

Goldtown Cemetery

Jill Dwyer

First Prize: Poetry section. 2023 Marysville BookNest Writing competition

Summer,
Back road, backwater.
Tired fence, rusted wire-clamped gate.
Parched remains of grass, grey shards of bark.
Dust.

We found elements of a ram.
Black leather struts, bleached horns, a crimp or two of fleece.
He'd wandered in through drooping wire, laid down a while
on sanctified ground and rests there still.

They travelled, restless over months of seas,
carrying only names.

(Some not even that – black sheep?)

The dreaming in their eyes was never this;
they could only paint in greenfield style,
in hedgerow terms.

Soon they felt the dry, destroying wind,
the hammer-blow of sun and blast of fever.
Welcomed new life, saw it grow feather-frail and cease
then wrote it, simply, here.

Some thrived.

There, in double-bed size, comfortable earth,
lies Sarah, eighty-seven years,
beloved wife of John (gone long before).

She prospered, hard and heavy as he, forfeiting time,
grew thin and husked and at the end
blew easily away.

Imagine aimlessly down paths of years.
As time goes wood's more brittle; marble only smooths.
Hours lie torpid under weight of sun.
And now and then a warm December breeze
toys with the frail, discarded leaves.