*Gold Rush*

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

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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.

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