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The Woodcutter

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STEVE KATONA

THE WOODCUTTER

old monk of country ways
 bearded in overalls
 bullshit & wisdom
 we took the deuce & a half
 up the mountain
 to cut firewood

ponderosa pine began at
 about eight thousand feet
 scrub oak but
 standing pinon
 we were after

the four wheel drive
 cut into the caliche
 rocks of the forestry road

up up the old truck climbd
 behind us the whole
 of northern New Mexico spread
 gilded mesas
 rio grande valley
 green line headed north south
 rio puerco meets it
 sangre de cristos jemez mountains
 tippd with first winter snow

“quite a saw you got there”
 a brand new homelite
 small but I cd cut twice as fast as he
 with the ancient hypochondriac
 mcculloch

his son bounced in the back
 tried to hold down the two saws
 the gas cans the axes
 smiled bright sixteen year old smile
 “cant keep that boy in school
 when I go up on this mountain”
 I tried to roll a smoke
 too bumpy

low range now first gear
following the forestry fence
"if the rangers catch us
tell em we're cutting on the land grant"
he hollerd
above the groan of the truck
laughing thru his grey streakd beard
"never did bother to get a wood permit
did you?"

in the middle
of one of the longest pulls
the truck sputterd died
he jerkd the emergency hollerd

"set a rock behind those tires
what the hell's wrong now"

six miles down
I thot
as he began to fool
with the truck
the wind cold
standing at nine thousand feet
the side of a mountain
high

but in thirty minutes
with pliers crescent wrench
a piece of copper wire
he rebuilt the fuel pump
kickd her over
and we're at the top

"no one ever told me I cdnt fix anything"
he chuckld
"never knew any better"

saws roar axes crash
and the boy
drags pole wood to the road
we're cutting a good stand of tall
heavy pine

only moving a few feet
from tree to tree
only stopping to refill the saws
with gas and oil

he workd with his head down
whistling
trees fall are trimmd
cut to length in the road
loaded two cords in four hours

his boy ran all the way down
met us at the bottom

we hit the hiway
and passd a man riding a horse
all deckd out in cowboy hat
new levis five hundred dollar saddle

"sells washing machines at monkey wards"
he sd spitting
onto the twilight road