a switchback trail
past wildflowers at Sobranes Creek
to a cool redwood grove
then a wind-swept meadow
where the midday heat has
sprung the fog's icy grip
and the sea thunders below.

Highway 1 is a thin, grey line
between jagged rocks.
Brown and green mountains
fold into the sky behind us.
We gaze down the mountain,
a map spread before us
and turn to go. The sea hisses
and the rush of Highway 1
grows louder as we hike down
the thin switchback trail.

As we reach the parking lot
we hear the screech of tires –
a truck hauling an empty trailer
slams its brakes to avoid a car
slowing in the lane ahead.
The trailer jackknives into traffic.
The driver of a pick-up truck jerks
the wheel too late – hits with a crash
then fights to stay on the shoulder
teeters and flips over the hill.

For a moment lasting forever, we
hear the sounds of surf below.
Then, as we reach for our phones
he stumbles onto the shoulder
and looks around, woozy and dazed,
staring at his hands like a child:
what unseen hand rose up
and reached above the sheer cliff
to drag him to the shore below?

Why toss him back? Why let him go?