

Wilderness House Literary Review 13/4

Greg Maddigan
At Skip Rock Bay

We are staring at the big empty bay, listening to a susurrus move through
the cattails and reeds behind us, watching a heron poised on a pointed
tree top like a

Tai Chi master. We realize that we have never been here before

without the children--a decade, at least, since their little fingers
wrapped so readily around these flat beach rocks, these smooth, soothing
stones

before flinging them wildly upon the waters.

Every rock, teal and marbled by memory,
the concentrated color of a thousand earths, a thousand childhoods,
skips, careening like the years, away from us.

Now, we sit in a bed of fossils,
bleached evidence of our old ties, our spent days, our heroic tales of
circumnavigating the sun; there is no one left to listen.

I hurl a rock, this one mottled red with my regrets, the color of the sun set-
ting
in fire season, born from the forge of a distant artist
with callous hands and crow's feet and a sometimes callous heart.

I wish we could ride a skipped rock, beyond
the coffin flatness of the horizon's tight lid, into next year, and the year
after that, skimming
the water's skin, together.

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Rounding Anacapa with My Father

The Santa Barbara Channel floats before us,
horizon to horizon, like falling petals of blue Iris--
the generosity of the sea at dawn.

The Channel Islands bob in the distance,
buoys of our shared past with water:

I remember the way

You heeled the Sunflower at Castaic Lake until
I was certain that I would pitch headlong into
the marbled blue-green iris of
the impenetrable future.

You would not let us capsize, with just the two of us
left on the lake.

The knifing hull of the catamaran rounds Anacapa, laying a wake:
past the battered cliffs, the adolescent fury of the open waves,
past the Fin and Blue Whales, shiny backs black in the crashing sunlight,
past the white-spotted rookeries, the jagged rock arch.

On the way back to the Ventura docks:

Dolphins, two thousand or more,
nosing, somersaulting, chirping, clicking, clowning, whistling--
acrobats of the absurd.

They echo-locate off my ecstasy.

Your whooping exhilaration blows joy
into the sails of my
tomorrow.

We sit at the fisherman's bar at the end of the day,
and I know how this will end, the same as always,
the silence louder than the clattering cutlery.

We are men. We are engulfed by the words
none of us want to say
but all of us want to hear.

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After our time together,
I can ease back
into the darkness outside the big-paned windows,
knowing that in the harbor,
all the boats
are still floating.