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## Montana Pastoral

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## MONTANA PASTORAL

I have seen fear where the coiled serpent rises.

—J. V. Cunningham

Late afternoon,  
I pull off my boots and burn  
the slow undersides of boards.  
Out a window, young corn wavers  
two feet up and I wash the earth  
of our garden from my hands:  
our garden of the green shoots,  
of the mud that slides,  
of water and no water, only memory  
of a full sluice. I light the lantern  
and we gather around this table,  
the dogs, a stray child, women and men.  
The sun draws us, caught by marigolds,  
lodged sharp-edged in honey.  
We raise our knives and plunge them  
shaft deep. The village priest bleeds,  
a yellow stain spreading down his legs.  
We moan with him and drive back the hungry dogs.