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Gold Rush

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You find the Petrified Man
lodged under glass at the back
of Ye Olde Curiosity Shoppe,
a tourist trap on Puget Sound.
He is skinny, a cross
between Christ and a bat.
He's kept his moustache
trim since the end of his personal
gold rush era catastrophe.
Tar pit, you figure,
or mummification in long johns.
No relatives bore him back
to a churchyard in Boston or Sweden.
His rib cage is sunken
but immaculate the way a mud flat
looks clean at dawn
before the first clam diggers.
His shell toughens,
exempt from the preacher,
foreclosure, locusts, a boyish
lover with transparent wrists,
whatever drove him
North of the Northwest
to muck for Alaskan gold.
A sign on the case
reads DO NOT TOUCH
but you already feel weather
conditions in his country,
so nearby that your spine

matches the shoreline node for node,
but so far away that ferries float
there under different stars, a big
dipper full of what? Not light,
not water, not spit, not blood.