Laura Wiseman

California

We were running
and had landed ourselves
in a motel in the only part
of Bakersfield that wasn’t seedy.

Across the road,
fast-food attempted
home-cooking
to all those trying
to find themselves.

I was 12, my sister 9,
we had school, wanted to swim,
but found ourselves in the bathroom
—our kingdom to play.

The green tub, rust stains, our ocean.
The cracked and chipped tile
the forest we transcended
to ignore her sobs
in the other room
muffled by television garble.

Hairs from people we didn’t know,
soap that looked dirty and hard,
individually wrapped plastic cups
we coveted like royal prizes of ownership
as we tumbled McDonald’s toys
to sea green murkiness of the deep.

78/Sketch
We knelt and prayed to the ocean,
as my sister’s dark tanned knee slid,
she sliced off the wart from the poverty
in the crack of the tile.

The blood, a red line
that demanded we disturb the resignation.
Mom falling into her role out of need.

I stared at the cracking chips
the floor of my childhood
wondering why we left behind
pieces of ourselves
everywhere we went.