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That Is to Say

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Zara Raab

That Is to Say

Like a volcano, the sawmill
burns and smokes above my village.
Jostling for place on a pebbled street
stretching out almost a mile
to unfenced pasture and forage,
houses hide behind their shrubbery.
Yards might drop of a sudden
to embankments and rushing creeks,
where berries grow thick and jumbled.
At dusk the mill hands come in
to sleep unwashed on tousled sheets
and dream of fire and blade.
The mill stands beneath the looming
Mayacamas, smoke rising
over the town where the highway
seams the land of the San Andreas
and brings only tourists passing
to Redwoods or House of Mystery.
In the rain-drenched glen, I tent
my umbrella and peer from the rim
spoked as a high spinning wheel.
Each nod of greeting is a codicil
begun by codgers in the old-time,
some quite kind, some less so,
name and lineage at every entry,
the lot bound by milk and semen,
and the sticky, viscous, untapped sap
of pine growing high in the valley—
bound by these and mulish conviction
that comes of roots set deep.