

Marina Romani

On Santa Monica Pier Once Again

[for Simon Hunt— in response to his challenge]

This time they just walked out
to the end of the pier and back.

As the arch of the bridge
neared the level of sand
their steps didn't slow down
nor did they go down
the old stairs to the beach
as they used to
when they would walk far
as far as their feet
and their mood
would take them
along sea-drenched sand
through wavelets of tide
that sparkled in sunlight
when the present felt endless
and they dared now and then
to imagine a future together.

This time they simply returned to their cars.

Their feet were still willing
to carry them far
along watery sand
but the mood
was long ago gone
because all they now shared
was a past.

a forest mourning

*the curved hillside road rises, descends, rises again
in rhythm with the land and the neighboring sea*

the pine
growing steadily on that hillside
stood upright its almost-century-long life
in shifting soils, nourishing them
granting ease of green to passersby
held its posture tall a while yet
in earth drenched by weeklong rains
was downed at last by raging winds

the woman
driving that morning before sunrise
through the seaside forest she loved, lived in
on the way to teach her seventh graders
as she'd done for countless years
downward then up the road's familiar slope
—how could she know what awaited
just over the crest?

that early morning
as she crested the slope she knew so well
woman and pine intertwined

police officers reported
*the tree had fallen perpendicular across the road
the driver, sole occupant of the vehicle,
was pronounced dead at the scene of the crash*

Mary, in full beauty, in the midst of life
daughter, sister, mother, woman who loved, was loved
my forest neighbor friend

—this too early mourning

[in memory of Mary Francis]

Crone on a Walk

—*I pass by, I observe*—

The young woman sits on the rock
looking pretty—her beauty a reflection
of the adoration of the young man
pointing his camera at her
his very own prize, on this rock
a sea wave rising behind
in the glow of late afternoon sky
— he's getting that picture just so
to show his friends, for her to show hers
maybe they'll post it on Facebook
and if they're lucky and hold on
this picture will evoke a nice memory
one day, to share with their children
and grandchildren, maybe.

She feels pretty with love today
but yesterday, at home and alone
she might have stood at her mirror
in utter despair—
her hair was too short, or was it too long
three zits had popped up on her face
she hadn't lost the weight she had wanted
before starting this trip.

The rock she sits on today has held
countless young women posing
for young men who point their cameras
at them the sea and the sky
as the sun shines above, or it doesn't, depending.

I walk by this spot often
—the scene keeps repeating itself
each time with a different girl and a different boy
each couple unique, all the couples alike
—all the girls loved, feeling happily pretty right now
—all too many filled with self doubt when alone.

If I thought they would hear me
I'd speak to each of them so:
*You're lovely, truly, with or without your young man
you're beautiful because you're young
the glow and color of youth are yours
they will not be yours tomorrow.*

Enjoy this! This moment! Now!

So I would speak,
or, if I had Cassandra energy
I would shout my message
even though they wouldn't hear me
—they'd choose not to, busy as they are
building a future they will not control
they'd inform me it's none of my business
and they would be right about that.

I was here, on this rock
or another one like it, once or twice
—I felt pretty when adored
ugly and fat, in despair when alone.
I've watched my mother at her mirror
speaking to her own reflection
a face to spit at, she called it
—I didn't understand till later
when my last year's photograph
was always more beautiful than this year's
when the photo I hated yesterday I love today
because now I have today's photo to hate.

The picture will not get better
they'll choose not to know it
and I'll pass by holding my tongue
—or if they ask me to take a photo
of the two of them on this rock by the sea
I'll hold their camera carefully
do my best to capture it all for them
—they'll check the image
and go off admiring themselves
for making a memory.

My father didn't bring me here for this —

for Boris Romani

—*Petersburg-Harbin-Shanghai-Tubabao-Sydney-San Francisco USA*

He flew the US flag on every national holiday
proud he'd made a home for himself and his family
in a free country at last, one that held up its torch of welcome
to the poor and besieged, to those who yearn to breathe free.

As a boy of eleven he fled his life's first dictatorial threat—
all comforts left behind, his small family joined the human mass
crossing Siberia on foot by cart by train, in retreat from a lawless power
fleeing they knew not where but away, to end up in a still-free
Manchurian city, which in a few years would be Sovietized too
so moving on, into China, to make a life in the “open-port” city, Shanghai.

Born to privilege, yes —it no longer meant much
to the shirtless teenager who labored side-by-side
with workers in the summer Taiga repairing ramshackle rails
—it meant nothing to the man who found himself and his family
stateless, visaless on a tropical island routinely struck by typhoons
and he stood humbling himself before paper shufflers who held
the Power of the Visa, the ticket to a new maybe safe and free life.

By then he'd survived a world war and a hostile occupation.
Then, faced once more with an imminent dictatorial threat
he led his family onto a rickety ship to sail through turbulent seas
to that jungle-filled island, refuge, if tenuous, for ones questing hope.

Hope didn't come easily or quickly—there were long stopovers:
in that jungle, next Sydney with months at assembly-line labor
waiting, waiting for that coveted US Visa, yet another sea journey
till at last he, and we, had our first glimpse of the Golden Gate
which to us held the certain promise of freedom and hope.

My father trusted this country he brought me to
expected me and my children to have a decent, free life.
In the country he'd fled as a boy, to be declared
enemy of the people meant certain danger, often death, from the State.
Here, we learned to assume we were safe to think, say what we thought.

Today my grandchildren are daily faced with the scowl
of the orange-haired man and his clustering cronies
who declare the *enemy of the people* to be our nation's free press
who slam the country's gates in the faces of the poor and besieged
who work with persistence to extinguish Liberty's welcoming torch.

My Father, by now you would be one-hundred-eleven years old.
I still wish you could see your great-grandchildren, enjoy their full promise.
But, oh Father, what a relief— you needn't live with these noxious actions
dismantling daily the foundational fabric itself of our American way of life!

In Tweet Time; or, Adam to Zombie in Twenty-Six Steps (in alt math)

Adam ate

- bats binge
- cats caterwaul
- dogs devour

Eve enticed

- figs fatten
- girls giggle
- hyenas howl
- imps imagine
- Jill jiggles
- kindness kills
- lovers leap
- maidens mingle
- nuns nudge
- outlaws ordain
- petals perish
- queries quit
- rapids rumble
- strangers stalk

Trump tweets

Trump tweets

- universe unravels
- vultures vomit
- wolves whirl

Xerxes xeroxes

- yaks yell

Zombies zing

Marina Romani, now retired from a couple of careers and as many marriages, lives in Monterey, California, where taking oceanside walks and writing poems are among her greatest pleasures. In the last ten years her work has appeared frequently in West Coast print or on-line literary magazines, including *Porter Gulch Review*, *Monterey Poetry Review*, *CWC Literary Review*, the Canadian *Poetry Pacific*, and previous issues of *Homestead Review*. Marina's first book, *Child Interwoven* (Park Place Publications, 2016) is a collection of memories and reflections in poem and prose of her Russian girlhood in China during the years of World War II and its aftermath.