

Cairns and stepping stones: Colleen Russell

Slanting high hills and stony scraggs of limestone
or basalt, natural cairns to trace the trail
to hunting grounds, or homes, before time began
and even now today, and then tomorrow.

In a verdant vale a cairn of shingle stones,
a monument to men, warriors of war,
of avarice; as thinking of things long gone,
a lost brother, a son, the everything; now
dissolute dust, filtered grit through fingertips.

A dry solemn stack near a dry river bed,
a sense of its own importance, one more cairn
stands alone, and lonely, a lone sentinel,
sorrow for a stillborn child, a treasured pet;
on glass-like pebbles, dark grey and dusty blue;
sunlight flaring then slowly fading - as life.

Tread cautiously on the stepping stones of life,
place each foot, each step with constant care;
our wanderings can be wrought with snares, or
wondrous, joyous movements, worth every stride.
Across the shallow creek stepping stones are laid,
Beware careless traveller! their surface smooth,
slick from constant ripples, slimy mosses, but
a path to a fresh future, a young man's dream,
a daydream way with the old Gaelic blessing,
'Each day I'll place a stone upon your cairn.'

Written for my grandson, as he left home to join the army at Duntroon, Canberra.