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## Words Going Wild in the Woods

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Paul Zarzyski

## *Words Growing Wild in the Woods*

A boy thrilled with his first horse,  
I climbed aboard my father hunkering in hip boots  
below the graveled road berm, Cominski Crick  
funneling to a rusty culvert. Hooking  
an arm behind one of my knees, he lifted  
with a grunt and laugh, his creel harness creaking,  
splitshot clattering in our bait boxes.

I dreamed a Robin Hood-Paladin-Sinbad life  
from those shoulders. His jugular pulse rumbled  
into the rattle of my pulse, my thin wrists  
against his Adam's apple—a whiskered knuckle  
prickly as cucumbers in our garden  
where I picked nightcrawlers, wet and moonlit,  
glistening between vines across the black soil.

Eye-level with an array of flies, every crayon  
color fastened to the silk band  
of his tattered fedora, the hat my mother vowed  
a thousand times to burn, I learned to love  
the sound of words in the woods—Jock Scott,  
Silver Doctor, Mickey Finn, Quill Gordon, Gray  
Ghost booming in his voice through the spruce.

At five, my life rhymed with first flights  
bursting into birdsong. I loved  
the piquant smell of fiddleheads and trilliums,

hickory and maple leaf humus, the petite  
bouquets of arbutus we picked for Mom.  
I loved the power of my father's stride  
thigh-deep against the surge of dark swirls.

Perched offshore on a boulder—safe from wanderlust  
but not from currents coiling below—  
I prayed to the apostles for a ten-pounder  
to test the steel of my telescopic pole,  
while Dad, working the water upstream and down,  
stayed always in earshot—alert and calling to me  
after each beaver splash between us.

I still go home to relearn my first words  
echoing through those woods: *I caught one!*  
*Dad! I caught one! Dad! Dad!*  
skipping like thin flat stones down the crick—  
and him galloping through popples, splitshot ticking,  
to find me leaping for a fingerling, my first  
brookie twirling from a willow like a jewel.