

RIFT ZONE

And so find myself in a shell
jacket and approach-shoes
strolling past boulders
on the xeric canyon path
limned with mustard flowers
as though it were my garden,
as though I'd never
drawn those distinctions
that separate me out,
as though I hadn't long back
expelled myself from all that

wasn't myself. But where
is the human place
in geologic time? Is there
some quality in me that links I am
to the remainder?— to whatever
is left over? Left out. What
in the world
have I left out of me?

Adjusting a headband beneath my hat,
I lift the binoculars
to my lined face. Displaced
by lateral slip, the mountain's
slopes have gone wonky.
A human life, what
is that anyway? Even here
at the disturbance zone, I find
myself pierced by birdsong,
standing among trunks and vines
risen from the ground
like the births and messages
they are. A riven land, this

place belongs solely
to itself. From the wall
of a crevasse,
tree roots jut out
into air. The fault is the earth's
junction box,
where its wires are
bared. The conflict churns
under ground howling out
in the faintest of decibels. Of course

there were signs, but no
one of us witnessed the ballet
of trees as the tectonic
strain below them rose
and they inclined suddenly
toward each other
from where they stood rooted
to the parted lips of a widening
rift. The earth humphed and
rolled and the trees bowed forward
and held their new pose
which strangely resembles a gesture

of devotion. But back at the start,
I was occupied
with myself as though I were
never to be a part. As if
I weren't both in and of it. Of
what? So I hike the long
fault for some new
point of view, asking, muddled
with anxiety, what comes next. Now
that I can't claw my way any further
from what doesn't resemble me. The earth
keeps stretching, knuckling, stretching
out from under itself, hungry
for a new shape, a new address. It has
tossed itself loose from its sheets and risen,

leaving behind a note
I suppose I could read if I tried. The fissures

run through everything, even through
my remaining years – which I can count, probably,
on my fingers. I fan them out and stare
at their ruptured, upturned faces, the faces
of my remaining years. I try
re-shuffling them, but no. They grimace
one through the other, they release
a sulfur smell; their solidity dissolves like long clouds
of filth entering a river. My time is here and
not. Feet dangling, I'm perched
at the edge of what? listening to the crackle,
the extinctions of small breaths
around me. While crevices bloom from the crevices,
and dust lifts and catches in dry caches of wind.
Heat and silence. Still, the ground insists
its openings will be filled. Why
not apply? Apply myself. Over and over. This argument
goes beyond me. I who have never been
homeless. Groundless. Am I just going
to stand gobsmacked
at the mirror while my years run out? What

is left of experience that hasn't
been measured? Is there
an app for that? As I bend, I feel
the weight of the specimen stones
I carry in my jacket pocket slide forward.
As I continue my solo descent
along the canyon's seam. As I sip
and hold a quick breath. As I slip from sight
into a chimney of rock.

Forrest Gander