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Copper Basin

Jim Papworth

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Copper Basin

by Jim Papworth

The Muldoon Creek Road bounces us
 across its knuckles
 as we intrude;
 it wants to jar our memories.

Clouds like dingy sheep
 drizzle their holdings
 into August,
 spraying the land with contempt.

A herd of mosquitoes chokes the air,
 ricochets its whine
 off quaking asp,
 searches the poke of skin.

The copper mine on Whitney Butte
 closed—ochre tailings
 rattle the hills
 with whisperings of clutched ore.

Sage coughs its musk into summer
 and stains the basin gray;
 roots crawl below,
 hoarding the valley's meagerness.

Like a hungry cat in winter
 the land clamps dead calves
 in stingy jaws—
 next year's teeth, bones, and bits of fur.

Willowwalls guard native brookies,
 whose variegated bodies
 feed streams
 with translucent fear in shadows.