

1971

Oh

Howard McCord

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O H .

The time spent finding things—
land and woman, the books you'd carry.
Marked somewhere in your hand
are the four totem birds, their trees—

owl, juniper,
crane, black pine, ouzel,
raven, cedar, fir, are mine.

Each flies from one in its direction,
the raven from the cedar to the south.

The best books are short,
and sacrifice your mind to mysteries,
like caves, or canyons nobody's
walked through for a long time.
Their skills are hinged to wandering
and the work of days, the cradled ax,
the quick thing that hides in water.

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I kissed a woman
was the moon
and is, and kisses yet—
married her before the books were read,
before the landscape had much formed in dreams,
so she was first,
before the birds, before the stones.

She taught me how to see so they could fly,
or them to fly that I might see,
or maybe both.
From above, a spruce is like a compass rose.

The moon was there before the earth.

The first trail led to water.

Oh, the time spent finding it.