



For Alexis

Rodney Jones

I dug a ditch three feet deep and eighteen inches wide
 From where the roots had broken through
 The Orangeburg pipe and clogged the line

To the end of the drive, and turned and dug
 At a perpendicular out a ways and down
 To tie in with the junction at the sewer main.

With a shovel and pick, with my sore back
 And poet's hands, I accomplished this:
 A narrow hole and deep, but undercut at the edges —

The chert kept sliding there. It was like a problem
 With law or philosophy. The more
 I threw out, the more kept pouring in.

Better the next afternoon when you joined me,
 Sweating out your first day home from college
 When others might have slept or shopped.

I could not see you, the hole had grown
 So vast by then, but heard your rock can
 Rattling in the depths, and an occasional

Shit or goddam, or an allusion to *The Inferno* .
 Did I seem remote? Father was never so proud
 Of daughter. We finished excavating by dark,

Snow clouds rolling toward us from the prairie.
 That night we were like a Dorothea Lange family,
 Hoarding water, using buckets instead of toilets.

Now in late spring I come back to our work,
 And the pipe you fitted by cheating at the joints,
 Silent in the underground, taking crap, still holding.

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