2018 Claudia Ann Seaman Award Runner Up for Poetry

california luck

When news broke of the broken
woman's carcass left behind a forest green
dumpster, I do not cry. I think of
my father's Stanford, scholarship-sent year
of laboratories and Church's Chicken and zero alcohol tolerance
something I'm blessed or cursed to inherit
even though it won't stop them asking Were you drinking?
Not even a little? It's June 4, the day between freshman
graduation trip and prom and I am sitting in class
listening to the world take each fragile sober breath;
her sorrys multiply in my chest cavity, falling to the floor
in a mess of crumbs. I think California is only for the lucky, the pavement
padded with the crunch of luckless bones. My father
speaks of the Trees reverently; solid California glow, fat
bean sprouts and cilantro-heavy broth in Mountain View –
cheap reminders of home.
But with each new incident another college brochure
is thrown in the trash. California
treated Brock Turner well, too.
What's left? we ask, as the American spirit lays naked,
unconscious, as the world goes by.

The concept of the naked American spirit is a great presence in this poem – personal and introspective on one end, and as big as America on the other. Technical elements, such as enjambment, create an aesthetic that both jars and moves the reader. The almost pastoral image that the reader is left with at the end encourages contemplation, especially regarding how much protection one's everyday cultural landscape offers when all the background noise fades away.