

For Royce

ELEANOR NICKEL

You leave the path that we are making in the sand
to follow a little girl and her mother
looking for starfish among the rocks.
They appear like bookmarks in the ocean,
pointing to places of wonder.

You leave the trail that we are hiking
to dip your fingers in the cold river.
We rest together and I think about how you touch
the trunks of certain trees with affection
that you don't even show to me.

You leave the rock where we are sitting
to capture a ladybug and hold it up against the sun—
you tell me that they are named for the Virgin Mary.
Suddenly these California foothills
are places of annunciation.

You leave the kitchen in the middle of making supper
to take your flashlight into the dark garden
filled with orange trees and lavender,
returning to open your palms like wings.
They are full of rosemary blossoms.

How could anyone leave you?
How could anyone choose another life
than to see what your hands will bring?

I will stay until you leave her betrayal
on the bottom of the darkest water,
under the deepest roots of evil.
I will pray that you always come back to me.