

JEFF McRAE
Picking Stone

I call this one the empty bag of money
and this one trip to Vegas,
pocket aces, lacey windows, honeymoon suite.
Hot day kiss my back. Here—
I call this some bizarre unknown changed life,
a wife, a perfect afternoon. Here—
this sweltering dirt field.
I'm what fifteen or something dreamy? You can see
this bucketful, load weight . . . Exacta to win,
gin, juniper, madness of rock, stock, barrel.
Skin, my skin. Little flesh like fresh paint
peeling under the weight of work,
so my little glass of water, so my little breeze.
I call this one mother, this father.
How have you been? Let's begin
by jumping ship. I call this clipper wind, port.
Avenue of doting white pine, this is family
and ancestor and custom and control
over a bowel function slipping away.
This is artifact, way, a being mere memory,
mere tradition. And still picking stone,
still heat. Wind whipping this field up
and over the trees; each stone's smoke signal—
what language to inject in this contract this epilogue?
Goodbye yard and Guernsey and Brown Swiss and Jersey.
What's the impression of a field wall?
Blood, blister open, oozing on a handle,
an eye lashed on the woods road.
Blood on a sheet, my son
who will know nothing of that New England,
that exact field, those buildings, routine,
pounds of produce, milk, meat of earth.