

-the pine

I am certain
the pine knows
more than me.

I see it
in that confident sway
under the weight
of a storm.
Its peerless height
requiring
a clear strength
that has it
among the ranks
of the greatest things.

There is
an immovable truth
that quietly
promises
it is better
to walk
in the cathedrals
of the pine
forever poor
than to cut
just one of them
down for gain
and hear
the bones of time
break harshly across
the earth.

~West from redding

A quick twist of the mountain road
Gave way to all hell

Dead trees clung to the mountains
Rigid in some awful mourning
Bent and blackened in the most profound sadness

Even the soil was killed
A mean depth to death
That bright earth freshly naked

Vulnerable

An offering to sky and sun
Sterile and with new marching orders
Ready to drift away

Another bend and another dozen annihilated mountains
Loss forever in front of us, and behind
A melted car next to a disappeared house
Another vanished world
In every view a dozen lives to ash
Or a hundred
Or more

And every place vacant of wildlife
What black river of death poured into the sky
Mile after mile of apocalypse
Mountain after mountain gripped by loss

Nearing the Pacific, we saw green

Finally

Clinging low in the valleys first
Then higher on the north-facing slopes
And then suddenly green all around

Just smugly pretending hell did not exist

The nightmare faded

But the promise of rebirth still seems a cruel lie

When you find no shade under a million dead trees
When instead of pillars of life and vitality and shelter
They are all crumbling figures of defeat
Tormented to nothing under a cruel sun

When every mountain is testament to grief
A looming monument to a future you hate
And a stolen past you loved

And every life a fleeting shadow

When your best hopes are now just a choking dust
A dirty, burnt haze you were forced to breathe
A mean air that buried your prayers in your throat

What could possibly be next

-pulling

There is a savage and lonesome want
that I have known from a pulling away. Some
roving ache aimed at buckling
the walls of our past that comes out strong
and loud from a decision removed.

That loss calls from the corners of our days:
here and there in a god-awful baying.
I still harden when I think
how it cast long a shadow over my way;
its hot breath against my throat,
ripe with promise of defeat.

The sadness lights a tormenting fire, doesn't it?
That cheerless flame rolling across
the darkening prairie of our heart;
wilting the once-vibrant
and licking raw the chapped heap
of what we called ourselves.

But sometimes our collections of hope
should be spilled from the cup of our curled hands.
Sometimes what matters should be brought under
that sea of joy and sorrow.

Aren't we revealed
when our favorite light is pulled below
and woven into the tapestry of loss
to warm what needs warming.

~someone believed

If you are ever short on concern for the world –
and why would you be you be? –
just remember, someone believed
they could improve a wild stream.

They thought it a reasonable thing
to dig into the body of the earth,
under burden of some twisted ambition
to send this living brook into the dark,
and through a cold and concrete tomb.

All of this after cutting down
a forest so lovely
you couldn't imagine its splendor.
Though, you only can't imagine it
because all of the loveliest forests were so cut;

in some greed-blind incremental amputation
of our wildest paradises.

All of these are ideas
and they were sold,
effectively, to nearly everyone, such that
almost everything was gleefully made –
and kept – awful
in a fatal betrayal of our native inclinations
to let stand the gardens of the gods;
to let flow the clear blue arteries of our forests.

An entire people were swept-up
in the shrill, menacing cry
of this new religion.
Its warped disciples shrieking the virtues
of endless growth and unbridled greed.
Mothers and fathers made manic
in the devouring of a continent;
brothers and sisters bent over the loveless toil
of ditching creeks and gelding rivers.

If you're ever short on concern, you shouldn't be.

But...

if you're ever short on hope,
I have to be honest,
I have never seen cynicism grow a flower.

I have never known despair to free a stream.

And the insipid grip of doubt
won't bring back a speck of what was lost.

At your end,
you'll want to be the kind of someone
that believed we could make it better...

don't you think?

-restless

One day the river rose from her bed
and looked into the forest of her edges
with a most lovely smile.

But then she closed her eyes
and fell hard over the land in a new coursing
and without a hint of her former grace.

Trained for the rules that kept her to the low
places, she now lifted herself and many other
things unfamiliar with being lifted.

She flowed right over the unsure
hearts of little creatures,
unready for such heavy company.

Everything was reminded of that wild power
rivers own: quenching your crops
the day before drowning your children.

That hardhearted wandering found her
careless with many things you would think
a river should not be careless with.

Still, envy the luck of those few that
have reveled in her darkness, holding long
their breath in the solace of her depths.

~chasing copper

Fall leaned hard
 into the hills
 and the trees roared

in a full-throated
 October pitch.
 I walked with

this breath of the north
 all day, along a high,
 forested ridgeline.

And below me,
 wind worked against
 the dark current of a river.

Waves rose and
 fell in fast confusion.
 The wild air was

soaked in unrest.
 I thought it must be
 exactly the zenith

of autumn.
 That is when,
 that very moment,

a fox met me
on my way -
or at least

met my way.
I doubt she
would remember me.

She decked the hill
with her artful gate:
spry and shy; low and lean.

Hurried like the wind.
Her senses betrayed
by the season.

Giving to my eyes
alone a rare reveal:
a 10 second treat

of tawny copper,
spun in elegant mystery
and silent, strong grace...

Fleeting like those days of change.

-stones

A collection of bad stories piled at the edge of a frost-browned field. Where a forest ends and mourns amputation. Where the plow's deep cut frames a sad permanence, billowing with the scar tissue of a fallow farm.

What rough hands – perhaps a child's? – pried these ice-smoothed stones from the soil: a perennial toil assigned to those small instruments of wonder of a boy long dead.

Just helping: protecting father's till from the hardships of the land. Just being productive. Just part of a ruinous machine.

A ghost of that lost garden still lurks; obituary whispered by the trees. Clinging to the margins, bleating echoes of a disappeared past. A gaunt shadow of a gelded landscape.

Can these stones be seeds? Collected for safe keeping: for when danger has passed: gathered here to be planted. Now ready to be pushed gently back into a familiar and eager ground. Now ready to grow that forest again. Now ready to bring back Eden. Now are we ready to repent? No? No.

And how to weigh the loss? Maybe with these very stones. Each opposing us on some hideous balance. Each pregnant with a tragic history; ripe with sorrow.

These stone piles mark graves: of dreams: too, the many deaths of a landscape, killed in many places. Earthly collections piled in monument to greed and to failure. A repeating testament to unrewarded toil: the stories of the broken.