

To Carry

By Linds Sanders

On January 11, 2020, a father and his two children—a 7-year-old daughter and 4-year-old son—were swept into the ocean by a sneaker wave along the Oregon Coast. The father was rescued.

It's not for us to find them
in the magnetic starfish,
in the periwinkle snails.

*—ferried by the pink belly of a blue whale,
fasten around the silk neck of a harbor seal—*

No, it's not for the ocean to return them,

smearing the sand like peanut butter across jelly
across backpacks across bells across broken lead;
troughing and cresting—keeping tempo
with those families still abundant with children

while we arrest with bright ghosts printed on retinas,
abstaining from blinking away the lime green shapes—
chubby legs, soft elbows, all those inches grown into.

Made into beach combers, into pilgrims, into beggars
with metal detectors crackle-beeping for the iron in their blood.
Wanting to rust away our days searching for those atoms we lost,
but finish by sunset, finding eschatology in opened clam shells.

If not the end of everything, certainly no beginning.
Nothing but salamanders and rubber-spine earthworms
writhe in the damp shackles of oak leaves.

*—no children carried in their bellies
no fingers tied around their necks—*

Watching the world behind a curtain of blue,
next summer that backyard oak will be cut down
and this year will be read in a black ring of rot:

the fires, the sick, the swarm, but thirstier still.

Crueler than water is this time capsule photo:
the sun scattering the reflections of a boy and girl,
upright and matching like only siblings can,
across wet sand. They look out—facing their future,
knowing not to turn their backs on the ocean.

