Dig

I.

I dig because I am the earth the heavy red clay the rain sodden, combed vegetation that creeps through valleys. I catch wind on my tongue and wrestle with tree limbs like brothers under a harvest moon I am cradling the barred owl and thirsty for whitewater caught between eddies.

I wake rise set two feet pray: show me

rinse, wrap, sip and swish

ritual like an obedient servant.

offering full deliverance of my body,

Calloused hands, blistered by inheritance

Sheltering bruises that remind me: elasticity has no place in a Colonial river gate

I bear the toll:

Invisible tallies of every word, position, action I’ve done wrong

I’ve done wrong

So I pierce my skin, puncturing the suppleness of God’s perfection the layers getting more fine as I press through grass wisps to crack surfaces revealing numb striations, nature’s hidden palette boasting hematite and quartz abstraction four inches below

I dig

I dig through wild vine’s battlement, absorbing rolling acreage of words

But three weigh heavier and permeate crust, sinking, accumulating,

morphing into stones

I pick those out by hand, like gravel in a skinned knee,

Place them on a white linen tarp and drag them as far as my hips and aching back

Will take them: to the river’s bed

Then twist, shake the sheet, and repeat.

Two three four hours pass I can tell by my shadow’s sun dial

My position marked only by footprints, persistence of the idea that a shadow shows once existed there like a reliquary, a physical echo of space

I dig through dawn’s mist rising, caught between warm waters and cooler air,

Memory smelling green like morning maple, once
Chewed evaporation spewing cotton white nostalgia
on summer's skunk cabbage plumes, elusive Sweetness
suspended defiant grasping
​branches that simply fade into
Vacant sky lots
I dig more steps until the mountains lean in and swallow me with weight, orthogonals pinning my image against the grain of a vanishing point until

I, too,

Disappear.

II.

To bend is to detour from straight, a vice-grip. pry-hard ache that yields curve

From line.

As I morph into a vanishing point, blurring into the horizon, humanity’s hum (rubber to road and hunter’s bullets) dissipates into vegetation and I sink into the mountainside.

It’s muddy, thick oozing suck my toes don’t stay here too long mud

That accepts me like I’m actually wanted, embracing any surface area that stays.

So I move methodically towards boulders, using my shovel as cane

To tap my path.

Blinded by dusk pivoting past trees,

gold perspiration guides my footing

to where I begin.

Heel, grip, swing, dig

Heel, grip, swing, dig

Breathe

Heel, grip, swing, dig

Heel, grip, swing, dig

Breathe

My gospel invites a circling hawk and startles migrating starlings

Into a confetti sky, an audible soundtrack more complex

Than that monotone freeway

Heel, grip, swing, dig

Heel, grip, swing, dig

Breathe

I angle tangents parallel to the river with each shovel hull,

Estimating length and degrees based on instinct: terrapins hold their magnetic north to water after birth why can’t I? Can’t I find my way?

I look I look to water

I look I look to water

Heel, grip, swing, dig

Heel, grip, swing, dig

Breathe

Repeat

I look I look to water then find footprints, a bas relief in terra cotta

That brings direction

Check: each step ruling precision

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 good

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 almost

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 there

Laugh, so far off it echoes and even the trees shake their leaves,

Leaving me in wake: a double entendre because at that perspective, nature teases:

crevices filling with water faster than I can dig or lift my legs

through the mud this one way, sine turns to cosine

So that when I retrace this journey, the other side reaches perfection:

One line lending itself

to bend.

III.

caked soil mounds yield
trenches that cradled cicada ghosts,
tangled worms, gnat hives humming
around candied fungus twigs. Unapologetically dripping
labor bore silence

To create space is to abandon

form,

Reconciling entity with sky: each footstep pressed into earth

Shaping memory from soil’s antiquity.