

End of the Line

JOHN S. HATCHER

Fleet of foot I was, my blond hair blazing
in autumnal breeze, smiling
at cotton-skirted girls

who lounged in the park, sheltered
beneath arms of maple and elm,
their leaves bright orange and gold.

But now nearing the end of this meandering trek,
each stride becomes more labored than the last.
My strained breath hisses like steam

escaping some ancient, dark iron engine.
My filigreed heart pounds in sync
with legs grown spindly and wooden

as I trod beside the etched stones inscribed
with dates and eloquent epitaphs that recall
fallen ones beside the grey gravel path.

Once through a pullman window,
I gazed on passing farms, quaint villages,
distant mountain peaks, desert strands

stretching to the horizon, each fleeting vision
I kept for reflection in my reverie at the end of day.
As I near it now, I am content to have done enough.

I shall devise no further lists for the future.
All regrets and guilt have become threadbare
from the redundancy of appraisal,

and all those who truly care, stand waiting,
their angelic arms outstretched to embrace me
with O such magnificent love!

And for those I leave behind,
I bequeath a single, tome-filled shelf
proclaiming all I was able to make of this.