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Rasa

The sky, a gray blanket, felt low overhead as I meandered to the creek. The dark blue-gray water flowed around green bushes while rocks clicked under my feet. The baggy coat on my shoulders constrained my movements as I dipped a small plastic shovel into the water.

“Michael, get away from the creek!”

My mother did not feel that I was safe when near the creek behind our house. In hindsight, I don't really blame her. At the time we lived there, I was three and could not swim, and in places the creek was deep enough for me to be able to completely submerge. Compounding this was the current: normally it was slow, but the last few days had seen rain. The flow was high on that overcast morning, and I was not the paragon of human wisdom.

If I was the paragon of anything, it was curiosity. Driven to find out as much as I could about the world, I would play with dirt and pick up bugs and worms. I would jump off small ledges to prove I could, and would pick at the bark of trees to see it fall off, wondering all the while what it did. I believe still that curiosity is a virtue, that it helps to sharpen the mind, especially the minds of young children. However, whenever I became curious, I also became invincible. That is why I felt no fear in walking up to one of the calm eddies on a bank of the creek and putting a short plastic shovel in the water.

Later in life, I left that shovel in a sandbox for a few days in the summer. Sitting there, the shovel was at the sun's mercy, hot and indiscriminate, and when I found it again, it had been bleached.

The red handle and scoop had turned into a pale shade of pink. However, at the creek, they were still a vibrant shade of red, lively and intense.

I loved watching how the water flowed and wrapped itself around the shovel, a cold blanket. Water's playful behavior fascinated me, and so I twisted the shovel, seeing how the water would react to its obstacle. My mother, from her vantage point on the back porch of our house, did not share my enthusiasm.

“Michael, do you want a time out?”

Grumbling to myself while the creek babbled, I was annoyed at my mother's interference in my attempts to understand the water. Ever the curious little rebel, I had a small burst of infantile cleverness, clambering over rocks and stones to reach the small ledge over the creek. It seemed obvious to me that I would be able to continue learning about the water from that height. I looked down at the blue water, and was disappointed to realize that my shovel did not give me the reach necessary to touch the creek – it was still several inches away. I was not subtle enough in my attempts, so my mother called down, “Michael, stay away from the creek!”

Not to be deterred, I called back “I am!” I moved toward the creek, and the moments that followed are blurred in my mind. Most likely, I set the shovel down and squatted to get a closer look at the creek below. However, there are other explanations for what happened. The one thing I know for certain is that I fell.

The next thing I remember seeing is blurry blue-tinted rocks from under the water. Sun shining through, the water and the rocks seemed peaceful, in horrifying contradiction to what was happening to me. The current was pulling on my legs, keeping me from standing up, while my hand was grabbing something I couldn't see. Lifting my head out of the water, I saw the grey stone embedded in the ledge and my hand desperately gripping it. Turning my head to the right, crying out, I saw my parents getting

out of their lawn chairs. Even from that distance, I could see the fear etched on their faces.

As my father ran barefoot across the rocks on the bank, my head submerged and reemerged several times, until I could see his hand over my head, reaching down for my hand. I reached up with my free hand, and he took it, pulling me out of the water. He carried me back up to the house, and my mother dried me off. Though I stayed away from the creek for a while, I still watched how it flowed, calm and dangerous.