

ROBBIE PFEUFER KAHN

Family Outing

I knew enough not to tell him on our first walk
together in the deep Vermont woods
that a black fly had entered my ear.
I could feel it flutter and hear it buzz
even after I rub-a-dub-dubbed my ear hard
hoping that the sticky wax would keep it from
flying into my brain, stealing away my wits.
“Why don’t you go ahead of me?” I said.
“Who wants to walk behind his mother?”

No twenty-four-year-old son alone in the woods
with his mother should have to hear a story
about the unwanted penetration of her ear.
Yet no mother should have her aural orifice visited
by a Freudian fly and have to hold her tongue.
Has Mother Nature no mercy? Or is she merely mirthful?

I thought I might have imagined it
being psychologically minded. I pondered
the unconscious significance of a mother and son
walking in the deep woods.
“I like it better when there is a view,” he said afterwards,
his eyes, clouded over, coming back to life
when we reached the airy meadow.

Without any exercise save for bicycling to work,
Ishmael's muscled height rivaled Achilles's and his skin,
even at forty five, had the sheen of a Greek marble torso
I had seen in the Gardner Museum after we split up
becoming slack limbed over the loss of him.
Yet is it fair that his mother once said, coming upon him
a young man naked in the bathroom,
"Why doesn't your father amaze me the way you do?"
In the *Iliad* Achilles gazed in wonder at grey-eyed Athena.
It isn't so much that an Iron Age sentiment has no place
in the twenty-first century age of irony,
though I suppose there is that.
Rather there are just some things a mother should not say.

I thought I had imagined it
until, in the last few days,
tiny black bits of a fly embedded in wax
like a fossil in amber
emerged from my inner ear.
Listening with an inner ear,
I thought I'd trapped and contained
for the good of civilization a stray Oedipal fantasy.
What I'd thought was private
was nothing more than a public,
though small, black Vermont woods fly.