“Holding the Stone”

You must hold it close to your ear, and when it speaks to you, you must respond
—Richard Hugo

I found it by the Clark Fork on a high bank above the river where someone dumped remains of an old road, broken slabs of concrete crowding the river stones.

I admit my first thought was throw it, skip it on the surface going gold in sunset, dimple the water like whitefish rising, give it back to the river that gave it shape and color. But once in my hand its calm and luck took hold.

On the bank the dog found something dead to roll it. She perked her ears as if to listen, wagged her tail, shook herself proud in primal perfume. Her good-luck demeanor almost won me over, but I still had to bathe her in the river.

That was years ago, first night in Missoula, first home, a motel by the river. Now I have a son. And I still have the stone. Its color changes. It goes from brown to gray to green like the year. I hold it close to my ear and listen.

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