

July 12 Stories at Chimney Rock

*For Leo and Marie Durnal who took us to their back yard
to see Chimney Rock and to tell us their stories*

The stone thrusts up
from the pasture,
bare, brown,
sharp against the sky.

And Leo says,
*She's the Greatest Landmark
on the Oregon Trail,
but she's crumbling---
least a hundred feet gone
since I was a boy,
Indians used to send
smoke signals
up from that hill behind,
the Cavalry blasted at
it
for cannon practice for a few
years.*

Now,
*there's a pair
of golden eagles nested
up on its tip,*

And I see two specks
as they
spiral up and down its height
sighting for rattlesnakes in the
cracks.

*There's a lot of rattlers 'round
here.
One killed my dog Willy
a few years back
but Marie keeps chickens,
Leo smiles,
Betcha didn't know
rattlers was scared of chickens---
From a snake's point of view
a chicken looks a whole lot*

like one of them eagles.

*And maybe if I'd had my chickens
with me at the dance in Baird,
Marie adds,
I coulda steered clear of you, you old
snake.*

Marie is in blue,
tiny white flowers scattered
over a cotton dress,
 blue shoes,
 steel-blue hair,
 her pale hands mapped,
 fine sky-blue veins, deep
 water eyes.

Leo shows his gums,
hands on his brown jeans,
 plaid shirt torn
 over his left rib cage,
 a fence he didn't quite clear,
 his yellow seed hat reads,
 Simplot
 across his forehead.

Behind them,
horses are running,
scattering in the grass
around the rubble
of the upper hundred feet of the
rock.

My great uncle Rufus
punctuated his stories,
spitting tobacco, across the
room
a good twelve feet,
to the fireplace every time,
asking through his brown teeth,
Ya know what I mean?

and there was Uncle Mahzon
who showed me his steel helmet

from the war,
let me feel the bullet-hole
on one side,
trace the scar across the back
where the slug traveled
before it tore
through the other,
Knocked me clean out,
Uncle Mahzon says,
and he'd wink,
I thought I was dead,

and also Uncle Pascal
who was oldest and told of
them
carrying his mama's
amputated leg out to the
field
to be buried, to wait
there
until she could join it, *It says*
"the dead'll rise
to meet Him in the air---'
and Mama needed both them legs to git up.

At the home place
once---
tall pines,
magnolia scent,
the toads sounding
in the marsh---
a pile of lumber rotted beneath
the crumbling chimney.

Beneath Chimney Rock,
Leo's fields are strewn with
fragments.

And always
there is a central Rock
compelling us to speak.