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

(like chokecherries from their shrubs)

to stick in a sidewalk littered
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,

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

leave this Beautiful place
you crushed into a wasteland
and, if you are still listening over
the sound of mutant coyotes yipping,
ever come back.