That Is to Say

Like a volcano, the sawmill burns and smokes above my village. Jostling for place on a pebbled street stretching out almost a mile to unfenced pasture and forage, houses hide behind their shrubbery. Yards might drop of a sudden to embankments and rushing creeks, where berries grow thick and jumbled. At dusk the mill hands come in to sleep unwashed on tousled sheets and dream of fire and blade. The mill stands beneath the looming Mayacamas, smoke rising over the town where the highway seams the land of the San Andreas and brings only tourists passing to Redwoods or House of Mystery. In the rain-drenched glen, I tent my umbrella and peer from the rim spoked as a high spinning wheel. Each nod of greeting is a codicil begun by codgers in the old-time, some quite kind, some less so, name and lineage at every entry, the lot bound by milk and semen, and the sticky, viscous, untapped sap of pine growing high in the valley—bound by these and mulish conviction that comes of roots set deep.