

For Night To Come · *Gerald Stern*

I am giving instructions to my monkey  
on how to plant a pine tree. I am telling  
him to water the ground for hours before  
he starts to dig and I am showing him  
how to twist the roots so the limbs will bend  
in the right direction.

He is weeping  
because of the sweet air, and remembering  
our canoe trip, and how we went swimming  
on Mother's Day. And I am remembering  
the holiness and how we stopped talking  
after we left Route 30. I show him the tree  
with the two forks and the one with the  
stubs and the one with the orange moss  
underneath, and we make our nest in a clearing  
where the wind makes hissing noises and the sun  
goes through our heavy clothes.

All morning we lie  
on our backs, holding hands, listening to birds,  
and making little ant hills in the sand.  
He shakes a little, maybe from the cold,  
maybe a little from memory,  
maybe from dread. I think we are lost,  
only a hundred yards from the highway,  
and we will have to walk around in fear,  
or separate and look for signs before  
we find it again.

We pick a small green tree,  
thick with needles and cones and dangling roots,  
and put it in the trunk on top of the blanket,  
and straighten the branches out, and smooth the hairs.  
All the way back we will be teary and helpless,  
loving each other in the late afternoon,  
and only when we have made the first cut  
and done the dance  
and poured in the two bushels of humus  
and the four buckets of water  
and mixed it in with dirt and tramped it all down

and arranged and rearranged the branches  
will we lie back and listen to the chimes  
and stop our shaking  
and close our eyes a little  
and wait for night to come  
so we can watch the stars together,  
like the good souls we are,  
a hairy man and a beast  
hugging each other in the white grass.