In a Parallel Universe

The hearth smoke and ash drifts all the way up here,
this mountain, where I make a plan to drift back down,

each step dropping fresh-squeezed sins like hot potatoes;
footfalls wilting weeds, I am a regular Hester Prynn,

back from her stay in the wilderness. Playing coy, I adjust
the ties on my linen coif, cos-playing the proper pilgrim.

Tugging it snug round flushed ears, I step into dappled sunlight,
eschewing the night forest. Pride feels like a secreted mother-

of-pearl button sewed into the lining of one's bright cloak.
But these buttons I finger are literal. *It's all smooth sailing*

from here, I think. *Don't look back*. I look back. Make love eyes at that
mountain's peak, the one shaped (dare I say it) like a scarlet letter

(that is, if you squint, if it were dark out). Years I spent in exile there,
a model cast-out, hanging in caves, spending days foraging

firewood and berries. My brain a spent bento-box, I startle when
the green flash explodes a nearby bush, a dozen impish

dust devils warning me forward, warning me not to turn around (I've
already turned around). Forward momentum can itself be an act

of contrition, so I make my way down the straight and narrow,
yesterday's #alt-criminal, rocking humility, like this year's #penitentcore.