

Tess Taylor

Habitat Exchange

*Calmada, Calmosa, California, Mar Vista,
Ocean View:* In duplicate languages street names proffer
synonymous peace. The billboard offers

“affordable luxury” — but the building is derelict
no ocean view no sidewalks the parks gated,
& all nature paths blazed first by oil rigs,

the trail a scar from fuel excavation.
I am pregnant again. The dust makes me cough.
Cool mornings I still hike the arroyo;

the plants here are replacements of plants removed elsewhere
“habitat exchange” — stand-in ecosystem —
gnatcatcher sumac invasive eucalyptus

I walk through scarred elderberry, shimmering mulefat.
Arid

crackle in the mud rat’s nest.

I pause near the tunnel: The baby kicks.
Black sage blooms in dry inflorescence
& the toyon is a distant cousin of the rose.

Buckwheat bush, sunflower, endangered roadrunner:
hear the *cheat cheat* of a towhee.

Whatever can wait waits for uncertain water

survivor survivor and the mod suburb beyond
crumbles already.
The future it promised seems already over.

I climb and watch an unmoving freeway.
Stalled tankers grit the particulate air.
At last, from the ridgeline, I glimpse the sea.

Apocalypso w/ Aquaria

Touching an urchin
in the reflecting pool: Bennett says *salt!*

Urchin: I say, *anemone*.
Each day Bennett sings new syllables.

Anemone alemony amelony a melody —
We watch jellyfish: volutes in the tank.

Jellyfish thrive in many waters,
even in the face of vast pollution.

Next to them, endangered alligators;
cloudy octopi; one turtle,

back venerable as Aztec masonry:
Bennett says *tortuga*.

Each day his bestiary grows.
Yet everything we name is

disappearing:
zebra, hippopotamus, rhinoceros.

Soon I'll also be explaining
how these words each mark

a half-lost species:
O exotic & endangered letters.

Song with Sequoia and Australopithecus

Limber pine, marbled godwit, diffuse daisy, stonecrop,
I was learning your names —

then heard Bennett waking.
On today's pajamas he wears dinosaurs.

He doesn't know dinosaurs or that *pajama*
is Hindi via the British;

or that this tree is cousin of paleoliths,
that this state was once Spain.

Some year I'll tell him:
What is life for but explanation?

Now he wakes under a tusky mammoth.
His arms flail & he flushes reaching

as if for a tree branch to keep from falling:
(He lies on the ground.

There is no limb.)

Moro's gesture: vestige of monkey self.

My primate clings to me in new human skin.
I rock him near stiff blooms labeled *sea thrift*.

Each body cradles its own conservation:
Each body bears forth the enormous dark chain.

We only half-grasp what we inherit:
In caves the first humans played

much of the Doric scale on bone flutes,
do re mi fa vibrating over eons.

Our ears cock
to old tones.

Scientists now believe that our wristbones
tell us which Australopithecus was our progenitor.

O dinosaur o Australopithecus.

I rock my wrists, I grip my son.

I might say *earth thrift, life thrift, or tongue thrift.*

I might say *word-crop: pajama: Empire.*

Today I revert by instinct to glottal percussion.

I coo, I croon.

Air blows
through my hollows:

I telescope song shape to vibrating chambers —
into his ears — fresh gills of this air.