

Contrast, Sunset and Evening

I am lying on a dirt road at night in the middle of the desert.
I dig my toes into the crushed rock
So fine it could be just gray dust,
And I feel it slide under my toenails.
The rock dust cakes my body,
Sucking the moisture from the skin, drying it out,
So that as I write this with my finger in the dust I get chills,
The kind that jar your spine. Unpleasant,
Like nails on a chalkboard but I do it anyway.

Maybe it's because there's some
Thrill in the unpleasantness, some
Archaic carnal pleasure in the
Involuntary jerking of my spine.
Maybe it's because the dirt
Beneath my fingernails makes
Me feel masculine, like I've
Done a hard day's work,
Lifting something heavier than a pen, or my own head.

It could be because of my own
Sheer desperation to be heard,
But that's definitely not it.
My hopes that some cowboy will
Canter past this spot and read this,
And know that once a man lay here,
And this is what he thought,
And that the cowboy will wonder if
I stood up and walked on, or if perhaps
The ground just rose up and swallowed me,
And my presence is still there under my thoughts?
That has nothing to do with it.

Would grass grow where the dust swallowed me in the desert?

Maybe the cowboy would carve
The answer in the dust, which would
Swallow itself like a snake and
Its tail, and the words would reach me.

But that's not why I keep writing,
Jarring my spine like a whip that
Sends my knees knocking divots

Into the dust.

Yes, or, No.

Maybe it's because I finally learned where I am.
Maybe it's because when I roll over on my back, most people
Would say I'm under the stars, but
That's not right.
Maybe it's because I see now that there are stars all around.
I'm under them, yes, but I'm above some too.
Maybe it's because the moon, it doesn't
Just rise at night, and disappear as the sun usurps it.
The moon is not nocturnal, and it is always circling me,
It is always in orbit.
Maybe it's because if the universe is really infinite,
Every point is the center.
Maybe it's because I need a break from being in the middle of things.
Maybe it's because I'm not always comfortable being the center of attention.

Or maybe it's because my finger is the only thing I can move anymore,
Lying on a dirt road at night in the middle of the desert,
As the dust swallows me up.

It's the contrast, is what it is,
Of a warm drink, silken and steaming
Against chapped lips surrounded by gray cold.
It's the sound of an orange leaf crunching, crisp under a bare foot.
It's smelling salts as they're taken from under your nose and replaced with flowers.
It's the sneezes that break up a conversation if you're
Sitting in a field, or comfortably on top of a pile of soft gravel.
It's having a bed that's big enough, and a door.
It's my cheek against your leg or your head against my shoulder.
My arms around your back or you staring at the
Sky, or a kiss on your face through a curtain of hair.
It's a moment that has a color.
A soundtrack, and crickets.
A squeaky swing and cold fingers burning against guitar strings.

It's, what it is, is lovely.
It's the dust falling from under my fingertips and into grass
In the middle of our conversation, and neither of us notices.

William Ritchie