

Twelve Twenty-One Twelve, Nevada City*

Here are the shops of dresses like dresses
of the past, less the corsets of whalebone.

Romance is better than history, which
tells us much too clearly that pyrite

isn't gold. Let's rest our ribs against
the lace, but trim away what itches.

Let their suffering be our glamour—
gathered bodice, crinoline, ruffles at

the neck. Take that, starvation and pestilence.
Our crocheted half-gloves transmit no ague,

and our fingertips are free of filth. Let's
don the bonnets but forget to die in childbirth.

Nevada City, let's light the lamps and bank the
fires. Twelve twenty-one twelve isn't the last

day, but at least the wind makes fists
and boxes off the hot-tub's lid, setting

the twenty-first century steam against sleet
like sleet that struck the miners' faces

chilling them and their women to the bone.
At night they trimmed the wicks and

unbound their ribs, but could not unfix
their fortunes. Fearing a boundless breath,
hard-handed women wept.

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