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John Pariseault

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Reflections on The Big Rock Candy Mountain and Stegner's America

By John Pariseault

Those first wanderers knew
the blistering westward wind
the echo of rolling waves
the flash of light
as sun falls out of sky
 into imagination

scratching up sand dunes
plucking sea grass

pussy willow bends
brackish air fills salty nostrils
distant hills roll in flat winter light
leaves on forest floor squish

sun softens flat hard earth
mountains soar
ragged and blissfully lost in soft white sky

a brilliant pacific morning
cliffs fall into sea
land's end - vast and smooth

east to west
trembling vibrating earth

the dream of the west is the dream of America,
a migration of generations
an itch to go
and keep going
 to make it BIG!
in wide open west America

a dusty dream that withers in the dry western sun

But, it is pure desire
waking in the glare of dawn
and making it again
in tall grass behind shed

rippling forearms, broad back and leather hands
savage aggressive
un-refined material of half a man - pioneer of
America

a blind pig, a car-load of whiskey
barreling through blizzard over mountains
and dried up old river beds
into prohi states, into Canada
out of the moon

the fire of youth
nose hooked
from restless nights
spent drinking and fighting
good at both
with dreams of getting out from under this place
to the big rock candy mountain
where the sun always shines
the women are sweet
and a smart man can make his way

a naïve, wonderful, sickening, hopefulness
to use your own eyes
to have a stake
in whatever is out there
beyond the buddha mountain
and the grumpy old town

it is the human spirit, the nature of suffering
an instinct that is America and breaks America's heart

boom and bust towns
slashed and burned
scoop out the inside of the earth
poison rivers
 flow
 into poison and depleted seas

a man at a makeshift kitchen table
beyond the edge of nowhere
figuring
the lines on his forehead grow deeper
fat sizzles in a pan
kids and wife an anchor
to this dried up dust bowl

the dream of the west
the dream of America
the big gamble
every frontier that will ever be
dot-com, enron, a pile

Yet hope still sweeps across
America
 like an automobile
across G.W. and out Golden Gate
throwing funny shadows
 contorted against hills

some will find a home
in pieces of broken memory
a patchwork
a song, a smell

a new dream
of community -
the orphan of pioneer boom-bust America.

