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IN THE BRONTE COUNTRY

Emily’s room looks out on the graves. 
A sampler by each daughter fades 
in the cupboard. The moss 
would not leave her thoughts alone. 
She tried to do what the moss 
began. Moss will finish it.

On the moor a track wears deep 
on the hillside; gorse leans in. 
Water stands in the grass, in brown 
pools on the soaked upland. Miles 
from the sea, gulls drift over 
that brown tide. Buffeted, they 
leave in the air their international cry.

At Top Withens black stones 
of the wall cling, stubborn, deaf. 
To look far you have to ignore them. 
The wind at your shoulder says over 
and over, “I knew them all.” In a stunned 
second you are one of the rocks 
and the heath has taken all your friends.

You understand what the bird that 
followed you was saying. The wind 
falls away and goes still. This earth 
tells time by the stars, and is telling 
you something: 
this is the way the world will be, after.

William Stafford