



American Field Notes
July – August, 2014

Greg Bem

Jumping across the fleeted street.

Begging brunt for the sun to explode much.

A moment and its infant tone

Attached hierarchical to sickened granite.

Shins of Philadelphia shrivelled cockroaches.

~

Sub what under what us my son

Saxophoned by what is father farther.

Eyes and larger and loins lagging.

Purple pluck of grapes bubbles

Lodged in the throat of your yes, yes, yes!

All hail West Texas and all hail the fatigue,
The blue sky caring for and caking the cracks of all this hair-covered arm skin,
Skein for the rest of the hours of light,
As Hill Country fades from memory as just another decal,
Tokens across landscape a series of notches in the earth unto which strangers have settled.

~

What is it, friends or friendship, which awaits us in the middle of the night?
Composing us through the dim red light of a Lantern before the fall,
Black widow hourglass turned over, reset, again,
The tarantula burrowing after a scuttle,
Stick bug crawling like wisdom, wise as it may or may not be through flames of a midnight
reincarnation.

The dust storms wreck as savage as they can be, as ruinous, gleeful, greedy,
And our bodies three forced to hold down the corners of a tent,
While we wonder if the Stone Giants will be felled,
Or the scorpions will enter as Trojans passed our defenses,
Sleeping pads as coarse and boundless as the rocks beneath.

~

Ridge gliding across I imagine the time of water in this world,
Though now most is dry, dead, and perhaps alive in its own way,
The weight of existence scattered like the coyote crap wasted in the crag cracks,
And my hand hoists forward the second and last of the warm cans of cider,
My head as vacated as the landscape I've climbed so high, dodged so many fire ants, to observe.

Las Cruces and the never-ending stretch of the neo-pueblo ruffles my beard,

Glistens my eyes with a layer of pink.

These people are like all people,

And yet the surrounding mountains are not like all mountains,

Strips of road leading in and out like ribbon wrapped around a present.

~

Remembering the signs from last night DUST STARTS MAY EXIST and ZERO VISIBILITY POSSIBLE.

When you're in your war machine the dust is as fickle as a breath.

When you're in your tent, the dust is an invasion paranormal, supernatural, in its essence.

This desert and its realms of forces pushing in and out.

This desert and its tourniquet of fear.

There's nothing steamy within Steamworks,
Durango Mountain village undeniably uncertain yet upon us,
Rough with us through the slick coat of rain glimmering slanted across the streets and their Hills,
A breath or ten worth of gift shops not breathing back,
For it is late and we are tired, our eyes in the reflections lidless as we are listless and tired and only slightly useful.

~

Banditry maybe in this haven of cold wagers and colder airborne waters shivering us, mimicking us,
Tourist Throngs sniffing leather through streets of damp dust,
As though dead cattle let odors loose knowing the thickness of this elevation,
And gut twirling through spectacle and cowboy iconography,
My gut lets forth sighs and crumpled desires for an impossible emergence of showgirls.

Looking back on the moment we looked forward and backward and sideways across an arching desert,

Eyes out for any sport of lightning capable of charring our damned bodies,

Devil's Playground more ground than play and the hiss of demons raged low and long in those clouds,

As our paths became a numbing void and the rain pushed us through our own cinder visions.

~

What of this heat we have heard of and how to keep its thorough feelings alive,

Canyons as long as wide old as cannons or seers releasing the sun each day,

Prickling feelings being those that sit with the strange, alien grasses,

And the occasional bunch and bundle of cacti ready to become an obstacle.

Finally there is a layer of sweat smeared in patterns, language of work and effort as we move along a landscape of brown, red, and light green.

Legs discarded by the miles we trekked,

I am too distracted and burn my hand lifting my shoes from the fire,

Which, left there too long to dry, melted quite thoroughly.

“Fuck!” I shout, liquid plastics and fabrics attached to my hand,

My soul doing a dance before the flames, my mind thinking abruptly about the lack of sex in the platonic cave.

~

Freedom is the town of Gunnison sleeping lazily in its Utah Valley,

Many Shadows of many vast mountains providing adequate layers of an unshackling Suffocation,

And the Adjacent penitentiary is larger than the town's commercial downtown district,

And the local Ford dealership is called Freedom Ford,

And my eyes frost over from the liberation of my car's blasting a/c as I imagine blowing Gunnison a kiss goodbye.

I must have left a poem in those deep valleys and Canyons,
Utah racing like a heart and we are gasping for breath,
Sudden height becoming all apparent,
Including the near-ten-k elevation and its effects,
Including the breathless act of creating art in the mountains.

