

THE BOOKSELLER

Garland Strother

The shop sits a block west of the main square
between empty lots facing First Street Hardware.

Hand-carved on rough-cut timber, a sign
says *Used Books* and *Rare Editions*, lines

from a table of contents describing the store,
the sign drifting by rope down the front door.

Another says *Open* and *Open Later*, a contract
he's made with time on the front and back

of a cardboard scrap written in his own hand.
Dust gathers in volumes of seldom banned

books stacked on pine shelves two-deep.
Few sell, but they're too good not to keep.

Copies of *Life* and *Look* lie on a leafed table
sheltering *Contact 9* like canopies of red maple.

Collected Works of Bret Harte in rusted leather,
spills its print in rows reserved for the collector.

Hanging by wire from eight-inch ceiling beams,
bare bulbs shine in the dark like search teams.

The bookseller, dressed in black and beret,
serves morning coffee on a burnt-cedar tray.

He lives in the back of the store behind an arch
he carved for himself from an ash tree's heart.

What more can a man of study and conviction
want than this? He lives on truth and fiction.

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