



GRANITE

Nancy Kuhl

GRANITE

LOST ROCKS

GRANITE

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(Avalanche or Avenue—) every heart asks which

—Emily Dickinson



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When I began to tell it, you said: *try to make something sensible rather than something beautiful*. One of us has gotten it all wrong.

Burnt tongue or bee sting:
a minor wound might become the heart
of the matter (who knows now which
bleary instant, the exact damage?).

Then moonlight with its grim
suspicions.

When I couldn't hold it
in mind, the story took shape in my lungs.

A common literary theme: *difficult*
circumstances can be changed. Remember

Man's inhumanity to man? That is:
sometimes *circumstances* means *a man*,

not *difficult* so much as *vicious* or *lethal*
and *Changed* means *one of us has to go*

or *no one is safe*. Sometimes in a novel
a rising moon marks a revelation, a turn

in the plot. In the real world, in your actual
life, has moonlight ever changed anything?

A father spends years perfecting
his hatred. One daughter is a double

agent: under cover or going to ground.
One records everything in the margins

of paperbacks. Summer holidays,
they strolled in humid air like any family

(nobody says a word – this distinguishes
them from the families in the books).

This family, this suburban dead-end
family—they use silence like a rope.

It's nothing special; anything
knitted is made of knots.

Shadow
falling: a fraction, a trace, a figure's
recognizable shape. That's *sequence*;
try to name *function*.

If her life were
like a magic show, what would be
the trapdoor opening to the grimy
crawl-space beneath the stage?

A magician tips his hat. Some-
one's daughter turns into a bird.



Gathering clouds and the moon
slides out of view. The clouds

slide, I mean. Wind comes up
out of nowhere. Pushed beyond

the frame; vagrant rather
than vanished. Distraction, then,

and delay. Find graphite focus.
Soon it's gone so far and high;

it's become so slight I might blow it
aside like dust from my eraser.

The voice of the present tense begins
to waver, trail off. The story is a crick

in the neck; the bones have gone
soft, accepting the impression

of fingers.

By *story*, I mean *the given*
account or *what was told*. Bones are

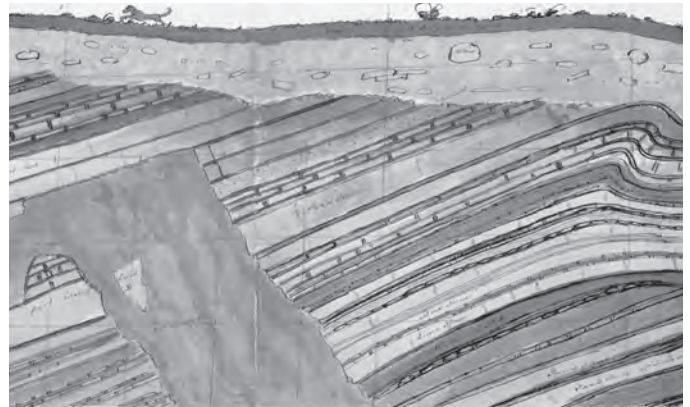
bones; they don't stand in for *resolve*
or *enterprise* or *imagination*.

The same

moon drags the sea back and forth again.
Even this might become a new idea.

THE DRAWING OF GRANITE BAY

||



We search for what will hold
it all together: solid ground-
work or speed steadily increasing.

We pretend it's a faraway shoreline
but from any hill you see sky-
scrapers standing in toothy rows.

Ice will break, eventually, the surface
and also hidden structures (structures
that tell us nothing about bone).

There isn't anything so old as this.

(Front Lawn)

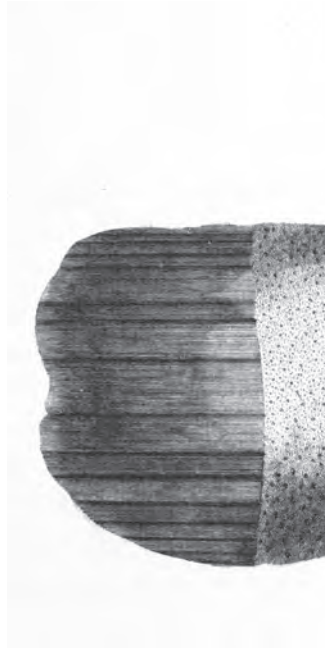
A child eating brilliant pink
flowers (lips and teeth frame
slender, pointy petals);

an actress
sinking in quicksand in a black-and-
white-matinee jungle.

