

Coniferous Fathers

By Michael Kleber-Diggs

Let's fashion gentle fathers, expressive—holding us
how we wanted to be held before we could ask.

Singing off-key lullabies, written for us—songs
every evening, like possibilities. Fathers who say,

this is how you hold a baby, but never mention
a football. Say nothing in that moment, just bring

us to their chests naturally, without shyness.

Let's grow fathers from pine, not oak, coniferous

fathers raising us in their shade, fathers soft enough
to bend—fathers who love us like their fathers

couldn't. Fathers who can talk about menstruation
while playing a game of pepper in the front yard.

No, take baseball out. Let's discover a new sort—
fathers as varied and vast as the Superior Forest.

Let's kill off sternness and play down wisdom;
give us fathers of laughter and fathers who cry,

fathers who say Check this out, or I'm scared, or I'm sorry,
or I don't know. Give us fathers strong enough

to admit they want to be near us; they've always
wanted to be near us. Give us fathers desperate

for something different, not Johnny Appleseed,
not even Atticus Finch. No more rolling stones.

No more La-Z-Boy dads reading newspapers in
some other room. Let's create folklore side-by-side

in a garden singing psalms about abiding—just that,
abiding: being steadfast, present, evergreen, and

ethereal—let's make the old needles soft enough
for us to rest on, dream on, next to them.