Walk with the River

Judith Moffett

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Walk with the River · Judith Moffett

A southbound current, strong,
littered with leaves, slides beside me.
I’m keeping even.
It’s October. On the bank ahead
a cardinal lights high in a maple tree.
I pass the tree. It blazes, in it
the bird blazes, through it
the sky is indigo; it’s afternoon . . .

A good child
gets taken for a walk. She wears
brown shoes and a sweater,
holds her father’s hand and looks
again and again to him,
only to him:
the powerful, patient, steady one
who—going someplace—
brings her along partway.
In his mind the entire route is plain.
He is preoccupied but kind.
She holds his hand. They go along
not speaking; but each time she looks
she is reassured.

Now they come south together, through the park.
Soon he’ll recollect himself
and send her back. She
eyes the burnished buckeyes
but lets them lie. Carefully
her shoes crunch leaves. A red bird,
burning, flies into a red tree;
they pass the tree.