

ROCKFALL ON A CLIFF HIDDEN BY TREES

Both *arrow* and *laugh* contain *bamboo*

(ink-stick melts on a disc of stone)

Brush or boot, step or pause:

At every switchback the view changes

A toe-hold, hand-hold, short nervous line

‘Of quartz in rock at the wrack-line’

For quartz in rock at the wrack-line

Use Chinese-white, well ground, instead of water

(though ‘mention of distant places implies military adventure’)

Wealth and ruin     one foot apart

And ‘you have no means of getting light brighter than white paper’

Snow in the gullies by the hundreds of tons

Trail on the far side rimmed with ice

‘You will see it reflects the objects beyond it as in a little black rippled pond’

(where a trout jumps and a fly dies)

A trout jumps and a fly dies

‘With other views of the horrid kind’

With views entirely of the horrid kind

A close-up painting of warriors on blood-stained heather

(butterflies apparently licking salt)

‘Or have I quietly assumed that we saw everything?’

A trail at morning, ‘the merest it was’

Set on quaint grounds of barred colour, like bearings on a shield

A trail at morning, the merest ‘it was’

Rockfall, on a cliff hidden by trees

## TENT BOOK

When I said *high grass* I didn't mean *tall*  
'Go looking for something that frightened  
you'

Rocks and willow, rocks and scree  
with 'one cake each of the hard colours'

heavy in the rucksack

*Rucksack* when it rhymes with *thick*  
*Thick* because it means *fog*

*Ten hundred thousand*  
because it means *fog*

in a high, far country

Not *far country* but fir cone

Not *fir cone* but firm cnoc

Not *cnoc* but knack

Not *knack* but steps

retracing stoic inscriptions

‘The guide has passed his examinations’

‘Turner has made the road more daring’

‘One final assault on the upper bastion’

Oh, and the avalanches

arrayed like so many cannon about to fire

Not *fire* but firm

Not *firm* but arm

of the hanged man

swapped for a word

Not *two* but *one*

Not *here* but *now*, now

Skirt slides, traverse talus (*vast* the hearts  
of flowers among the snows)

to steep, slick grass and a summer murmur  
scattered spruce

cut off at the depth of snow  
(A mile below, their heads lie

in a lake of August flowers)  
Mist pours over the headwall

follows the same path, knocks me silly  
(one deer-track where the rocks tumble)

*One deer triggers wander under*  
Under water walk is awkward

O stand, don't falter, heart  
beats hard against a leg's labor

'The wounded lying on bloody hay'  
'Last drops of the wine bag'  
'Bed thirteen wanted a ginger snap'

Not a *ginger snap* but a general's nap  
Not a *general's nap* but a generous map

Scissors cut paper, paper wraps rock  
Rock balanced on a pillar of ice

Blisters appear some hours later  
Conditions of luminosity

And 'the ground moraine does not appear  
before the ablation of the tongue'

Not *tongue* but trail  
Not *trail* but all

is positively frightening  
a fact often misunderstood

as *hermitscape* or  
*heaps of stone*

Ample opportunity for calm

(26 hours, 56 hours  
position of paragraphs known by heart)

and instead of a wallet a leathern cup  
a rare woodpecker with a yellow cap

‘Ant-surgeon in the 11<sup>th</sup> Hussars’  
(page torn out of an air of truth)

‘A large flat piece of rock  
wedged in like a volume on a shelf’

bounds, so to speak, down the mountain  
each leg choosing its own course

In the picturesque or the interregnum  
(o immoderate greatness of *vast*)

was it air was it water the rims of ice  
on the tent flaps, you descending

with mountain goats a waterfall  
and *O Mama, don't forget me*

I am on I am on  
I am diamond, darling, dilettante, I

'Not big enough to carry much  
but he speaks excellent French'

I turn the page my  
sleep now excellently abridged, see

that Petrarch drew a mountain with a church on top  
in the margins of Pliny's *Natural History*

Scan frontispiece, sort woodwork



alphabetize my own old

until it I it was but yes  
and fabled, there, with a telescope

a leathern cup that folded up  
a trail guide opened at random

to lush willow, grass and scree

I got lost reading

*Scramble in the Laps*

followed all night, so

meadows opened, sparrows opened

miles and miles of *mirabile dictu*

told in fatal until by heart I

sorted out *clast* from *iconoclast*  
(interbedded erosion intertongued)

2 old knapsacks, hob-nailed boots  
12 dollars to last 5 weeks

*Click here to sort accident data*  
ascend toward perfectly unobstructed view

of white bistort, black raven  
barbed wire strung round a living tree

Yarrow stands ready to staunch all wounds  
(say proximal conglomerate, distal sand)

Above Swift Creek  
(are the others slow?)

checking the knots on the tent fly  
bruise my thumb

And the whole first day  
my horse wouldn't drink from the streams

AT A ROCKSLIDE ENDING IN WILLOW  
A LARKSPUR TALLER THAN WILLOW

Not *taller than willow*  
but telling the sparrow

Not *telling the sparrow*  
but not shy

at eye-level  
Sings, flits, sun

on the willow-wave  
wind-

driven flies  
on the snow, the snow

calicoed  
by rock-dust, algae, red

as a kestrel's tail  
Step

through its trickling edge  
'breaking the colours

amongst each other'  
What's there to be seen

What's seen