Ancient middle-
class ambition, the blades of greener
grass. She undecorates the basic idea.

She becomes an escape artist,
slips through any kind of grasp.

Blink and she's as good as gone.



The surface of the ocean
isn't still but there's no

disturbance. Pencil and
a memory of curving,

hand following the path—
sun-bleached or silted under—

to the margin. Vertical
cliff and rising cedar. Paper

unfurls, blues ribboning.
The map, the mind's eye.

Now what? or *What were you
thinking?* Rumor still drifting

to the surface, then; floating
up to the sundrenched

and rippled. And *What does
any of it have to do with me?*

Soon, it would be told, but what
was broken was still breaking.

Who do you think you are? then.
And later: *What have I done?*

It was a troubled summer, a time
of powerful thirst. And then some-

one broke a window and climbed in.
What I lost: all the jewelry I ever

owned (except the silver bracelet
on my wrist) and my grandfather's

initials engraved on the back
of a watch. That was late October.

Leaning into frost. And then a mild
winter. And then a cold spring.

The purpose was to record it:
hollows and stony tracks and

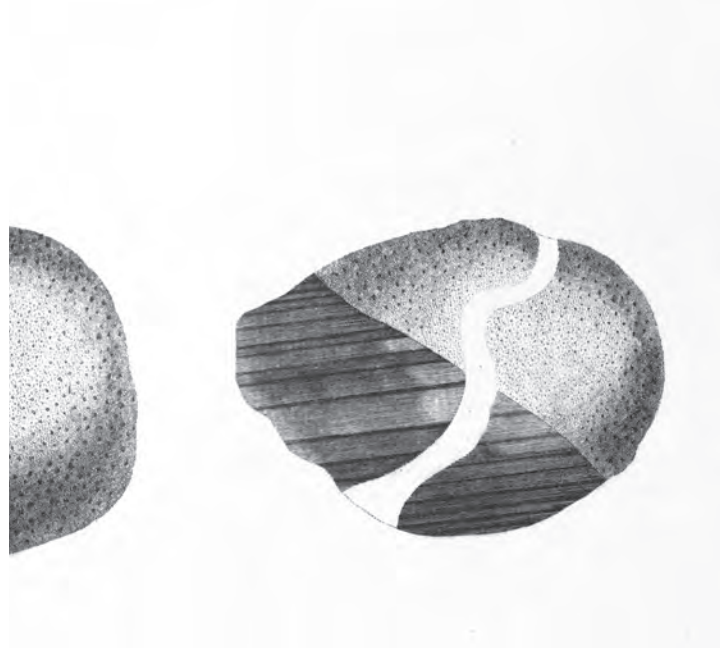
the road's surprising and treacherous
bend. To get it all down. On paper,

over gridded lines. How does a map
become a record of waiting? Of not

wanting? Bank, estuary, swamp:
plotted. American lawns, driveways.

Hours stretch taut; days unbending.
What will survive our forgetfulness?

THRESHOLD



|||

When it suddenly seemed too much
to contemplate, you said: *divide*
the idea into parts.

My vulnerability
is new and unprecedented; I am still
fragile in all the same old ways.

Today: opened like wildflowers; like
wildflowers bent against rain. Red
petals, the smallest increments;

I ask for help
again. There's more talking; each word
an artifact of something already lost.

To try to formulate an answer. To think
only of running; to wait. To feel hunger begin,

as it sometimes does, in the fingertips. To
recall last year and last week as if moving

across a threshold. To pry open the romance,
hold it open. To slowly grow smaller (curl in-

ward, fern-like). To find a letter behind the desk;
to consider, in this way, a gap between *missing*

and *lost*. To write or to say it. Half gone. To swift;
to wait. To turn past the sound of your voice.

(Meteor)

Ice and rock rushing now. Falling.
Burning sphere, as predicted. Promised.

Clarity, velocity. And the force with which
you respond (I mean *say nothing*).

Unconditional plummet, an absolute
idea; gravity, the thought of it leaves

the weight of salt on the tongue. And
the eye—into which a thousand frozen years

and any hour's sway and proof; the eye,
into which the bright, the dark world rushes.