~

Jackson Hole at the end of a fiery green space,
A landscape of contracting and contrasting colors,
Valley of stars whimpering in daylight for the Daily shit to just hurry up,
Pharmaceutical abuse signs posted in Afton,
My manic awareness and fatigue beyond this drive with a sinking feeling of my youth remembered
bubbling up.

Rainstorm over Big Sky, Montana,
The rows and rows of black trees like a queue of lost souls,
And Yellowstone sucked the life out of us,
And future islands are nurturing us back to health,
My mind cancerous in its longing for an unknown other.

~

In Butte we come to rest our minds,
Footsteps fondling the crevices,
And everything here appears as a corner,
As a space to hide away, or slave if we were here a bit longer,
So instead we lay down our mental arms and breathe in cat smells and ponder the empty buildings.

If it was not forward, or backward, it would be Bozeman,

Quintessential and sensual all the same,

Amenities masked by a fleeting stop on a road map towards and behind the favorite American spaces.

One must not doubt the library, closed, providing us still with free Wi-Fi from the patio,

And that unknown potential we glimpsed before parting ways with the town after five minutes.

~

Butte storefronts include Soho, an Asian restaurant, packed with broadbacks long after closing time.

The silver saloon, a hole in the wall empty enough to make you consider your alcoholism before stepping inside.

Pork chop John's, closed, both locations, despite a very open website.

El Taco, fine purveyor of the fine *tacolotta*, which will be your cheapest and deadliest dinner.

These and more planted throughout town like statues we always dreamed about touching, defacing, or pushing over.

We are the people of yellow endless fields he called vast,
Central Montana North of Helena where the buildings stay closed on Sundays,
Landscape surrounding us, 90 mph, mob in a death machine,
The sky as big as the horizon, lowered into the peripheral through the cool,
Air a bit chilled and nothing much in front of us, beside us, behind us, except us.

~

Skeletal revisitation before the rock Gods,
Their fists churning and attracted to us,
Our immediate reactions to the pouring fountains of glacial water parched,
Our endured reactions to the splashes of mountain sunlight as caked as construction gravel,
Before we continue on like a mythic forest fire spreading viral through our consciousness.

Lone and long gone we are gotten by the breeze that fills skinny, living trees extending through to sky.

Bear boxes mean protection of goods, materials our only collection of creation,

While the chipmunks and squirrels dart defiantly, we chirp delinquently,

Muttering tales and turns and our trips are longer in our stead of stasis,

Liquid lanterns strung above our tent years of vision beyond our temporary churn of coals.

~

When that bison burger gets served hot with the sweet potato fries,

And that slice of huckleberry pie gets delivered in plastic wrap, forever to go,

Can't help but relive the fourteen mile trek, high line back and forth,

A blazing world staring so strong from so many angles,

Ready to bite at your flesh, make dry the top layers of your toes.

Morning gore ain't nothing to fuck with,
This time on going to the sun, my own hands cradling the wheel,
Following some truck aiming at good intentions,
But that little squirrel just can't get its crisscross timing right,
Has its head crushed by tire and gibs go shooting across the road and the body is violently
spasming as we drive past in shock.

~

We hunted crawfish with our camera mounted on a stick,
All of the lake glistening before us, while a family of overweight old folks from Idaho idled neatly in
their campsites,
And the mosquitos moseyed around waiting for our blood,
Our own senses muted by the calm and warm Lake water,
The temperature drafting, freezing over far from any summer slumber.

Memories of recent visions of black Rocks scattered I'm a yellow field,
Beacons of some ethereal reckoning between and beyond Euphrata and Soap Lake,
And now a sky to the north filled with the smoke of Cascadian wild fires,
And the Gorge sits wide open like this country's chugging, pulmonary artery.
Rock face sculpted like magnified cells, ripples of the future, and the past.

~

Bring back the Browns a blanket you left wrapped up your own personal present from years ago,
Discovery as juvenile as adult despite the mishaps and malignment,
They are waiting like the predictions within a tapestry of ghosts,
Rubble and ruin pressed forward and getting caught in the cracks of the road, and all its
automobiles,
And all brave automobiles travel through bravely despite the risks of the knowledge of the core.

The hills have been waiting,
The needle poised to strike,
And there is a rush to the waves,
Our body compressed by pebbles,
The daylight extending on and on before the final departure.

~

Five brave raccoons being all that it takes,
Taking me for a spin back to the side of my car,
Taking me back to my voice where I learn again to shout,
For no one ever walks this street but me,
And I am brave enough to brace myself and let out a rippling roar at the invaders and their creepy hands.

