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The Drought Walkers

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THE DROUGHT WALKERS

They move like shallow breathing
past riverbeds and dull-eyed deer
they stop to listen near old turtle shells
their fish belly hands touch brown yarrow
the wind burns across wrist and tongue
even as they kneel with children by forked sticks
hoping to be asked about sorrow
of jawbone and socket the way they have become
dull histories

One will whisper of lizards
the absence of dogs behind them what happened
to the hearts of the women

At evening they lie down
lighter than ashes their eyes gather moonlight
brittle as old snakeskins slowly stars cross
the sky slowly they count the hours
until first light trickles down mountains
and they rise by blackbirds
their hearts are the gray ends of rivers
boxes of dust hear them Christ hear them
near moss and empty barns
these small drying things of the world