

# From Nevada, to that Bitch California

willow mullins

The Donnor party died in you  
and still I claim their bodies.  
Students in Roseville aren't taught  
that 39 people lie dead in the Sierra Nevada,

(split between us like a bedroom  
painters tape narrowly missing the tectonic divide)

and they don't know how many  
had the meat stripped off their bones  
by gnawing human teeth,  
imitating the wolves that used to live there  
as they tore apart a doe.  
You, Califia, are nothing more  
than the parables of never-emptying cups wanderers  
tell on their pilgrimage to my open-armed grave.  
It is shallow and hastily dug.

(were you tilling for more treasure?  
it is above the ground)

Despite your desperate grasp  
to make it a tourist attraction  
I believe Death Valley a part of me.  
The way you pulled my dunes into you  
is now my hand wrapping tightly around  
lush palm trees, like a neck.  
They are not native

(except  
for one, but we both know I reap no benefit  
by affirming your insincerity)

and even if they were you would have compressed  
them into little dots on your map, making way  
for billionaires and Bikram yoga studios.

What am I if not the place  
that you now go to get away

(you asked Virginia City if there is any fun  
in graveyard tours, and they said yes)

and shoot The fucking Hangover,  
not to mention the shit?  
I am a bar on a desolate road.  
I am a slot machine themed  
after Sex and the City.  
I am the place you send your excess, angry sun.

It boils out the fury from inside me  
and brings it to a simmer, knocking the lid off the basin.  
You like to watch  
as that brown yeast-water tsunamis  
into dusty dive bars.  
All this to have some cinematic background  
for the rust hued films of my wastes.

(“this is a great shot, move  
the camera to the left”)

You will sneak a glance at the beer-battered carcasses, skewered  
by the metal supports behind cardboard  
ghost-town cut outs, ichor steaming off them.

(pour it in a glass and it becomes  
the atomic cocktail)

From that curse  
I am still spitting out trinitite  
like broken teeth from a red-drool mouth  
as I lay hushed on the floor  
after you beat the lithium blood out of me.  
A cataclysmic explosion of fists against sand  
where nobody can hear the grains fall  
out in the empty, microwaved desert.

Maybe it was not you who  
pulled the silver from my veins

(although it made your spotlights  
and your mirrors.)

But you poured in toxic waste enough  
to call it a mountain.

(call it Yucca,  
that will protect it)

In 100 years when they dig me up  
they will no longer find arrowheads  
and calcified American lions  
for their parts will have melted into the uranium  
ruin to make a green, glowing  
slush. It shines in the cold night.  
Each star on me is brighter than the coruscating  
windows of your billion and one apartment complexes  
whose light reaches up to tear open the sky  
and collect pieces of constellations  
to stick in a sidewalk littered

(like chokecherries from their shrubs)

with the gaseous grime of non-electric cars,  
not like the ones your socially elected voltaic Jesus  
built way out  
in the middle of nowhere;  
in the middle of me.

So, if I am of no more use to you  
than factories and fields of radioactivity  
please, God,

leave this Beautiful place  
you crushed into a wasteland  
and, if you are still listening over  
the sound of mutant coyotes yipping,  
never come back.

(I saw him in Saint Mary's,  
a way's through Devil's Gate  
begging for forgiveness from me.)