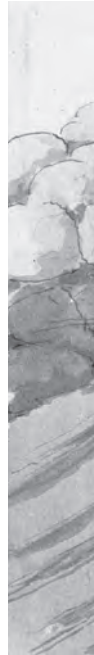
Almost any word you'd say about travel
might also be said about time. We have

walked and walked and now we stand
in the shadow of the tree (we say *Shade*).

There are words to describe a journey
when it's long and difficult. *Shade* also

means *ghost*. *Eclipse* doesn't only
describe a relationship between

two celestial bodies. Don't forget:
I'm still talking about what light can do.



(A Story about Feathers)

100-year-old bodies of seabirds
contain mineral knowledge (copper,

sulfur, zinc); compound and crystal,
traces of temporal events—ocean-

floor volcano then coastal flood—
recorded in pin and down.

Time

writes itself indelible into feather,
into hollow bone.

And the past

rises like the sea.

When did
all my ideas become this idea?

In this room wishes are windows—
ordinary and transparent. Blinds

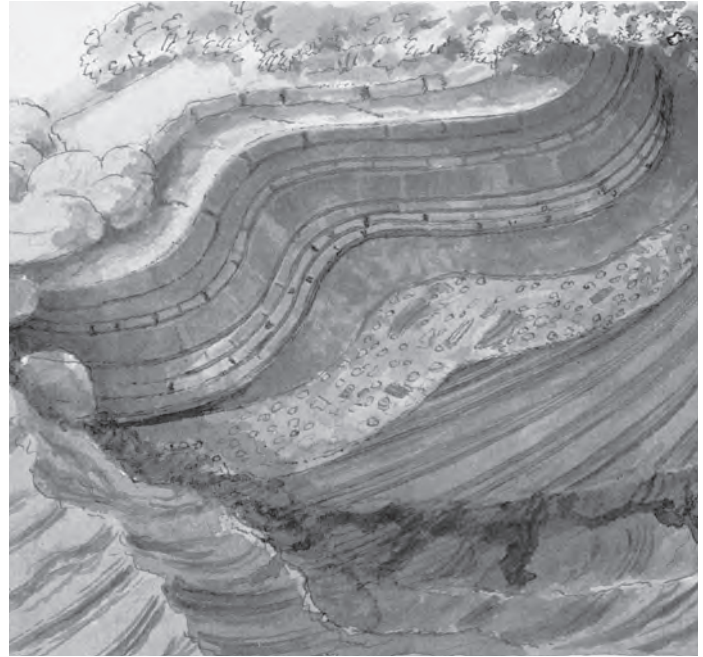
and branches pattern slant-
wise and shifting (be patient:

trust this reliable variation).
Ceiling as field and support, look

up: this is the sky from beneath
the surface of a green lake.

In this room memory can be a tool or
an instrument (a chisel or a compass).

ALONG THE GRAIN



IV

We say *sleep like a stone*;
we mean *like the dead*.

In the time of nightmares, this
is wishful thinking. In the time

of sleepwalking. No one—not even
our sleeper—can say what happens

in these rooms after midnight.
In the dreams the sea is as haunted

as the house; it's dull and red,
no horizon, no end in sight.



We worried about the trains.
We tried to remember to wind

the clock in the hall (*Grandfather
Clock* is only a song; mine stood

behind a hardware store counter;
was more *wristwatch* than *weight-*

driven plumb). You might say we
lingered in expectation. Longing

which suggests sadness; not *wanting*
with its implication of deficiency.

What little we were able to say.
The question was finally asked:

names and dates, verb, verb—gush
and spill. Abrupt new honesty

puts an end to thinking.

I wanted
wait tell me again tell me more.

I dreamt of water rising through
the dirt, through the floorboards;

I dreamt of the staircase climbing
into a fire on the second floor.

The smooth or pebbled, the hot,
the solid, the immovable. Unknow-

able interior. There is no floor plan
or frame. No method. Liquid hardening

in seamed layers. Something like
the creased-soft postcard (long ago,

faraway) but also like the crack-
veined hand mirror (reflection, shatter).

This is what happens. This is what
happens. This is what happens.

Sameness of days; ordinary
disruptions. Afternoon train

sounding over the bridge. Chime
and tick and the clock is wound

again. Slows again. Someone calls
children home at dusk. Their names;

stillness follows. The atmosphere—
it can break into pieces across

the high-fenced yard. Night
comes down finally like a lid.

