

Long Dark

(The closure of Longannet Mine, Fife; the last deep mine in Scotland: 2002)

The end of the long dark.

The end of the long, hard scratching out
of face after face after face;

and each face black and weary
and drawn as if three-hundred million years of dust
had piled up and weighed down
every pick and every shovel
and every broken drill.

The cough of a pony in the darkness.

The drip of water filling tunnels.

A grim snatch of song echoing
through the strange, dark ways lost
a mile underground;

a mile from the sky
and breathing.

This hoarse geology breathes
with rock falls and bones; with fossils
and names of the dead that curse living as much
as their blisters and lungs and broken knuckles;
and the weak beer; and the hard church
that made them pay for eternity –

theirs at the end of the long dark.

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