

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.