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Second Growth

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Second Growth

I sit among ferns at the top of a ridge
between reddish spires of trees
that push the earth's darkness up two hundred feet
drawing the mist out of the sky.
My friend left me here to listen to the wind
as it swirls through the branches
and the sarcasm of crows that fill the canyon
with a loud cajoling. She left me
a few wild threads of her hair
in case I got lonesome, and a blue notebook
in case there was something to write.
Had I a choice, I'd rather have followed her
down the trail through the wells of sunlight
to the playground where we argued earlier
under a canopy of dragonflies,
about the afterlife of words;
whether to write one must memorialize
or embody the actual.
But then I'd have missed the two cops
who came looking for underwear
inside the huge sorrel stump; who on tiptoes
headfirst finally fished out a flannel shirt,
nightgown, and panties it seems likely belonged
to the girl I overheard them say they'd found
a week ago. I take a stick
a scratch in the ground a sign, a little pit
where my random lines intersect.
Dust billows over the wreathes of oxalis.
There is something terrible I cannot tell.
The dry greens and browns of summer
fade in the shadows that lengthen all day
like memory. Nearby the ocean heaves
and shudders, rocking the cliff where I sleep
in a house full of fish and swallows zooming
around under the eaves, where I can look down
at pelicans skimming the water and whales

making their own miniature typhoons.
Where I can see for five miles
the beach lined with huge broken spars of driftwood,
and buried in shallow sand
the carcass of a sea lion the waves have
dredged up from beyond Big Lagoon
where crews work illegally
in the mountains cutting timber.
It helps to return to the site of injury,
to sleep alone in a wooden bed,
above the place where the bride
of my childhood ran off, where I watched
her blondness recede up the strand
as she frolicked in the dross of the sunset
with a new love. It helps to have my oldest
with me, growing out of his tight, eight-year-old body,
to hear my youngest's small laugh on the pay phone.
To take the frontage road through the ghost forest
at dusk. To swim at College Cove in the cold,
black water with otters and gulls.
To feel brutality inside the beauty.
I almost had another family.