

RON PRETTY

CUTAWAY

From where we stand we can see the beach
and the headland, its slow erosion. A late storm
this winter has eased that boulder down
from its ledge, gouging a path as it fell.

An inch or so each year the scarp
slides seawards; miners in their tunnels
hear the timbers wince in movement.
They pause, scan the shoring above them

and when the wooden complaining stops they
do not start their machines. Above them, out
on the ocean road, a van-sized bite has fallen
from the pavement. Cars swerve and halt,

the drivers white and shaking. Gull cries
sound in the sudden silence. Walking there,
we pause. My hand of its own volition
reaches for yours. The cars restart and flee,

miners emerge from their dungeons early
while we stand in the edge and mark where
the cutaway fell. This solid earth beneath us
suddenly seems a sham. What can I rely on?

What can you? Your free hand touches my cheek,
we do not speak, but inch back from the edge.
My arm slides around your waist. So much is certainty
while boulders fall and the sea rises to meet them.