

Beneath These Hills

Before I learned history from books,
I learned it where the mountain looks,
in roads cut deep through stone and clay,
in hollows where old houses stay.

In Wyoming County, time stands still,
yet moves like fog across a hill.

The land does not keep silence long;
it speaks in story, work, and song.

Coal lives here still, though years have passed,
its shadow wide, its memory vast.

It lingers in the names we know,
in towns where generations grow.

In lunch pails resting on a shelf,
in framed old photos of ourself,
in weathered hands and furrowed brow,
it lives within the county now.

The mines ran deeper than the ground,
their reach in every home was found.

They stretched through kitchens warm with light,
through prayers whispered late at night.

They reached through pews and schoolhouse halls,

through winter winds and plastered walls.

They taught the young, the old, the brave,

that work could bend but not enslave.

There were men who wore the mountain home,

with dust in every seam and bone.

They carried darkness on their boots,

yet fed their children from those roots.

There were women strong and standing tall,

who scrubbed black collars in the hall,

who held the house through fear and strain,

then rose to do it all again.

Coal bought shoes and winter coats,

put food on tables, fixed old boats.

It paid the bills, kept warm the flame,

and helped small towns earn out a name.

It raised up stores and churchyard beams,

and let young children chase their dreams.

For many here, through loss and lack,

coal gave the means to fight life back.

But truth must speak in equal tone:

coal never gave without its own.

It asked for lungs and aching knees,

for backs worn down by years of seams.

It asked for holidays below,
where daylight was a thing unknown.

It asked for wives to wait and pray,
and children count the hours away.

Still Wyoming County stood,
through every single dispute.

Because the people here know well
how hope can rise where hardships dwell.

And courage here is seldom loud,
it does not need to draw a crowd.
It sounds like boots before the light,
and coffee poured before the bright.

It sounds like trucks on gravel roads,
like fathers bearing heavy loads.
Like mothers saying, "We'll get through,"
and somehow making that come true.
Like neighbors showing up unasked,
to help with any needed task.

Like casseroles set by the door,
when grief has come to live once more.

Even now when tracks grow rust,
and the spikes fade to dust,
the mines have not been left behind,
they live in spirit, bone, and mind.
They live in pride that asks no praise,
in stubborn hearts and weathered ways.
In hands that wave from passing cars,
in folks who carry hidden scars.

Walk through Wyoming County slow,
and you will feel what people know.
In names repeated line by line,
in family trees with roots like pine.
In older voices warm and deep,
where memories wake they thought asleep.
They'll ask your people, then your name,
because around here blood runs same.

These hills remember whistles blown,
the rumble of the trucks full-grown.
They hold the echo underground
of boots that struck the earth with sound.
They know the laughter on back porches,
the evening talks, the lantern torches.

They know the tears not often shown,
the burdens carried all alone.

Some places boast of towers high,
of city lights against the sky.

But Wyoming County's pride runs deep
in tunnels carved where shadows sleep.

Not only coal, not only stone,
but strength in flesh and strength in bone.

A heritage no storm can quell,
a stubborn fire beneath the dell.

Coal is not the whole tale told,
but threads through every story old.
It shaped the grit, the grace, the care,
the way folks here still learn to share.

It taught that life can turn severe,
so love should always stay near.

It taught that when the dark appears,
you stand your ground through all the years.

And when the evening settles low,
and sunset paints the ridge aglow,
it's easy then to hear once more
old footsteps near a timbered door.

Not haunting sounds, not ghosts that roam,
but history calling people home.

A quiet pulse, a steady thrill,
still beating underneath these hills.

So speak with care of this old ground;
there's more than scenery around.

More than roads and ridges wide,
more than mountains full of pride.

There is a story strong and still,
of hands that worked through ache and will.

And if you listen, you may feel
a heart of iron beneath the steel.

Because in Wyoming County's frame,
coal was never just a name.

It was labor, loss, and light,
it was bread earned day and night.

It was generations standing still,
then rising stronger from the hill.

And though the years may onward run,
its work, its weight, are never done.