

Letter to My Nine Year Old Son

Anne Panning

Dear Hudson, one day you'll get eaten alive by buzz-headed boys
and football numb-nuts but for now, you're tender; I'm here. Your face, turning
in my hands, so impossibly soft I cannot see the future you
with bristled beard and wide shoulders ducking through doorways. Your father's
tall; you'll be taller. On the hot April day you were born, I cried
at your tiny hands, tinged blue. In the photograph, you're a loaf I'm considering

too fragile to consume, too precious to put down anywhere considering
the gleaming danger of cars hostile in the sun and your soft spot, beckoning; even boys
break. When I'd discovered I was pregnant, I gave the test to your father, cried
without words, until at last we cheered and ordered Chinese takeout to celebrate, turning dinner into
something monumental with hot mustard sauce & Moo Shu pork, your father's
favorite. Someday you'll understand how, that evening, dreaming of you,

nothing would ever be the same, how we stood in the guest room, the room now for you
and diapers and terry cloth sleepers with snaps and a tiny spinning night light, considering our boy's
little nest at the north side of the house. And when you cried, your father's
hands would thump your back, to burp, to sleep, until, finally, our unhappy boy
calmed. The glider rocker kept time with the moon, the sky turning
gunmetal gray. Do you understand how days bled into nights? One day you no longer cried,

or not as much. And when the school bus took you away from us, we cried
and ran to the corner, hearts heavy. Hudson, we're always chasing you,
your backpack growing bigger by the day with secrets and stashes of stones turning
to stories we may never hear. Your bony shoulders broaden, your freckles spin, considering
a face I've looked into a thousand times with adoration, fear. Boys
like you with sensitive hearts will bleed. I know. No matter how good, mothers and fathers

fade. We will build you snow forts in the backyard. With your father's
tools a playhouse will appear one summer with skylight and mailbox. I'll cry
when you hide inside it a whole day and your father will say, "that's just boys,"
but not true. There's a thread of my mother in you, the way you
appreciate the nap of good velvet in your small hands, the careful consideration
you devote to constructing a Miracle Whip & bologna sandwich, turning

soft slices together, cut on the triangle. And when, turning
to look at you, I see my father's
eyes gaze back at me, black and wet and lovely as warm earth, I am considering
genetics an art form. Hudson, remember your fever last week, so sick you cried
against me, your long bones heavy against mine? This moment, I knew, for you
was fleeting. Leaving their mothers is what boys

do. And yet, turning softly in bed that night, you cried,
held your father's feather pillow against you,
while I stood, considering the rocky dreams of boys.

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