

Going for the Gap

Cape Lookout, Oregon

On a blue day like this,
mist clinging to the cliff face,
rising to the fringe of pine,
who would guess the unseen danger,
the fault line running deep beneath the waves,
a lull of three hundred years
marking this coast for drama?

The surf's roar batters us,
rearing, curling, smashing on the shore.
Our kayaks strain in shallows,
tempted, taunted by the tide, waiting
for the big one that will lift the bow,
carry us out
into a thundering wall of water.

Brown pelicans flap across our sightline
as we fasten on a distant point,
de-code the pattern of crest and break,
count sets of waves,
watch for the shoulder —
then punch out to sea,
paddling hard into exploding surf,
the onslaught of weight and water.

We dodge between breakers,
search for a gap,
not knowing if we'll be spat out of the frenzy,
hurled back to shore
or enter the rolling valleys of smooth green swell.
We taste the ocean's power in every gasp,
feel it in the thrusting lift,
the supported fall of our bodies.

At last we glance back —
the collision of ocean and rock,
a slim strip of shore,
the sheer-drop headland,
its car park and noticeboards.
A line of signs instructing
what to do when the earth cracks open,
where to run from the tsunami.