

**PAOLA BRUNI**  
Cement Ship

The slimy carcass of a cement ship lies like a slain mammal at the far end of the Sealiff State Beach pier. The ship's eyes and ears are gouged by the sea and its skin splashed with a birdy guano. Heermann's gulls, marbled godwits, pelicans swoop in, land on its wrenched spine, crushed femurs, cracked clavicles. Entrails, congealed with rust, leak into the pulsing white loam. I can't look at the wreckage without remembering the high school boy I read about, with his dirty-blond hair and hazel eyes, who dropped stones into a backpack, leapt into the sea by the dying ship because like attracts like, I think. And how I added him to my list of regrets, even though I didn't know him at all. But I do that—consume regret like an essential food group. Take, for instance, one-night stands with shabby musicians. The guru I followed blindly, a noose of prayer beads strung about my neck. Excuses. Lies. The kidney-shaped embryos that abandoned my dark, uncooperative womb. Wallowing. Convincing my eighty-three-year-old mother to have her remaining breast lopped off when she was clearly done living.

It's a Tuesday morning at the beach and the fog is a wet, shiny fascia. I walk by a homeless guy building a fire in a crusty barbecue pit with newspaper and a discarded cake box. He looks at me as if I'm a mirage, raises his arms like Moses, says, *The Loch Ness monster is out there right now*. And I say, *That's cool*, because I never thought of my regret as mythic, but there it is. And I find myself sinking into a damp womb where all the stupid things I've said and done gestate, where there's no forgiveness, only an icy black current that swirls and toils, because I'm the monster that's been fucking up since birth, and the homeless guy has seen through my façade, seen past the good daughter, the good wife, to the riot of worthlessness I've always been. Sometimes, I dream I'm drowning, only I don't completely die. Instead, I exist underwater beside the wreckage, manacled by the seaweed's flat green fingers, watching hungry fish swim by.

Paola Bruni's poetry has been published in the *Commonstock Review*, *Catamaran Literary Reader*, *Mudfish*, and *Porter Gulch Review* and will appear in upcoming issues of the *Massachusetts Review* and *phren-Z*. She is the 2019 winner of the Morton Marcus Poetry Contest and the 2017 winner of the Muriel Craft Bailey Poetry Contest, judged by Ellen Bass. Bruni is also coauthor of the nonfiction book *Let God Love You Up* (Maria Press, 2014).

**JOHN MOORE**

*Blue Bay, 2019*  
Oil on canvas, 36 x 46 in



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