

**Surprise Valley
Poetry Prize**

May's Winner

Finding the Sacred

By Lara Gularte

Born with question marks
about my past,
my people,
I step inside myself
and find running water,
stones too heavy to bring up.
These waters fill the banks
with gold dust and granite,
shining mica and quartz.
No heaven here, but root,
alluvial and veined.
Still I hear voices,
see ghosts drift in and out,
the drone of the river.

In the old growth forest
I listen for footsteps,
and hear birdsong.
In this place of rest,
this ancestral path of migration,
the air pulses angelic
from the throat of a sparrow.
In my hands, the smell of prayer
gathered in a bouquet of lavender.
Madrone bark,
red and gold,
flame like candles.
Crows on the church roof
a ring of ancestors chanting.

*Lara Gularte lives in
Magalia, California.*