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Sawmill

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Sawmill · *Dave Smith*

The gold hill of woodchips at dawn hunches and sulks
like the huddled faces gathered to earn their way.
The young ones smoke, talk, and shake with the chill.

Up the clay road the thin-soled boots pull the others.
Cedar and plain pine thicken the air and two magpies
shriek, knifing gray air, until I remember the pulleys

cutting through sunbursts, dew-scald, and gears glazed
with red oil where skinned planks like bellies pass
and a boy turns in his head to watch a girl's loose

skirt whip up in the night where he leans. The banging
of big slabs laid down is ubiquitous as the soul
closing its eyes against pain by noon. What can we say

about the hand not calloused enough to resist aureoles
of heartwood, the one we are always missing too soon?
That blade, doe-freckled, which they call the penis-cutter,

lies in its black bed as innocent as the serrated moon.
While there is still time, I spit and lean homeward
like a colt in the unburnt mists, but already time's

siren slices around me, snatching each forward. The dark
boss moves among us, selecting his crew, naming one
so dangerously alive in our heads we cannot help rising

beyond the hour when "another's been kissed." A cold sun
shoves through leaves hanging limp, breath of our women
at dawn kneeling to blow fire into beds of little sticks.