

Stones

by Dianne McKnight-Warren

At the graveyard, the leaves had been raked into loose array and left for the wind to scatter again over the ground. Little piles gathered here and there under the trees like fresh graves without stones, Lucy thought. She lay down on one pile and her friend, Daniel, took his position on the one closest by. The leaves were making Lucy itch and she knew in a minute she would move and automatically, Daniel would say, lose. You automatically lose, he was always saying.

"This is a dumb game." She sat up and pulled leaves out of her hair. Daniel didn't move. His arms were crossed on his chest in profound finality. "I said, this is a dumb game." She stood up to signal it was over but she knew this was the part Daniel liked best.

His brow was smooth, his body perfectly still. "You're not even breathing. How do you do it? Daniel? Stop it. I hate this game. It's not funny. I'm counting to ten. One, two." She walked to her bike, counting steadily. She kicked the kick stand hard to make noise and got on. "Five, six." Her legs dangled and her toes touched the dirt for balance. A foot swung the pedal up. "Nine and ten." She was off. "Okay. I stopped. See? I'm moving." She braked and skidded the bike around in the gravel. "You were supposed to touch me. We added that on last time, remember?"

"I remember."

"Then why didn't you do it?"

"Last time you were cold."

"Well, you moved first. You automatically lose."

"It's a dumb game." Lucy turned her bike around and began walking it down the dirt lane to the road. Daniel ran after her.

"You want me to teach you how to throw?" Come on." He hid the bike in the low bushes on the edge of the graveyard. Small birds flapped up in a burst.

He took Lucy's hand and led her through the briars. Inside, the ground was covered in leaves. The ones beneath were slick and dark. He held her hand and at the place where they touched the hardest, she could feel a heartbeat, but she couldn't tell if it were hers or his. Then he let her hand go and the heartbeat was gone too.

They came to a creek and sat on the bank. "Watch." He took a handful of stones and one by one threw them in the creek. Lucy watched, astonished at the precision of his aim as he fired each stone to a target fixed in his mind, the next even point in the circumference of a giant circle. He threw fast, each stone making its own circles. They exploded in beautiful symmetry, like fireworks on water.

"How do you do it?"

"It's easy. Here. Take one, look at the place you want to hit and throw."

Lucy tried. "That wasn't even close."

"Don't try to hit the water yet. That's harder. Aim at a rock. That one over there." He tossed a stone that nicked the dead center of moss on a rock on the other bank. Lucy threw another, but missed. Daniel came behind her, fitting himself next to her, his head over her left shoulder, his right hand around hers. Over and over he moved her hand and the stones hit the same dead center spot.

"You have to look hard. Can you feel the difference?" He moved to the side.

She hit the target but then began to miss, as if the spell were broken. "You need to practice, that's all. Tighten the way you look." Lucy looked at him, surprised at herself for wishing now were the time to touch.

"You're getting it, you're getting it," he said and she thought he understood when he reached toward her, but it was only to put stones in her hand.