By morning, I've forgotten,
mostly, though I remember

my father was there
(wherever we were)

(whoever *we* were).
And I woke crying out

again. I woke saying, as I am
always saying in the dreams

that wake me this way,
I was saying (trying to say) *no*.

THIS HISTORY IN FRAGMENTS CALLED STONE



V

Two turn into a third;
each and
both. Still so like themselves.

Matrix (but I am easily bewildered
by the language).

And: lazurite,

calcite, sodalite. Under. Sub sub-
terranean lapis pressing not-yet-

blues to crack and pucker. Eventually:
ultramarine.

Joints knuckle like finger-

bones.

Stone polished and aglow:
a distant, an unfamiliar world.

(Fable)

Thought we'd move to remote woods,
a tiny cabin (this, when we knew
we were truly and at last alone).

But the dapple and chill, that nearly
perfect not-quiet. Just the thought—
well, it dragged our mood low.

We live now under high ceilings
on a rocky coast; youthful trees offer
inviting shade.

We devote one hour
each day to ordinary unhappiness.



A crisis, another. Pressure heats everything. Slowly at first, then rushing. Little by little and then all at once.

The situation is quite serious; it's dire; maybe you should come; you should come.

Picture
a scrim. Or, a sentence struck through—intrusion of ink. Letter forms remain; almost remain. Meaning comes gradually apart.

Try thinking through a mineral lens.
Now stillness is method, progression

by inactivity. Grit and grain under
palm, surface hot under late sun.

Depressions collect rain, ponding, pooling.
Airy mosses—nearly invisible stem and

flower—reach into seams with roots
unrecognizable as roots.

Cold comes crisp and influencing,
opens the earth. Moves the whole sky.

What comes up through layers.
The top, the lip, the overlay,
the brink, the joint, the skim,
the skin.

What happens happens
by minutes and by hours—it's true
here and anywhere.

One then
the next. This then this
then this. And and and.

Soon
we'll say: *the structure loses
its regular form; becomes a jumble.*

(Stories about Granite)

One story is time beyond
comprehension. The end.

There is something called
a melt; it has a plot: beginning,

middle, and *the last of it*.
And the fever when it forms.

Solid parentrock and
percolation along margins.

See how it takes a shine.
The end, the end, the end.

TAKES PLACE



Summer rental, buckled pavement
path to a screened porch; everyday

we stand ankle-deep, we watch
the action of currents. We suspect

something but do not say it aloud.
From the third floor, we're almost

eye-level with stars. Evenings are
gravity and copper and magnetism.

These nouns have no opposites; we
identify others that stand alone.

Occasionally we drove
to the beach to swim.

We ignored warnings
about riptides, walked

deliberately into waves.
Even now, there is no

match for the undertow,
that mindless drag

and pull. No match for
hunger so relentless.



The list we made was not unlike a navigational chart but neither did it explicitly describe the means. This is one way of moving into moving through experience. *Careening* as in lurching. I think: is this how we are meant to know our minds? What multiplies and what cancels? With speed and changeability: reeling and gone.

Of each and everything we ask:
what is it like? We try to describe

the horizon set down between
limit and limitlessness. We

telescope the view through a grid
of screen: narrow harbor,

narrow breakwater. Inevitably,
the mouth of the sound. Some-

one will say something pretty: *It was
all suspended under birds' wings.*

Careening is also grounding
a sailboat at low tide, exposing
what is otherwise underwater.
To make necessary repairs.
The work of it requires a sandbar
and wading waist deep. Anchors
and halyards. Mechanical advantage
of block and line. The work requires
many kinds of strength combined
with various subtle pressures.

