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Sawmill

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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.