Anna Rose

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I.
The wild clover, sunflower and columbine
are in full bloom,
as you were, say your neighbors,
in that last summer of '72
at the gracious age of seventy-some,
country-ripened harvest years,
spinning cartwheels
through this same meadow
as the grasshoppers cleared your way.

Your door is still open-
the kitchen table lies face down
minus three legs...
I've heard you kept a place-setting
always laid for your son
-those weekly pilgrimages
hitchhiking to Des Moines-
did you find him?

In this small back room
the walls are papered
with the yellowed Sunday funnies,
a chronicle of years,
and the window has no panes,
shattered once before
by the stranger who hid out there
in the brush of the lilacs
where he dropped his gun
after dropping your brother
-did they find him?

In the patchwork shade
of the honeysuckle-wed barn
the swallows pursue
faint yellow cabbage butterflies.
The warped boards
hang lazily now
just like the stories
on the tongues of the folks
of Coal Valley Hill.

II.
We’ll probably never see
another March night
with record breaking lows of -22°
with 15” of snow on the ground
and another 5” yet to fall -
like the night you lay
beneath the damp feather mattress
shivering from the sweat
melting through your gunny sack gown,
still panting from all the trips
to this shell of a barn,
prying off
one board at a time,
like memories forcefully stripped,
your flesh never feeling
the splinters that pierced the bone,
and gathering all one could carry
you struggled through snowdrifts
to the warm haze of the candlelight,
each board burning dimmer
in the cast iron belly
that devoured each slab
with an effortless flame.
These boards-
they fuel our lives
whether we want them to or not
-but they sucked in your last breath
to fuel their own.