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Sample Collage #2: Reflections on the Sea

White, frothing foam spews from her mouth. Her formless hands wrap around the ankles of an unsuspecting child. He is busy savoring his bliss on the sandy shore. Joy and disaster duel. Mother Sea bides her directives, but she will not be governed. She is content with the struggle. Her maternal instinct directs a drama that teeters on a precarious precipice between diametrically opposed outcomes. There is a tumble. Balance gives way to terror, and abandonment dominates the scene. In rushes the hero. She whisks the child from Mother Sea's loving arms. An instant passes, impinging a memory forever. It is business as usual. Ebbs and flows, nothing more.

That was my first encounter with the Pacific Ocean. Years pass, and boyhood fears give way to insatiable curiosities.

Now I am kneeling on the bottom, fully equipped with my arsenal of life-sustaining paraphernalia. Maybe it is some unconscious longing to return to the weightless fetus of my beginnings. Somehow it is right. My bubbles rise to the surface, expanding throughout their journey, and arrive as shouts of joy. I am a guest.

Today my hostess gives me a special treat. A forest of kelp weaves canopies over me. The sun aims its beams through any opening it can find. As it is above, so it is below. I am trans-fixed. The clatter of daily life disappears and the cold water baptizes me anew. I am adrift in a watery reverie mesmerized by the balladic ease of my fluid movements. A fish docked alongside the kelp catches my eye. My arms flow toward it, and, as they make their way through the viscous medium, I swear I can feel its pulsing gills vibrating through the water. It is as if I am tethered to the fish. Its gill and my finger are joined in some magnetic union. I am struck by the obvious. This fish does not know it is in water. The water is air to the fish. Yet I experience the water as some sort of cosmic glue tying me, and everything around me in a synergistic partnership. The fish knows none of this.

The arrow of time moves forward, and the scene changes again. This time I am cutting through the water in pursuit of adventure. The hunter-gatherer instinct inside me stirs and my eye is caught by the scintillating glimmer of an abalone shell tucked in a tight crib of rocks. Priding myself on my acrobatic agility, I position myself just right to reach in and take Mother Sea's treasure. Disorientation ensues, and a mouthful of water assaults me. Several efforts of gear and dive buddy offer no remedy to my situation. I must make the climb to the surface without air. Perhaps this is the freedom I have longed for with Mother Sea all along. I am caught between worlds—one of land and one of water. To which of the two do I belong? Each is a part of my nature, yet neither fully meets my needs. I need them both, and they need me.

We are made mostly of water. Toss in a few atoms of carbon and other trace minerals, let evolution work a trick or two, and we emerge. There must be some sort of galactic museum. "Planet Earth exhibit this way," the sign reads. The centerpiece of the exhibit is a stuffed Homo sapiens. Maybe the caption reads, "big on brains, short on awareness—a highly differentiated life form with a lack of integration between itself and its environment."

Could we be a natural wonder of the universe? Maybe it is we who should invoke the celestial muses and tune ourselves to the frequency of wonder.

There is more water than land. We can reach higher into the heavens than we can into the belly of our home. We fear the deep. Is it the thought of a colossal squid or is it an avoidance of our nature?

Nature is in flux. A fire is constructive. Fertilizer is destructive. All natural ingredients include synthesized chemicals as part of the standard du jour menu. Call in the relativists. They will save us. Nurture not nature is to blame. Social constructs are the root of all evils. I forgot, could you tell me who built the constructs? Or maybe it's all predetermined in our genes. Just fill out this form and the human genome is yours for analysis. I can see street-corner hawkers vying for our attention, "Hear ye, hear ye, get your DVD today, and read all about your genetic makeup."

I put up the mirror and spin around. Give me somewhere to point my finger. There must be a cause to hang my hat on today. Resources are not finite; only our understanding of how to manage and control them is lacking, is it not?

The fish turns to me. Its beady stare shifts my attention. I reach out to touch it but I realize the fish is inside me. It is a part of my memory—a vital epiphany guiding me. It slips through my fingers, and the momentary gift is lost. I am back to the ranting ramblings of my mind.

The equilibrium is gone. I throw off the cover of the hot tub and subject the water to my tests. If I have read my instruments correctly, I can bring this water back to a happy, safe balance. The water will succumb to my elixir. I do not need to banish my ideal. I am master of the water.

A mother holds her child's hand as she leads him to the great expanse of the sea for the first time. Eyes filled with awe, he lets go of her hand. He takes all of it in and only some of it registers. Mother Sea will take hold of his imagination in ways beyond his present capacity of comprehension, even if she must pull him toward her bosom.

Our event horizon must stretch further than our puny minds allow us. Nature goes about its business. One thing is obliterated and replaced by another. A phoenix rises out of the ashes to take flight once again. What about those mighty dinosaurs or species of plants and insects off our radar screens that are candles blown out in the dark before anyone benefits from their illuminating secrets? Nature has not gone astray; it is simply in motion.

I examine my hand. I am appalled to realize that every seven years almost all the cells in my body are replaced. Those poor cells remind me of pelagic carcasses unknowingly committed to insane asylums of our shores. Have I lost my nature or am I along for the ride? Maybe I should just catch a wave and sit on top of the world.

I hold the treasure in my hand. The pearly allure of the abalone's shell is intoxicating my thoughts. I am without air but I am free. Whatever happened to my umbilical cord? I will break to the surface and rejoin the atmosphere. The fabric of water will be punctuated with my staccato gasps for air underscored *by my* drive to be unique and in control. I want to bring the fish to the surface. Will it feel the air as joining the two of us in a new dance, or will the harsh reality of a foreign

environment take hold of it before it is enlightened?

The world marches to its own nature. Developing nations are eager to karaoke tunes they have heard before, and scarce resources attempt counterpoint melodies against the beat of progress. Mother Sea beckons, a child is initiated, and an underwater explorer struggles against his nature to hold on to his battling prizes of material gain and insight. There is a faint glimmer of guidance. Mother Sea scans the shore and finds another child eager for tutelage. Perhaps her passion to incite wonder might take hold and pique a new imagination.