

Bill Tremblay

Third Son

for Jack

The night you were born it was morning
before we came back into time.
Your contractions arrived, irregular
& of themselves, surging & astonishing,
until, despite the doctor & his theoretical clock,
your mother knew.

The moon had gone down
& we crossed the nightly river into the small city
with its sleeping hospital.
We could feel you inside, rising,
your mother & I together touching
the clenching sheath which held you.

In delivery she grasped
the steel railings, my hand,
anything to work against,
her vaginal lips fiery & opening for you.
She & I were breathing together
as if for the first time,
holding hands, talking.

When your mother, hard in your labor,
strained, her eyes seemed like two knotted boles
of an oaktree & her face changed.
“You look like my mother now,” I said.
“If I look like your mother,” she gasped,
“then you’re seeing yourself be born.”

It was like that, sudden words
spun me back to a dream I kept having
before you were born.

A woman would say to me,
“Somewhere in America we reach the border
& we are driven outward & beyond ourselves.
Don’t worry if you die. I will give you a new body.”

Your mother took two deep breaths & shuddered

& your head appeared, lightly tinged
with clots of blood & hair.

The nurse put silver nitrate in your eyes
& you cried, softly, & turned to us
cupping your ear, as though listening.
Your mother, her face shining,
held out her arms to take you.

I couldn't stop smiling,
carried away by your birth,
feeling it stronger than time,
stronger than pain,
knowing it was your time
& your mother's pain,
but that I helped
with a word, a touch.

I drove home that morning
watching the rising sun fleshing out the trees
& felt blessed,
knowing that nothing makes it any easier to be human,
but believing that I would no longer
be divided & struggling against myself.

The struggles have not ended.
I have taken the world into me
& armies of darkness & of light forever
march toward each other in my fears & hopes
whenever I write a poem.

But this morning, the morning you were born,
I had this vision I could be a messenger.

If you wonder why I look at you
& smile, unaccountably, sometimes,
it's because I see that.

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