

Far, Far Away, in Vilnius

by Jane Olmsted

A paper boat and an empty carton of juice
dangled from a bridge over the river.
Why, you asked, did someone do that?

I said, two children were playing
in the water with boats they had made,
and afterward they hung them out to dry.

Then, in the river, we saw
a stack of shapely rocks, then another, then many.
They looked dribbled from the sky, dabbles of brown paint—

why are the rocks piled just so, you asked, why?
In this city of churches, I said, pagans come to the water,
gripping the slick stones with their toes then hoisting them high.

And not only that, I say, here in the side streets of Vilnius
doorways too small to step through
unless you're an elf or a child or an old couple stooped over.

I miss my home, I tell you, which is why I'm sad.
Is it a big missing, you ask—no, it's a little one, like a notch
on one of these padlocks attached to this bridge by people in love.

We lift and turn them and they settle with a clink above the water,
and then I ask if you have a lock for us, knowing you don't—
our just discovering them like that, on the way to someplace else.