

Fatherhood

There was the valley,
the Youghioghenny cutting
through rounded mountains,
the red clay my father dug
with pickax and shovel
to force a home from
the grudging hillside.

The time was new, the clay
dark red with iron,
the wind warm enough
for summer, but not so
hot you'd think of death.
My father grunted with
each heft and swing.

He sculpted that clay
with the same careful
touch he used when he
etched our busts in
redwood. He showed me
the meaning of the red clay,
the river in the valley

cleft, the rounded mountains.
He showed me the tracks
of the deer, the shy brown
flash of doe between
green undergrowth. He
showed me how to find
wild onions by their

leaves, and how to
recognize wild cherry
trees by their black
bark and sweet sap.
And with the sunburnt sweat
of his rippling back,
and with each heft and swing,

he showed me how to cut
a home from a red hillside.
So with a shaping word
I have tried to hew

a human place from high sun
and the hunger within
the world's rich clay.

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