Spring 1984

Trains / Departure Time

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TRAINS/DEPARTURE TIME

I've walked the one remaining rail, heard the narrow gauge engine's whistle echoed off the bunch grass canyon walls as the empty ore cars pushed up and rode the brake back down. How the sound fused with rock, pick, voice and water, harness and slip scoop in dirt and stone.

And if I could climb rungs into the cab and ride down out of the hills feeling steam test the gauges. I could get off in town, cross the yard to the station house and stand on Main Street with my hat tipped back, jacket slung on my shoulder in the small town Johnny Carrol built to scale, placed on a plywood board, outgrew, and left behind at our house. It was a town never named: glass windows in tiny wooden sashes set in perfectly plumb walls carefully painted; street lights pooling the board sidewalks in the darkness; a steam express, its green coaches lit and rocking.

Here, today, five valleys feed this one their streams, creeks, and rivers, their twin rails of track bringing ore to smelt, timber to be cut and planed. Here, in the roundhouse center of these spur lines and rivers are fourteen diesels coupled to an oil and grease idle;
their hydraulics, computer linked, flex together,
relax as one, speak in exhalation.
The closest commuter stop now
is one hundred miles north over the mountains
and the train runs twice a week.
This yard makes the freights up after dark;
the box car thunder,
the diesels working back and forth
in their low vibration
remain subliminal and sweet.