

ON A VISIT FROM MY SON
ON HIS TWENTY-FIRST BIRTHDAY

I think the someone at my shoulder is someone else,
until I see the sandals, the run down-at-the-heel,
run down-at-the-toe, run down-at-the-all-over
shoddy sandals, and the impossibly grey wool socks.
It is my son, ubiquitous baseball cap and all.
I love this young man. He does not know how much,
and I am unable to tell him.

We walk to the creek to catch the beaver at home,
hoping to surprise him in industry
hoping he is not quite finished,
hoping to walk softly enough not to disturb.
My son strides purposefully before me while I follow
and worry he will get his socks wet.

*Of course he will. There are inevitables
more terrifying than surprise.
I would not break this moment for the world,
not with Be careful, not now, not today.*

We cross the creek to the island
where the beaver builds an elaborate home
intricately woven of sticks and mud and anything
drag-able to the site to defend against onslaught.
My son leaps, lands safely, and turns, his hand
extended. I make the leap, land safely, too,
and memories rush up like the rain-swollen
stream cutting on both sides of us.

*Remember Rock Island? he begins. Remember?
I nod.
I got my feet wet. I was always falling.
You were always warning.
I nod again.
You built a fire so I could dry my socks.
I scorched them both, burned hell out of them really.*

He laughs out loud, a lumbering, crashing sound,

which may be heard and may be not if there is no one
there to hear it when it falls.

On the way back, we step cautiously
around slugs, a snake, point wordlessly
to expanses of wild irises, nod yeses.
His parting hug is not goodbye, but as I wave
to the baseball cap behind the steering wheel,
I hold my breath against the exhaust -
and something else -
slightly reminiscent
of wet wool over open flame.

— *Trecia R. Greene*

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