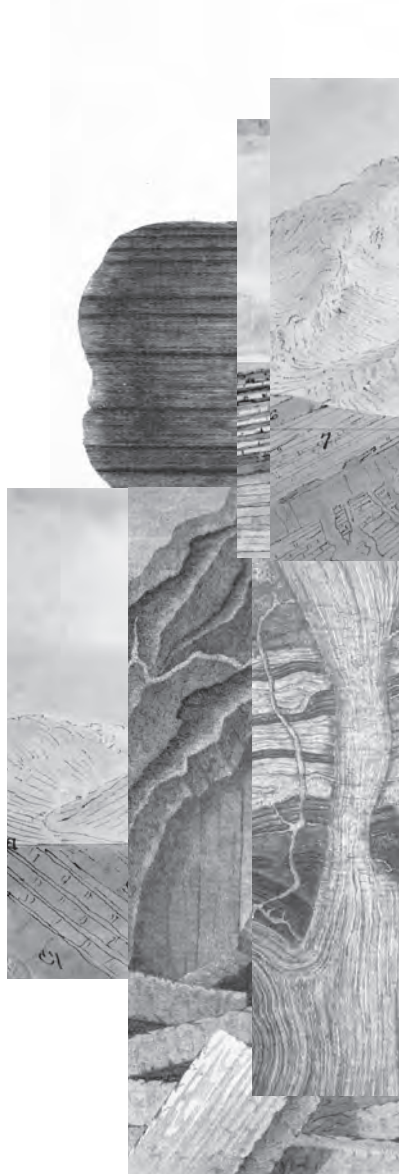
Tides erode days until
there is only one: we drove,

we swam; waves broke and
gathered. I keep telling

the story; I worry there's
nothing more to know.

Again, I circle back; this is
the rind of the orange, the pit

of the peach; also the sweet,
also the tender. Also the tooth.



1

The granite problem: had it been, in a state of fusion, made to flow among the broken? So much happens before the beginning – this is one kind of narrative.

2

A natural history of granite. An idea like a thunderstorm. More than anything, the drawings demonstrate the relationship between the invading and the pre-existing.

Imagine a hidden river running under everything, deep through the universe.

3

Curiosity as landscape: sandstones and shales cut by faults. Through ridge and crag and sill and slip and slip. Rock floats in rock. Centuries, then. Dig and quarry.

Takes place, meaning *transpiring* or meaning *to stand in for*? (The image may be a mirror opposite).

4

This is music drifting, sent down. An echo-back sounding from the center of the distant center.

Name something that doesn't have an edge and a middle.

5

Marks, the trace of the man (the hand, the very heart); line and line and I wonder if attention is the same as devotion. Broad lashing and anatomical shape, a creaturely inorganic. Body of. (The body is undeniable—which is not to say real).

6

Archive of stone. This is what time looks like.

IMAGES

Drawings herein were made by John Clerk of Eldin while traveling with geologist James Hutton between 1785–1788. They were to be included in the third volume of Hutton’s groundbreaking work, *Theory of the Earth*. Hutton died before the book was published. Though they were preserved by Clerk’s decedents, the drawings were first examined by scholars only in 1968. Justy Phillips and Margaret Woodward derived the reproductions here from the 1978 portfolio *James Hutton’s Theory of the Earth: The Lost Drawings*. I am tremendously grateful to both for their inspiring collaboration.

Details of Clerk’s drawings are found on the following pages:

| | |
|---|------------|
| Detailed E–W section, Northern granite, Isle of Arran, Strathclyde | 4, 9, 92 |
| Frederick Street, Edinburgh (East side) | 16, 23, 92 |
| Boulders from River Tilt, Tayside (engraving) | 28, 37, 92 |
| Junction of strata, Isle of Man | 46, 51, 96 |
| Veining, Cairnsmore of Fleet, Dumfries and Galloway (engraving) | 54, 65, 92 |
| Map, Glen Tilt, Tayside (engraving) | 68, 79, 92 |
| Arthur’s Seat and Salisbury Crags, Edinburgh | 84, 92 |

NOTES

‘Table of Contents’ and ‘The Drawing of Granite Bay’ incorporate language from *Nature and Character at Granite Bay*, by Daniel A. Goodsell, 1901.

The italicized line in section five of ‘This History in Fragments Called Stone’ is from *The Granite Landscape: A Natural History of America’s Mountain Domes, from Acadia to Yosemite* by Tom Wessels, 2001.

‘Lost Drawings for A Theory of the Earth’ incorporates language from James Hutton’s works *Theory of the Earth* (1788) and *Observations of Granite* (1794) and *James Hutton’s Theory of the Earth: The Lost Drawings*, by G. Y. Craig, D. B. McIntyre, and C. D. Waterston, 1978.

COLOPHON

Granite (V) is one of forty mineral recompositions commissioned by A Published Event for *Loſt Rocks* (2017–21).

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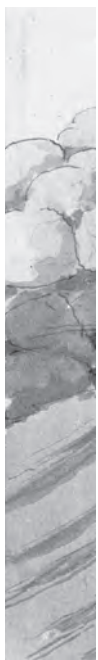
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Stories about Granite

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