

Michael McDowell

Seaview Beach Approach, August Afternoons

The crumbly rock of the approach
Sinks into the drying sand. Vehicle after vehicle
Reaches the western edge of the continent
And rolls from the last road onto a wet-sand beach.

As the vehicles race the surf-line past kids and gulls,
We lean on a driftwood log, counting the crab boats
And observing the sand ruts
Grow deeper with each car and truck.

At last one SUV
Sinks to its axle, guns its engine,
Spews rooster-tails of dry sand,
And sinks even deeper.

Everyone applauds
And no one helps
Till another vehicle arrives
And the men get out and stand around

And point here and there and
Look for driftwood planks or boards
And someone pulls out a rope or a chain,
Someone else a shovel.

The curling waves sparkle like polished green marble.
The ocean's roar erases shouts and gunned engines.
The men dig and pull against the backdrop of foaming surf,
their backs to the water and dull roar.

It's best when the tide is coming in
And the leading waves bounce over dry sand castles and footprints
To creep closer to the doomed truck.
The men eventually notice, and point, and run around faster.

They jump up and down on the bumper
Till eventually a man slips and falls back,
A rope or chain pulls taut, and the rocking SUV bursts free of the sand
And hits the bumper of the pulling truck.

The men slap each other's backs,
Scribble on pieces of paper which they exchange,
And the vehicles spew gravel and exhaust at the ocean
As they race up the approach toward town and its two taverns.

We listen to the ocean's unceasing complaint
As the smallest waves begin to cover the digging.
Gulls and brown pelicans settle and then circle,
And the afternoon sparkles on the swells.

