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Raising Children

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Raising Children

You wake up as a parent.
You have had the last good night's sleep.
People older than you used to tell you
about the softness in these years:
the skin behind the knee, the powder,
the bath. White clothing rests lightly
in your palm, fits perfectly
in the clean drawers. You see comfort
in your own eyes as they look in the mirror,
your head shaking slightly.

Before too long the cushions on the chairs
in the kitchen begin to harden. When a July
storm comes from the west, it hits
the house at a different angle,
the rain chipping away at the eaves,
the lightning clipping the tops
of your neighbor's trees. You hear footsteps
in the middle of the night, feel them
along your headboard when you are half asleep.
In the morning no one eats breakfast.

At times, when you run your fingers along your jaw,
you remember the questions strangers asked,

the ones about resemblance and grandparents.
You begin to see odd profiles all around you
and consider the origin of chins.
An electric razor is in the medicine cabinet.
For some reason, curly hair is the topic
of conversation, the way it behaves in public,
the texture between thumb and forefinger.
You are puzzled as you look at old photos.

When you least expect it, words become
unnecessary. The bannister is smooth
and the back door closes softly.
Someone else is worried about taking
the pictures at all of the reunions
and pulling the weeds in the flowerbeds.
You find an old comfort in the upstairs,
where the carpet is worn in familiar spots,
the curtains are full of the wind,
and someone has turned down your bed.