

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 11th 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

‘THE MOUNTAINS FLEW OVER THE WATER AS BIRDS’

Wander out in the morning with a cup in my hand
A lion scat and three bloody tracks in the driveway
This form of silence called *ellipsis of battle*
And on horsemint salient: a small trouble of wet socks
a yellow flower I can’t name
Whistle three bars to cut the gravity
Gravity means: a bullet travels in a line that curves
as the planet curves, and then a little more
‘Outflank the second hostile position’
(squirrel runs up the window screen)
‘I can’t convey how much my boots delighted me’
(sliding down scree fields, fording wet willows
holding my walking stick over my head, as a soldier holds his gun)
‘I remember you at Austerlitz! I remember you with the flag!’
(an old corduroy of saplings under the mud)
‘Andy carried Stevens in the Sunni Triangle’
‘Joey had Marvell stuck in his head’
And what would the gardener say to the untrimmed path?
Pity for the anteater, not the ant
So let’s say *ignorant plowboy* if we can’t say *motherfucker*
Let’s practice adaptive stillness:
A single flight feather merged with rock
25,000 feathers on a large bird
No thoughts, counting seven paces
The mountains flew over the water as birds

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