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JASMINE HSUEH-TING LEE

it's hot today, too hot. for some reason your
mother really wanted to stop at the beach.
probably to take too many pictures and put
sand into a tiny little bottle as a souvenir,
even though this is the land that looked after
her years and years ago. the ocean calls to you.

you leave your shoes in the car (you'll beat
the sand out from between your toes later.)
the first step down is scalding, and you
delicately hop down to the shoreline until
your feet adjust to the heat. the voices fade
out as you approach the water, until all you
can hear is a muted hum behind. the sun
is bright, forcing your eyes into a squint as
the ocean reflects its light back to you. all you
can see is water, water, water, until it blends
into the horizon beyond.

the ocean continues calling.
you can't make out its words,
but you listen anyways.

hush. hush. hush.

all of a sudden the world is big, too big.
you feel the waves lapping at your feet and
imagine your mother standing where you are,
tossing shells into the waves and holding
her hair behind her face. she is young again,
freckled and tan, ignoring her parents' calls
to come home. you wonder if she was happier,
lighter, purer of heart than you are now. you
wonder what life she would have lived if
you were not her daughter and she was not your mother.

she is a ways from you now, knee-deep in
the water, bent over at the hip, reaching
for some shell she can't see but knows is there.

you call for her and you think she doesn't
hear you, but when she sees you and stands up
her smile is the exact same as yours.