

Walking with my children during the pandemic

by Cara Howard

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My children walk beside me
along the asphalt path.
Freed from home confinement,
we notice everything.

The morning sun cups
our upturned cheeks,
beaming:
Oh, how I've missed you!

Warm air kisses exposed skin,
tickles and unlocks our smiles.
Call and response birdsong
trills and floats over our heads.

A lonely heron stands
guard beside the retention
pond, stoic and calm.
We keep a safe distance,
careful not to scare her away.

Strips of mossy carpet fill
cracks in the pavement
beneath our feet.
Eager shoots poke through
last year's faded mulch.
Copper coated mushrooms
dot the wet earth like
nature's scattered pennies,
wishes for good luck.

We let the wind
run gentle fingers
through our hair,
tousling till it tangles.
It exhales a sudden,
exasperated sigh:
the hushed roar swallows
all ambient sound,

then recedes into
a holy vacuum.

The shushed world
pauses. Just like us,
it holds its breath.

We look up, surprised,
when we feel the drops.
The once blue sky is crying.

We look at one another,
all thinking the same thing:

This wasn't in the forecast.

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I remember
my kids as toddlers,
their rocky initiation
to the changing seasons.
Spring's clumsy progress
teased them as it stumbled
closer in fits and starts.

Railing against reality,
they refused warm coats,
denied their goosebumps.
Defiant in tiny flip-flops,
they clung to the memory
of how it felt outside
just the day before.
Preferring to shiver,
they defended their position
against all evidence
to the contrary.

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But today, we pick up our pace,
wind our way home
through a maze of naked trees.
Rough gray branches point

bony fingers toward heaven,
as if begging for relief.

Unlocking the door,
I usher my kids inside,
of the rain.
For just a moment,
I linger and breathe deep.
My lungs soak up
an earthy musk:
the unmistakable scent
of dormant life yearning
to begin again.