Bark Beetle Tracks

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As we learned to read, those strange, tidy marks on the page bore little evidence of the cat’s stiff whiskers, or the smell the dog left steaming by the road.

No hint of the fire off mother’s comb and hair, or the smoke of father’s breath.

Cold fingers of baptistry water clutched our genitals and drowned our eyes, masking the big idea that love was everywhere and baffling and good.

By the time we could scrawl clumsy messages, heirs to Plato, Moses, Seneca, we tried to guess how puffs of smoke a friend could see across the county might announce “we’re here” or “the land is breathing.”

Inside snug bark of paper birch exploded by the splitting maul are weird, truncated phrases, wild, existential messages, the signal, smut and poetry of a species.