

## SHEPHERD'S COTTAGE, SUFFOLK

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*Jeanette Miller*

The old woman who died here  
three years ago  
didn't, for a lifetime, go  
beyond the road  
where the red-mantled pheasants  
strut ahead of their mates  
into the nettle.

She walked the hill  
(where adders sleep)  
in high, black boots,  
whistling and singing,  
walked the narrow stairs,  
a bowl of water in her hands,  
mirrored in rain. Her window—  
rows of pines planted to the sea.

A breakfast of sausages, fried bread, tomatoes.  
A thread of steam rises from my cup,  
disappearing into a poster of the Heathland.  
Dwarf gorse, bristle bent, bell heather.  
Did she take the yellow-flowered broom for granted?

Sand road. The bleached carcass of a squirrel.  
Blackberries.  
Blue phlox, dark whorls at their centers.

A carved, wooden angel  
hangs above the bed  
where she slept alone,  
wrapped in eiderdown,  
while the nights of solitude  
repeated themselves with certainty  
like the stitches that tie together  
the layers of the quilt,  
binding its edges.