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Echoes in a Landscape

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ECHOES IN A LANDSCAPE

Brother: from this round hill
we shouted our names at the wall
of the barn, waited for them to wash
back over us, like a priest .
chanting the landscape.
We used to camp between those tall pines
knowing they mark an old aunt and cousin
buried there by smallpox and no money.
We never knew death till we named it
and it echoed over this ground.

That old barn kept as many secrets
as it gave, trapdoors and cracks
and boards stamped in by steaming feet.
By the window we found the skeleton
of a bird who forgot that the way in
is the way out, and broke a wing
beating against the glass.
In the west corner the calf
too big for the black and white cow
was cut from her tired body.

Over there the old seeder rests
on warped wheels, filled
with dust and gray wheat
and the rusted plow lies
broken by the ground.
Once everything here moved.
Now the branches of the pines move
and barn shutters slam in the wind.

Farther is the crumbling foundation
of the old house, kindled by hands
we feared were ours
till the sheriff found the firebug
trembling in a car on the back road.
We knew his terrible joy as the house
burned, each board defined red
the chimney exploding in a storm
of orange brick, the dark attic
and cellar freed into the night.