

The Good Socks

by Aloma Davis

When my son finally let me know she was my daughter
after a heartbeat of hesitation
I adapted.

After earnest conferences with grandparents aunts uncles and teachers
after tear-off-the-bandaid chats to the churchy neighbour, the macho basketball coach
after joining glacial waiting lists for specialists, like an endocrinologist:
a word I had lived 41 years without needing to pronounce, like bete noire
- so many new pronouncements! -
and finagling a new library card
I finally fell to the delightful simplicity of buying her wardrobe.

She was not shilly-shallying on the shores of uncertainty
but diving into dresses florals ruffles beads and sequins
splashing through ribbons bows headbands and lipgloss to reach
the bright island of herself.

But I know that no matter what she wears, there will be
those who look with their eyes to see who she was
instead of with their hearts to see who she is.
They say she isn't she.
They say they don't understand, therefore it isn't real
Well, I don't understand gravity, but I know it's real.
Why can't they see the gravity of this situation?
Their words shackle and shend
render her a point in debate and finally a statistic:
82% of girls like my daughter consider suicide
because people are "entitled to an opinion".
So I won't teach my daughter,
"Sticks and stones may break your bones but words will never hurt you"
because research shows they kill you, instead.

But for now, each morning she takes care to dress

and comes out wearing an open smile
like an apricot tree fruiting after years of budding disappointment.
I wonder how I failed to notice how tightly closed it was before.

Last night I shopped for her socks.
But I have to concede that my daughter's perfect socks are unfindable
...because they are from a department store in the 1980s.
Then, my mother would buy me a new birthday dress each year
but the same socks. Short white with a lace ruffle
I could not abide them but every year they were rolled like icing on my feet.
The Good Socks meant being put on display
and they gathered snags and stains within minutes.
Surely my mother knew they were a futile gesture yet she bought them.
She would smooth my hair and before she took the photo
she would tell me I had a beautiful smile.

Thirty years later here is my daughter sweeter than cake
too Good, unwearable in this world.
She is destined to gather snags and stains every day.
I would roll myself onto her feet to spare her
but all I can do is smooth her fears and coax out her beautiful smile.

When my son let me know she was my daughter
after a heartbeat of hesitation
I adapted.
But it is neither of us who need to.
Her bete noire is the world, and it is still budding.

I wonder how I failed to notice how tightly closed it was
before.