Building a House in the Woods, Maine, 1971

A good uphill mile and a half from a not very good
dirt road,
That distance on foot meaning a sort of mincing strut
over frost heaves
And washouts across what had been a poor road at best
fifty years previously,
Through tangles of witch hazel, alder and birch saplings
And—at this time
Of year in the low spots-sucking gurgling mud:
that expedition
Taking the better part of an hour to a ridge side where
a few gaunt, disheartened
Apple trees and dead elms from the nineteenth century
stood like blank-eyed
Sentinels and where you intended to build a house
that would stare
Without curtains at a prospect of more ridges and then
real mountains that
Receded to the serene distance of pale green eternity.

And why shouldn't love be made here, meals cooked and
consumed, fires stoked,
Children born who would have the boundless woods to learn from,
who would feel freedom
In their footsteps and taste the calm thrill of dawn.
Weren't all of us
Young and able to split, hammer, haul, plant, saw, push,
carry, lift, and
At the end of the physical day simply and sublimely sit?

We breathed the dank clean air, the thin sharp smells of
pine woods and dead
Leaves and melting snow, and we started to whoop and jig
for the vision of it,
The earth strength that we had lived too long without.

(read at the inauguration of Governor John Baldacci, January 2003)

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