

Day four and Pru still hadn't found the end, although each day she broached new territory. This day she came upon a wounded family home; its windows boarded up with rain-buckled plywood; a fallen pine wedged in its roof. In the yard an A-frame playhouse, painted yellow to match the house, had been built on top of a flat-roofed storage shed. Its peaked front was almost entirely taken up by a full-size door. A wooden ladder ran up to a narrow strip of deck from which a full-size American flag hung. At the bottom of the ladder sat a hibachi with a slingshot on the cold grill, a can of lighter fluid beside it.

Another amazement she could recount to no one. Pru thrust her hands into the pockets of Bert's vest, which she now wore every day. Her fingers moved through cough drops and slippery wrappers, loose raisins and bits of paper, a broken cigarette. This is what was left her—Bert's pocket trash.

Around the next new bend, a surprise: the road shot from the trees in a short sun-blazed stretch and stopped at a white guardrail that closed off the road. Pru's heart crowded her throat with what felt like fear. The end. At last.

Just before the guardrail was a crude vista point—a slightly elevated plot the size of a picnic table. A knee-high metal sign driven into the ground warned “No Dumping ~ No Trash”; its greenish-white tint and professional lettering looked governmental. But the border that formed it looked homemade, edged with scrounged rocks and chunks of broken concrete.

Pru stepped up onto the cropped weeds and gazed across the canyon at the purple ridge where she lived. She needed to find her place in this vastness. A gust of wind rushed through her thin hair and freshened her eyes. But

the trees she stared at seemed to close rank, pretending to be a wilderness, as if there weren't hundreds of homes among them, hers included. All this way and still lost. She was angry, longed for the strength to hurl something, to feel the bodily pleasure of exertion and the relief of disposal.

Plunging her hands into her vest pockets she rained cough drops and slippery bits of old wrappers on the vista. She rolled the broken cigarette between her palms hoping to revive its scent. It smelled of nothing. A golf pencil and a paper clip joined the trash on the ground. She turned the

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*Coastal Canyon Santa Cruz, nd*  
Oil on Canvas, 13 x 33 in

COURTESY WINFIELD GALLERY

