

CHRISTOPHER MERRILL

*Brick*

The reddish stubble streaked with birdlime—it's the grizzled beard of a silver miner sleeping off his first strike, his feet propped on a wooden crate behind the saloon, a rope looped in his hands. His aging mule, laden with provisions for winter, gazes at the mountains circling the town, where the rush is on to find new veins, new laws. Someone has stolen the miner's tools and torched his cabin. The flames are spreading, even as a fine mist falls on the valley, carving lines in the miner's brow. He dreams of a canyon too deep to ignore, too dark to follow to its source. Call him a foot soldier in the campaign to wall off access to the sea, the stars. He will not stir until the earth buckles and the buildings heave. Smoke shrouds the mountains, and in his dream of rising waters there is no shore. Vultures are summoned to their nests, bees to the fire, when he sets his jaw, his fingers twitching along the rope. And when the mule stamps its feet, bells ring.