

Stripping the Kitchen Floor

I peel up linoleum like juniper bark,
Scrape at the glue, sand to discover
The white pine of this kitchen floor.

Black streaks scatter like bugs.
Four generations dissipate to dust
And settle in cracks between boards.

Since nineteen-five, these planks
Have born the scuffs of children's shoes,
Blackened nail holes stained with paint.

I sand through the houses this house has been:
Patched-up three-family tenement;
A condemned pile near the street's dead end,

Hovel of spiders and stray cats;
A hobo stop by the tracks,
Leaves heaped at the foot of the stairs;

A dowry and a family home;
A farmhouse in alfalfa fields . . .
I feel the lines, the amber grain

Of pines that stood in the canyon
When this valley spread out
Birdcloud and empty of towns.

—William DeFord

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