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In Bas Relief

By the time you arrive, we've had a drink,
positioned our chairs for late-day
sun or shade in the brownstone's garden.

Your feet, scored by sandal straps,
nails agleam like oyster-shell casings,
slip free onto my lap, into my grip,
where I knead them.

You leave no trace of your young scent,
despite the train rides from Brooklyn,
the walk north on Broadway in spring heat.

A Japanese maple trembles at the center
of our host's plantings, its burnt-red leaves
in bas relief. I remember the tree a stripling,
tethered to a pole, expecting it to fail.