

A Man Tries His Hand at Building a Flagstone Path

He carries a level and a measuring tape,
looking closely at each piece of flagstone before
he places it in the hard clay that he's been trying
to smooth out for days, running his backhoe
over it again and again, *scrape, beep, beep*,
and repeat, repeat, fraying his nerves to thin
wires that would give off sparks if they touched.
He lays a stone, then another, moving them closer
with his shoe, as if that would work. Intractable
stone on clay hard as the stone itself. The path
begins to curve toward a driveway, and then,
he makes a spiral. Perhaps he is thinking maze
or labyrinth or nebula. The temperature
has climbed into the nineties. The man sweats,
steps back and looks at the path, the spiral.
He looks long and hard, and again pushes
one stone toward another with the toe of his boot.
Then he walks up a stone step onto his unfinished
deck, and sits in a chair, seeming to stare at the street.
His hands dangle between his knees; his jaw goes slack.
He imagines that the path, if finished, would take
him somewhere, out into the vast universe
perhaps, or at least out of the cauldron heat,
take him away from his unspeakably futile task.