Detour

Dixie Partridge
Detour

Before we left our mapped route to take in Yosemite, I dreamed that visit in grey and white like Ansel Adams' photography—those Titanic slabs of granite I'd seen in books. The road simply extended to one such pale bulk and ended. We all got out of our dark, shiny car confused. With their arms entwined, the three girls looked oddly the same age and size, the boys tramped at once back to a dropoff: grey pines so far below they looked like grass sod.

Perhaps it was Ansel's tin moon that made me look up to the cliff top above the car: I was not startled to see my youngest there in shorts and knee socks—which he never wore—and how he got suddenly to the top I didn't wonder; he was simply there and already I knew he would fall: hurling down toward the car with a face that held no surprise, only apology. It was over in a moment, but we could not find his body—no vegetation to hold him.

In the heat of California's drought some of us voted no to the detour. We drove into the dull greens and dying grass of Yosemite, into the thin moonlight that would touch us before we could leave, and I wondered which waiting bodies among us were stained as wholly by memories of places we have never been.

—Dixie Partridge