

SHEPHERD'S COTTAGE, SUFFOLK

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.