

WITNESS IN THE PINES

She was a water witch, my great grandmother,
quenching generations of need, dousing
scoffers, dowsing through collective faith,
herself the ranking believer.

Nearing her hundredth year, she vowed
to find the ancestors her mother disclaimed.
She laid down her favorite hazelwood
to hold a new rod she dug up--
wishbone of the tribal thunderbird,
she told me, slyly smiling.
Mad as March wind, neighbors called her
when she began searching for the Old Ones.

I watched her chanting, weaving herself
into the forest, an upright rag
borne on breezes following the fork tip.
Sometimes I'd have sworn no one was under
her cowl and her voice rose from the earth.

The bony point of her rod twitched, jerked
down. The slender arch leaped from her hands.
"Help me," she cried. "They're here!"

My shovel plunged through years of pine drop,
turning the layers of centuries.
Disturbed shadows fluttered with light.
Crosshatched roots defeated our spades.
She died digging. I carried her home,
hardly heavier than the cloth she wore.

It's been twenty-five years, the land
bought and sold, cleared and squared.
The Indian Pines bulldozer uncovered
the spot. The state acted quickly.

I'm told they lie in the fetal position,
trinkets and painted pots at hand.
My grandmother wanted to be with them,
the Old Ones. I'm glad we failed.
The roof of their privacy is laid aside;
museum lights shine on clay-stained bones.
Visitors pay \$2.50 to stare.