

Try and Stop Me – A Daughter's Challenge, A Father's Poetry

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Thanks for Telling Me

The ring doesn't tell you.
It always sounds the same.
Plain, brown wrapper of news
or god knows what.

A disembodied voice becomes a salve,
or a weapon,
or a call to arms.

At the end of the day,
you discover,
there are many things in this world
that you really don't want to know.

Don't Want to Know

We think we know.

We think we know alone.

We think we know dark.

We think we know hopeless.

We think we know lost.

But when you meet someone
who really knows these things...

Really knows.

They don't tell, thank god.
Because you really don't want to know.

In Between

A soft, gentle fighter she was.
Soft, but a fighter.
Gentle, but a fighter.
Energy to spare, to waste, to lend.
Always sharing her light

Then one day,
after many days of not spending energy,
of not having fun,
of not throwing love at anything it would stick to...
One day she simply gave up.
Said she had nothing left to give.
It had all been taken from her.
Taken, not given.

The fighter gave up.
Struggle became surrender.
She lay down in the dark space,
in between all the good reasons to live

No View

The sad thing,
the very sad thing,
about being in that black hole
is the view.

There is no view.

There is no light
to show tomorrow's face,
no light to show next week's clothes,
no light to show next year's vacation.

But they are all there.
They do exist.
They will happen.

So many things lie hidden
beyond your surrounding black wall.

Graduation from high school.
Your very own vehicle.
Graduation from university.
Your first "real" job.
Your first true love...

I truly believe, I know, I promise,
they are all there waiting for you.
It's just that,
you can't see them from here.

Your Fingers Know Why

It's because your fingers,
your fine strong fingers,
could wring fresh music
from the neck of an old guitar,
or push sweet melodies
through a piano, every night.

Your determined fingers
could knead sweet cookie dough,
embroider a pillow,
or dial up a friend to share a laugh.

But instead, your fingers,
your long, beautiful fingers,
scratch and gouge at your arms
and unscrew the childproof cap
of yet another pill bottle.

It's because your fine strong fingers
should hold mine firmly,
like they used to,
interwoven,
like a carpenter's finest dovetail
that will never let go.

That's why.

Licked Alive

Another fuzzy morning.
Aching for sleep.

Why am I in the laundry room?
Am I half undressed or half-dressed?
Whatever.
I am trying so hard to be a father.
But I can't be this father.

My undone shoelace is too much to cope with,
so I leave it and head upstairs.

Reaching the top step I trip on the lace,
bang my head on the wall,
and fall in a pathetic heap on the floor,
tears and self-pity flooding out of me.

I lie there for ten minutes,
stiff broadloom prickling my cheek,
until the dog comes and licks my face.

If it wasn't for his awful breath
I'd be lying there still.

wishbone

I have, in my kitchen, a collection of wishbones,
ten of them, mostly chicken,
but the big one is turkey.
Gathered over the year,
they hang there grimly
over the rim of a clay plant pot.

When I remember, and she's here,
I pull one with my daughter.
With eyes closed,
a brief, pinkie finger tug'o'war.
She always wins,
and leaves me wondering
what she wished for.
(She never tells.)

I never win.
And I often think it's because
my wishes are awkward.
I mean, how the hell do you wish for
someone to stop trying to kill themselves?

Or wish for someone to see that
life is precious and worth living?

Or wish that the acrid, tormenting hell that
is suffocating this home
would just evaporate
and leave us alone?

Next time we pull a wishbone
I'll be specific,
and, for myself, wish for...

A 1956 Gibson J50 guitar
in immaculate condition,
natural finish with triple-bound top,
ivory nut and bridge,
rosewood fretboard,
tortoise shell pickguard,
mahogany back and sides,

and the additional 20th fret.
In its original hard-shell case.

For me to play
in the dining room,
after a good chicken dinner.

My daughter might like that,
and find it worth living for.

Sun

Afternoon, I think.

After a cereal lunch up in her dark room, at least.

But then, my silent kitchen is disturbed,

and she stands before me,

in a bikini!

(Ok, so it's black, like everything else she's worn for three months.)

Beach towel,

new paperback novel...

She goes outside,

into the bright backyard.

Towel on the grass,

her body on the towel,

for hours.

Scorching sun does its damndest

to hide the scars on her wrists

with a tan.

Slash marks fading,

but not the memory of how they got there.

Melanoma versus scar stigma.

(She cares, shamefully, about the scars.)

I know,

because I have to read stuff like this,

that she is 17 times more likely to die

from cancer than from suicide.

I try to smile.

But my mind and my lips are at odds.

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