

DEIRDRE DWYER

The Careful Path Back to Naïve

We had just passed the place
where the inlet narrows
before it widens, where islands
hold the opposite shore
behind their backs like children
with fistfuls of daisies.

We were on our way to the beach
when we hardly saw it,
 a cat ...?
... no time to brake.

The kids oblivious in the back seat
eager to jump over waves.

While the two of us in the front seat
after that split second holding—
 her eyes said
 say nothing—the children ...

As if the lie would wrap the animal,
close its eyes. We were holding
to all the possibilities,
to what we couldn't bring ourselves
to say about injury,
how an animal dies,
why some go on living
in pain, why sometimes life
is something caught in the throat.

The two of us reeling.
The kids uncomprehending,
if we told them
hearing *cat* thinking *home*, thinking *safe*.

We couldn't picture
trying to find the cat's owner:
walking up a driveway
to find a young girl behind a screen door
looking at us, waiting for us
to say the special password.

Pleeease
we would say *let us in*

What the beach would have been
after all that: a letting go,
our taking more than a few steps
forward and back, the waves
pouring up the sand with a strange
new urgency,
the kids jumping in them
but not with the same buoyancy and ease.

Their slight delay, as if they keep turning
to us *but?*
as if they place their hands on either side
of your face and once they hold you realize
they have nothing to say.