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the View from Cataldo Mission

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THE VIEW FROM CATALDO MISSION

Stooped and sickened by the drive
I leave you at the coffee shop
and climb the slick groomed lawn
to Cataldo Mission. Three days
watching old friends dismantle
their marriage and I have run out
of steam. My boots grab
at nothing on the ground.

Nights, the windows blazed
in our borrowed home. All weekend we climbed
the flooded hillside with wood barely dry enough
to burn, looking on as friends mapped
the vacancy between them, the civilized exchange
of children. I think of your hands
curled, coffee steaming from the chipped cup
held between them. I climb to stay warm.

Maybe when priests had it built
and the town boomed, when miners
pulled themselves at dusk from the ground,
the mission didn't need to be explained, its
vaulted windows burning like signal fires.
Today constant rain streaks the dark windows
blind. The bell tower points to gun-metal
clouds choking the hills.

Today all the mission gives me
is distance. From here the children
in the supermarket are no threat, children nodding weakly
in carts near the magazines, the slow fire of lead
in their blood. Stunted birch cling to the ridge,
scrawling, like a deaf boy's fingers in the air,
their pleas for soil. Our maps mean nothing.
Without them, you wonder how long we can last.

Here, the storm's worst has passed. Heat
escapes the ground like steam from a pond.
What's left is ours, heat enough to follow the miners
and their children east. Today another beaten family
leaves, and the dust that rises from their tracks
lights the road like a brushfire. From here we drive
the valley wall into clouds. We have lasted this long.
The children in the supermarket are not yet ours.