

# Clean

*Donna Bernhisel*

Creekbottom  
pushes up between our toes  
like mushrooms.  
Summer water  
moves slow around our shins  
then flattens our dresses  
like leaves against our thighs.  
The three of us  
hold tight to willows bent low  
as we wade in further.  
Sun shifts between the shadowed creek banks.

Yesterday  
the same light fell  
on the boy baptized by his father,  
"by the proper authority," the bishop said.  
We saw his underwater smile and closed eyes.  
Creekwater streamed off his slick hair,  
clean.

We stand now,  
looking at each other, waiting.  
The slip of water around our legs  
nudges.  
Willows rustle around us,  
branches bowed toward the water.

We take turns.  
Helped by the other two,  
I bend and plunge under.  
My feet kick clouds  
of underwater dust  
that floats up.  
When I shake my hair,  
an arc of droplets freckles the water,  
clean.