

Design

1 We have a secret place
my daughters and I where an
old creek
has run empty

The sky above that hill
pushes fast past the swaying tips
of pines
but the birch, oak
and ironwoods have not yet
leaves enough to dance

No dry winter
no drought emptied our creek
the water turned aside
some years ago for other
work and my oldest
stares at the smooth stones
sunk into soil
*When will the water
come back?*

My youngest has hands
delicate as birch twigs and
burrows pebbles
from the bank
like a busy mole
carries one at a time
to the mound of larger rock
we are shaping into
a ring for our campfire

She chooses a spot
for each
and believing in some master design
believing I would know it asks,
Should I put it here?
Or here?

There, that looks good
right there, but that's really
the question, isn't it

and I think of the water's

working years and centuries
into polished stones
forever setting and re-setting each
here in our creek bed
to be abandoned

2 I cannot tell
how my knees bend
how my fingers
inside these leather gloves
swing on their hinges

I know only the digging and the
occasional sun
on my neck

I cannot read the seasons
burned into the grain
of this handle
or tell what secrets if any
the hills keep

but here, another shovel-full
for a moment visible
mixing with air
thrown toward the sun

3 The deep soil
reclaims each stone we leave
unturned, swallowing her
wayward children

around us, the trees
are smoldering
with an inner fire
relaxing into the dirt
that grew them
flaking open with each rain
skeletons all of ribs marking the
ground
with bright stripes
of greener grass

The air darkens
as rain enters the ravine
like a lost fawn:
one step there, here
hesitant behind us

other side of the tree, there
again, over the rise
and suddenly certain
almost purposeful
all around us
the leafy floor comes alive
with movement

we flee our unfinished altar
rain drenching
stones, wood, dirt
rivulets refilling the creek bed
and back in the car
we decide, tomorrow
to build a bridge