

Poem by FORREST GANDER

Photographs by RAY MEEKS

## A Clearing



Where are you going? Ghosted with dust. From where have you come?

The dull assertiveness of the stone heap, like a barren monarchy.

Wolfspider, the size of a hand, encrusted with dirt at the rubble's edge.



What crosses here goes fanged or spiked and draws its color from the ground.

Nicotine shadow at the edges.

Where are we going? Ghosted with dust. From where have we come?

Like stratigraphic lines, lifted from rock, suspended in air.

What does it mean, a cauterized topography?

One step forward and he is with us. One step back, another realm absorbs him.



The sense of epoch loosened, unstrung.

Each thinking it is the other who recedes like a horizon.

The miraculous cage of bone visible under his skin.



I cannot be discarded, his eyes say.

The photograph like a flute cut to play one note.

In the scrape-out at noon, men fading from brightness, silvered with dust.

I can be read, say the stones, but not by you.

The air burnished, almost mineral, like a thin peel of mica.

A mound in the photograph, an iris in the eye.

What does it mean, a cauterized topography?

To salvage rocks the color of powder from powder the color of rock.

I can be read, say her eyes, but not by you.



As if the landscape had abandoned itself.

Telephone poles stabbing what remains of a hill.

One step forward and we are with them. One step back, another realm  
absorbs us.



Don't pick up the stones, he says, because stones belong to the dead.

Nicotine shadows at the edges.

The distance flat as horse-hair plaster, all depth sponged away.

Black hill of tailings.

There is nothing between his eyes and ours, but how to translate that nothing?

Each stone carrying its death sentence into the animate world.

A stone hill, he said, or a bivouac of snuffed stars.

The sense of epoch loosened, unstrung.

Light, stopped in the air.

The shadow of a pole has the same quality as the shadow of a man.

A glance held, an afterglow.

All depth sponged away, the distance flat as horse-hair plaster.





A mound in the photograph, an iris in an eye.

Don't pick him up, the stones say, because the dead belong to the stones.

Encrusted with dirt at the rubble's edge: wolfspider the size of a hand.

The shadow of a man has the same quality as the shadow of a pole.

What crosses here goes fanged or spiked and draws its color from the ground.

The air burnished, almost mineral, like a thin peel of mica.

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