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CHACO, VERDE

1 (The Legend)

We never understood the significance of the abandonment, whether it was a cause of personality or not. Certainly, there were persons involved, possibly goddesses, spirits and gods, but whether they were simply bullets shot from an unaimed gun, or whether one stood and deliberately chose a target was not said.

The oldest manuscript maintained that she had done it all, that had she moved in certain ways uncongenial to her nature, the collision of body and projectile would never have occurred.

Later manuscripts analysed it differently, and held the invisible hand responsible, though there were those who would insist that such collisions (collusions) were in the nature of things, and not to be understood. Abundance figured in it, they all agreed, but how its lack transpired (luck) could not be understood.

The elder tales were genially ignored.

2 (San Ysidro, Cabezon)

We went up the pass, she and I,
to see the mountain turning,
watched it discover
its golden light
rejoicing
we followed a rutted road
center blooming and filled with rocks,
yellow, magenta and pale brown,
that kept us twisting, unable to see
what was ahead, climbing
until the valley opened wide below
fading into simple blue as the sky,
revealing distance to our astounded eyes.
We were reminded of an old wanderer's dream,
a stream fizzing and bubbling among the hills,
the blooming, smokable trees—
the kind and perfect ease anyone would wish for,
going so unbelievably.
I want to tell you this:
the notion of how it ought to be,
name of an Eskimo god who sits,
content, grinning. He understands.
And so do you, and I,
if only we could remember
the banks are steep,
the peaks so far away,
but in between
a careful space of perfect springs
and all we'd ever need,
and swift winds on the peaks
where the light is clear.

3 (Jemez)

Walking along the dry arroyo bed
we pick up bits of chipped,
shaped flint, obsidian, find manos
scattered almost randomly
among the stones.
The air is warm.
Cicadas sing in the twisted junipers,
low wind builds behind, murmuring
old forgotten songs.
The women used to come here to work
before the land went slack
vacant
and white.
It is important
to know how they thought,
the white ancestors of the woman
I walk beside: they
needed something to fear,
something frightening to name,
to speak about their inner sense
of things.
And so it was.
Someone else reaped
their despair.
Over the next hill at the mesa's foot
the village curls around itself.
There is a picture on a stone near my hand,
the line of eternal return, circling.