

## Field Trips

1.

Our excessively enthusiastic, moderately pathetic instructor  
held rocks to his face and breathed in.  
The sedimentary stuff in particular—sandstone, shale. Aaaaah!

He took us to see beautiful, sand-polished stone in an ugly desert.  
We disembarked and leaned down  
to examine this item closely while the vastness  
made one circle after another around us.

It started inside of us, then out and out... Or maybe

I've got my directions all wrong. Who knows.  
Who knows says the beautiful  
ugly vastness. The Great Desert.

Later we actually stood  
on the famous San Andreas and literally touched it.  
We touched grains of soil in places where Earth  
keeps slipping and sending forth massive, upper-crust ripples  
felt by half the state over. It was

funny  
to stand on that exact ten inches of ground  
where something, anytime,  
could happen.

2.

We saw big chunks of dolomitic marble in the mouth of a cave, my first  
darkness that complete. It gave us all considerable pause. We kind of stopped breathing.  
I'm talking *dark*. Palpable mouthful, lung and brainful, can't-remember-  
my-own-name-full. Almost  
animal? Or thick like a liquid. Our eyes would never adjust. Who in their right  
mind  
would go any further in? We all backed up ha ha, nervous chuckles  
stepping back out with arms good and full

of leaden, sparkling white gifts from the edge of the blackness.  
(Our teacher said we could take them: glittering jags  
for holding down tedious, everyday notes  
on a desk, for example, or keeping our brains I mean books  
in line on a shelf, or maybe some door, somewhere,  
ajar. Something ornamental  
for one of those sad but industrious  
"desert gardens?" I don't know what happened

to the rocks I was given. I misplaced them, perhaps,  
or gave them away, perhaps,  
in the course of those feverish moves  
up and down, up and down the California coast...

later this way and that way across the Midwest...

In retrospect they shine more and more.  
Like all things finally required to live  
in the deepest dark, they've learned, somehow,  
to emit up their own light...

3.

Later, the whole class craned its collective hormonal teenaged neck  
and looked up

to see owls in their nests in a high stone wall  
in Red Rock Canyon. Miraculous powers of flight  
and sight  
sleepily recessed  
in their all up-and-down home  
of vertical stone. Stone which cannot, of course,

move

or see

ever

in any direction

the owls were at home  
there

because they can leave.  
When they're hungry, when they're restless,  
they are not ridiculous.

They simply fly away.

4.

Meanwhile, I stole something terrible.  
A man with a feather in his hat,  
I think,

lead us to a corner of the park where the rare  
almost invisible tiny crystals were not to be taken

or touched. Were they some sort of treasure  
secured by the natives? or by nature? I can't remember

the lecture. All I know is, much of the talk  
was *leave them as-is*, just *leave them*  
*alone*. He might as well have issued  
an outright bellowing command

to steal whatever we could damn well sneak  
into our backpacks or pockets. Didn't he know  
we were kids? Teenaged lunatic sapiens, exactly ripe  
enough? Really, the moment

he said no  
in response to no  
question

we all shattered internally. Something like that. Exploded  
out of our turning and burning interior lives  
set into motion as surely as stone

is wholly inert  
(until shaken, of course, by what shakes the whole ground.)

I exaggerate, some.  
The ugly truth is, on top of it all, I shortly lost  
the illicit crystals I took. The moment  
passed. Like all  
moments.

And nothing changed.  
Oh, small memories come on in the darkness  
if I close my eyes...