

-Stones (rock piles)

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

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 hardships of the land. Just being productive. Just part of a ruinous machine.

A ghost of that lost garden 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.

O how to weigh the loss? Maybe with these very stones. Each opposing us on some hideous balance. Each pregnant with bad histories; ripe with sorrow.

Something more died here. 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.

-Through the Door-

Sometimes, I think about you walking through the door. Like some stalking, dark wind spun into a song, hunting me so that I listen again to my shadow. I'll be in some café you've never heard of. I'll be in a town you'll never know. And it will hit me: that familiar wave of need, rushing to gnaw. I'll glance to the door in a quiet, perverse hope.

I like to think you've been searching for me. After all this time and despite all the miles you laid down between us, you finally remembered. You remembered and came as swiftly as you could: took the first flight; stole some stranger's car; swam a river and bolted barefoot across the rough and busy street. You finally tracked me down. You risked it all to pour yourself through the door in a bright panic and redeeming lust. Don't worry, love. I am here, watching the door.

It's not so ridiculous to swim in this sea of remembering and fantasy. It is not so strange to hope for great passions to satisfy promised potential.

And don't call me crazy for being here. Don't find me foolish for still wanting you. There is no deeper insult than questioning my sanity when I'm reveling in that once-great love.

Though, to be fair: I would kill to see those eyes again. Afterall, I've seen you walk through other doors, eyes on fire for me. Charged with a searing electricity, arched in calamitous want.

Come, my love. Share a whiskey with me in this shabby northern town. Bury your face in my beard. Rattle tomorrow's breakfast with that rapturous laugh. I'll tell you some story about a far-off forest and you'll demand I take you, posthaste.

Or maybe I'll be at a restaurant with someone new and you'll come to steal me. You'll murder all protest with that ice in your eyes: best not to resist such dangerous inevitability. You'll pull me out, we skip the bill, make love in a park, and forget the rest.

What else could matter? Tell me again how I am all you could want and that you'll stay this time.

Just walk through that damn door.

West From Redding

We drove west from Redding

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

I had heard about the fires
The biggest in all of history

But nothing readies you
It's never as you think

The 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

In that burned-over land I recognized it

The saddest metaphor for us
And you somewhere else, still next to me

Oh, where did I lose you

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

Each singing a morbid song to my heart

Framing the pathetic size of my sadness

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 didn't exist

The nightmare faded

Another metaphor, I suppose
Its counterpart I have yet to accept

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 death
Tormented to dust 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