The Fall

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You were a head of squirrels’ nests,  
with blackberry stained lips,  
half pursed in smile. I remember  
    how you sang  
    like a whippoorwill,  
with your tongue pressed against your teeth  
so the sound of your breath  
formed a harsh whistle of heavy air.

Now, your back is to the cliff’s edge.  
My arms pressed against your bare back,  
sticky summer skin stuck between  
stringy bathing suits.  
Your feet placed carefully;  
one step too far back,  
    and you’d fall headlong  
    into Hog’s Mouth,  
the sensation of cold, spring water  
like so many needles pricking a thumb,  
only rapid and all over.

_The devil’s beating his wife_, you said  
on the cuff one afternoon, your rosebud  
lips forming the shadows of letters,  
when the sun was high and the rain  
was falling from a near cloudless sky.  
I can’t shake this feeling—  
you got up one morning on the wrong side  
of the tracks, and I watched you  
    fall from grace  
    and out of my arms.