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NIGHT TREES

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG, JR.

I thought I saw them writhing in the dawn
On cold, black hills—the gnarled and twisted ghosts
Of Titan cedars and the sapling hosts
That stood so starkly naked and forlorn.

Poor stricken things that bore the forms of men
And forms of beasts; great gorgons unreclaimed
By childhood's gracious fancy. Did I then
Declare that they had been forever maimed?

Tall aspens writhing like beheaded snakes,
And cypresses with lean, distorted necks,
And stunted hemlocks in the riven brakes
That fringed the garments of the oaken wrecks.

Oh did I stand and curse them, one by one
That were so lovely once beneath the sun?