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Walk Up

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The Walk Up

Mary Dengler

Walking up the road from San Clemente Beach
To Colony Cove condominium
When clouds parted like a curtain on the sun
Emerging hot and white,
Brought me to a heart-beating allegorical moment
Reached by whatever Greek imagined Sisyphus
And by Shakespeare when his Brutus thought of floundering in shallows
Having failed to take the current at its height.

My earlier downhill run
To seas of startling blue and white-laced waves—
Like those backed up against the sky
In an Asian artist's dream—
As seen from high atop my distant hill-top view,
The way Odysseus, with his homeland wish,
Saw them from the heights of Troy,
My view distracted by sparse traffic on the highway and the Metrolink,
Whose tracks I take with two big leaps,
His view by flimsy chariots on his list to burn,
Whose sandy tracks he leapt inside a horse—
Was met by littered sand and ragged gulls,
One hopping from a sunset duel,
His missing leg the price of rotting fish.

The water—darker than its far-off sparkling kiss,
Its waves much bigger, colder, than they seemed up there—
Plunged and springing forward, hissed
Before shrill winds beneath a distant sun,
The way Odysseus must have seen it when,
The battle won at Troy,
He'd gotten Agamemnon's leave to make that easy run on home to Greece.
My run was halted by debris of midnight sex and jobless sleep
And huddled aging folk
And surfers waiting, drifting dark against the mounting swells,
Like Odysseus' run, by flesh- and lotus-eaters,
Kirke, hungry for a human's touch,
Poseidon, angry that he'd dared to violate a favorite son.

Discouraged by the dropping walls of surf, the litter, stares,
And ominous boards,
I flirted with the icy froth,
Then turned my feet to jog the water's edge toward Dana Point
Or San Clemente Pier
The way Odysseus later wished to turn around and jog Kalypso's shore.
His epic craft exploded by Poseidon's wrath,
He found himself alone at sea
With nothing but the veil of Inos as a safety sash,
No treasures from success at Troy,
No riding on a current to administrative jobs in Greece,
Just one more shipwreck on the shore of one more foreign place,
The need to prove himself, in trial and narrative,
Among one more barbaric race.
One more quest
Before the final war and peace—Elysian Fields.

A mile or two from home, my run
Impeded by great piles of rocks engulfed by Proteus' incoming tide,
I circled back to start a two-mile-cheated run,
Then climb the hill where I'd,
A very short time ago,
Begun, the years emerging in my thought
(While I engulfed the humid air) to settle on my legs and back.

They taunt my easy run down infancy and youth,
Depict high-mounted waves I'd sketched to ride,
The shock, the cold,
The pounding of my twenties
Thrashing in the shallows when I failed to take the crest,
My settled jog along the shore
Between the time-constructed bounds,
My starting up the long steep lonely climb toward death,
Our journeys necessary for the text.