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**Stone on stone.**

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# Stone on Stone

ELEANOR NICKEL

Last summer I went hiking without you.  
The trailhead for Muir Grove was a bridge  
collapsed by snow, cracked into a V  
over the stream with a posted warning.  
I climbed around and moved into the gift of total solitude,  
birds with their hopeful cries, deer with their tense energy.

The path wore down onto an exposed ridge of rock.  
I looked for a sign with its confident little arrow,  
its alphabet reminding me that the Phoenicians  
on their ships unrolled a scroll four thousand years ago.  
Here the whole circle of nature was untouched—  
open sky, early June flower—  
and little piles of stones along the way,  
easily scattered by hooves or mischievous squirrels,  
but they struck me like a word being spoken in that place.

It was the work of human hands.  
Everything else was God's infinite complexity,  
the map of lines drawn on the back of every leaf  
like directions to a place we still cannot find.  
The stones were random in their number, size,  
but the intention is what I recognized.  
I followed them into the still grove,  
the red trunks black with the fires they have survived.

I came back to you thinking about stones,  
the pillow for Jacob's head, the pillar of God's house,  
the heavy cover of Laban's well, the weapon against sinners,  
etched with commandments we cannot bear  
and stacked into memorials for battles we can't forget,  
made into altars and evil little gods, slung by David,  
marking the boundaries of widows' fields,  
tied to Jeremiah's scroll and thrown into the river,  
stacked over the lions' den, sealing the Messiah's tomb.  
Someday we will hold the white rocks bearing our new names,  
we will look up to the towers covered in sapphires  
and in the heavenly city we will never be led astray.