

Merced Lake Junction, July 2018

Far reaching mountain vistas
Where there should be granite domes
Backed by a sapphire blue sky
Are all hidden by a matte of constant gray.
Dense, unrelenting, dimensionless.
Daylight can no longer indicate time.

A healthy stag stands prominently
Just off trail, he fearlessly watches my approach
A brown coat does little for camouflage
Against an apocalyptic backdrop
His velvet covered antlers turn away
As he seems to lead me down the path.

Charcoal covered trees
Skeletons of their lush former selves
Ghostly sentries densely stand in every direction
Lifeless limbs curl downward from their sides.
Like dark spirits fading into eternity
Their stoic numbers disappear into the smoky horizon.

Isolated atop a small hill
A large ponderosa pine stands bent, distorted
Decapitated, twisted to reveal internal vascular lines
Damaged by passing fire, it's flaky bark falls
Like a giant jigsaw puzzle box had been emptied
Brown, black, and rusty red pieces pile at its roots.

Much of the forest is silent
No birds. No vegetation for the wind to wisp.
Thunder rumbles, I have no sense of direction.
This drab dome conceals the weather.
Occasional raindrops indicate
Clouds may be closer than they sound.

The deer continues to lead on
Ash lightly falls from a nonexistent sky.
Soon I hear flushing, gurgling, whooshing.
An understory of green has grown along a vibrant creek.
Precipitating remnants, decay, and water
Nourishing and nurturing life.

The stag stops to feed upon a level outcrop.
It appears our trek is done.
Here I can rest and ponder,
A distant fire ravages the brethren of this forest.
Just as life leads to death, death gives way to life.
Such is the cycle of a Sierra wildfire.

~ Rusty Alois