Homestead

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HOMESTEAD

For M. S. Daniels

Dog days in high country offer no relief. I hunker where trails climb to claims that turned the century rich, ore Cape-bound for Scotland like a dream of easy ways back. It must have paid panning the creek with stillwater eyes, snapdragons to flutter in spring. What words came after dredges tunneled through for greed? Did old ones linger for a nugget or Sunday lighting up the ridge?

Roots and stone. Reason for returning autumn nights. Pictures yellowed under glass, faces torn or buried by the gray waste heaped behind, nothing grows when you find the road to town. Cold sky deepens the winter slope. Love dies. You learn to flood the shaft that fails, dig for veins you have no stake in.

Aren’t all claims ancient where we settle our remains? Do words come after flowers dry or white stoops sag in the rain? And life we drain from timbered drifts, will it still burn like the peacock rock it bubbles? There’s little shelter in mines that work their own shift. No memory survives the short way home.