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A Very Good Walking, The Thing That Keeps Us Watching,
Juanita and Nancita at the Cantina, The One We Call Uncle Ed

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A Very Good Walking

The boy offering to go
before me on the beach,
where the tide's gone out low,
and find the hard
smooth sand I've said I like
that's good for walking fast
the way I do. And he knows, yes,
where is the good walking sand,
and a dollar only, quite cheap. Okay,
I say, knowing I'll pass him
in ten minutes, but then it's an
hour, and he's still ten steps
ahead, veering us out of the mush
and the muck of the last
tide, a labyrinthine northwardness
with the wind behind us,
the Sea of Cortez lolligagging due
east, and the boy turning
to smile at me and hum a bit
of whatever it is I'm singing.

The Thing That Keeps Us Watching

(near San Felipe, MX)

Because she can't make her right hand work,
 my friend's daughter pierces her navel
 with her left, twice, using a big safety pin.

In the Campo, the retired deacons, trailed
 by dogs, look up from sweeping the sand
 that blows back in ten minutes, and stare

at the silver snake whose coil is a bite
 through the girl's belly. Last night, a low
 sticky moon, and the sea in its flat tide today.

Slowly the wild motions of the sweepers' arms
 begin again, then faster – men trying
 to dervish themselves up and out from the dunes.

After the horse, years ago, had bolted the girl off,
 everyone here had an ointment: yucca and
 chaparral and a dog's 6 a.m. piss. Later, hypnosis;

half-wept prayers, half in Spanish. Most days
 the sky is kind and allows the sea its
 deeper shade of blue. A slight conquest. Most days.

Once, at her age, I split open a jack rabbit
 in the backyard. Daubed at its ochre liver.
 Crouched. Wearing my mother's flowered apron.

And her frowning, but not crying, not that day,
 from the kitchen window. A long blue artery
 I lifted and revealed to the dim supervisory elms.

Then to stare back in. To stare in a long time.

The mouth at the window with its soundless
words: *that apron is for baking. For ba-king.*

In the afternoon movie, a wind tips the olive trees,
and clearly the men stay upwind of Christ
when he steps from the tomb. The thing that kept

the girl and me watching also drew the women close
in the film. Men in a huddle of robes, and women
pressing vinegar-soaked rags to the nail exits.

Outside, the voices of deacons calling home dogs
named Gus and Baby from the breasted dunes.
The sky rescinding its blue from the sea

for the storm it's been storing up. After the film,
when the girl steps into and lies back on
the water, the men look and look away.

The dogs' silence silences the beach. Her sweet
silver snake splinters the long horizon.
And when she stands again, the dunes drape

their shadows on her shoulders – the right one
a little lower, emitting more of the mystery
since it holds more of the dark.

Juanita and Nancita at the Cantina

No one ever walks the RV rooftops
 except the workers. Lugging buckets
 and hoses up there, where TV antennae
 and air-coolers are anchored, the young men
 work awhile, then stop and smoke and admire
 what they've done. The Sea of Cortez
 pulled back like an eyelid by a doctor's thumb.

It takes all afternoon to ready the RVs
 for their owners. The shells waxed and shiny
 and the inside air sweetened. So the big men
 wait in the cantina, staring at the sealine
 which is a steady drone of dirt bikes
 and dune buggies I barely hear anymore.
 Me showing the girl my shells, and her

showing me the lovely blue-bellied
 lizard, holding him by his tail, his tiny feet
 wriggling, and that gut the same hue as the sea
 and with the same undulating ripple
 when the breeze of our breaths
 touches him. Then she's off to show him
 to the men, and the mother getting up

across the room to go say what she says,
 that This one, she's not all right
 in her mind, but waylaid instead
 by the bartender's come-on, even
 as the girl lifts the lizard up close
 to the big men's faces, that blue flash
 across the white tables, and the men

jerking back. That blue like a tongue
 with something to say but missing its
 mouth. The girl's happiness and mine
 as it whips and flails. It's eaten the flies
 the men have shooed away all afternoon
 from their chips, but now they must turn
 and shout to the waiter to kill it.

The One We Call Uncle Ed

sells illegal pelts – mountain lions in Nogales.
 Baits traps with half-dead, wild Mustangs.

Tells the 3 p.m. crowd the sort of thrashing
 that attracts the big cats. Won't say

the going price. Won't refuse a fresh cold mug
 but sometimes looks away from a can.

Walks up the slab of bar and says this is *his*
 bar, *his* country. The forest belongs to him.

He restuffs a red sock in the window's hole,
 then steps out back to piss in the alley.

We nod. The forest belongs to him. When
 the river thaws, the thaw does too.

Another man's joke makes him frown.
 The sock falls again, and he's just

remembered one of the hundred country hit
tunes he wrote, and how those wise-acres

in Nashville still owe him millions. Long
overdue. He's nobody's uncle, but of all

of us, he's the only one who looks up
when the rain starts on the tin roof.

Barbara Helfgott Hyett

At the Pond

I want the geese to stand beside me,
softly speaking, stroking my hair.
One might lay his blazoned head
on my lap. I'd pet the wild thing
and he would let me, the others
cooing ungoosably in their joy.
We of kindly natures would stay
there, the water bounding in
the narrowest of wavelets, every
small stone seeming smooth, and all
the world – the dirt I sit in, the dust
insinuating itself into the leather laces
of my shoes, would be preening, graceful
and open: the many males, the females
in their pale brown abstraction, the goslings
swimming simply on their own.