**Hidden Lake**

Behind us now the crowds, the cars, the visitor center. We turn and see the boardwalk stretching on in front of us, inviting us to follow its snaking path. In the distance, a majestic dome looms, flecked with striations green, orange, a rusty red. It pushes up against the clear blue sky, insisting upon the optical illusion of its pre-eminence over the cosmic cobalt canopy arcing overhead. A swampy alpine meadow, newly refreshed by the summer’s melting snowpack, is carpeted with flowers enjoying their brief moment of splendor before the snows come again. Marmots scurry around, fattening up, begetting another brood of babies with biblical fervor while they can. A group of young bucks test each other playfully, in training for the real fight that’s sure to come to determine who will claim the precious prize of fruiting progeny.

We step off the end of the boardwalk and slip into the melting snow that has yet to succumb to the sun’s alchemy, turning ice into cold liquid. Silence now, except for the crush beneath our feet and the gasping breaths as we struggle on, up and across the Continental Divide, that great parting of the waters, the Atlantic and the Pacific separated by the merest of a hair’s breadth. Perhaps that of the mountain goat ghosting in and out of the coniferous forests and leaving pieces of her molting winter coat snagged on the berried bushes she grazes by. We smile, then say, “Oh,” as her baby bleats for her attention, scrambling after her, five skips to her mother’s every step. It’s cold in the thin mountain air, but perspiration soon washes over us. At last the grade levels out at a summit, and there it is below us cradled in the comforting curvature of a high, glaciated valley.

glassy turquoise sheen

catching sky in its mirror.

we *float*, enraptured