

If you could say that this story of mine started anywhere, it started Monday night, two days before the poetry competition entry due date. I had been listening to my favorite song play list (which featured songs I and perhaps four other people in the world actually liked) for the better part of an hour, staring at a blank page of one of my favorite notebooks, which had a walrus on the front. But no matter how hard I willed the pen to simply write award winning poetry, the stubborn device didn't seem to want to comply.

I had never wanted to enter this contest, I wasn't good with poetry. I tried, I tried so hard in the past, but always failed. This form of writing did everything it could to evade me, and I wasn't one about to give chase.

However, my parents would hear none of this. I got satisfactory grades, I was in some clubs, volunteered a bit (at their "request"), and because of all this they acted like I was some sort of humanitarian super genius. So, by that logic, how hard was it for me to simply regurgitate some brilliant thought provoking poetry? It was something I had lived with all my life, and though I had brought up my displeasure with this many times, I had just reached the point where it was better to go along with them than disappoint the people who believed in me so vehemently. Sure, it was nice to be praised, but I never understood their fascination with me being in the limelight. Even so, I couldn't stand to see the unhappy looks on their faces, so I went along with it.

It was Tuesday now, and the due date was rapidly approaching. It didn't help that my mother's last words as she pulled out of the drop off lane for the high school was "Can't wait to see your poem sweetie!" Did she really think I could pull it off, hand in something by 8:00 a.m. tomorrow that'd be worthy of reading before the whole school at the poetry fair on Friday? I would do my damndest not to let them down, but how?

The whole day I didn't paid a lick of attention in any of my classes. My mind was constantly focused on the poem that would never come. Before I knew it, I was riding the bus back home, still not even a letter committed to a page, and then it was dinnertime.

I couldn't believe my parents didn't question me on how I acted at the table. I loved my parents to death, and I actually *did* enjoy having a conversation with them. Tonight however, I couldn't bring myself to say anything that wasn't "ehhh" or "yeah", barely hearing a word they said. Guilt and fear and a plethora of other emotions dragged me down, making my impossible task even harder, if that was possible. I walked back to my room, almost wishing I were a dog so I could put my tail between my legs.

This is when the turning point occurred for me, I think I'll even call it the climax of my tale. For it was in this moment of weakness, that one of my favorite songs began to play from the depths of my favorite play list. A song whose lyrics I didn't understand the meaning behind, but the notes and beat had always drawn me.

I've probably always been a little too daring at the worst of times. As I committed a portion of the lyrics to paper, broke them up, and mixed them around (just to make sure it'd be thoroughly unrecognizable), I was sure no one would realize what I had done. This song was from decades ago, and on top of that I'd scrambled the words up. No one would be able to put it together, no one could prove a thing. And best of all, even scrambled the poetic affect of the words certainly wasn't lost. It was brilliant, and that was a word I certainly wouldn't use to describe something I did.

Perhaps best of all, was that even if this was poetic in nature, it sucked. At least I thought so. So when my poem wasn't picked all I'd have to do is put on a show of disappointment, talk about how much I wanted to win, and that'd be that. The worst thing that could happen is my mother would come to the school and bitch at whoever she could, and it wasn't as if I hadn't endured that before. I had won.

How poetic is justice if it's as ironic as is possible, but nonetheless a cheater is favored? I probably asked myself that all day Thursday after I'd been called into office, and given such high praise for my poem. I would be an opening act of sorts for the art fair's assembly, where I would read my lie of an art piece before the whole high school. They were even going to publish my "poem" in the school newsletter. I would have thought I fell through some portal into the twilight zone if this wasn't possibly the most inappropriate and conversely *most* appropriate punishment ever exacted.

Dinner was an uproarious affair. My father spent most of it away from the table, on his cell calling all of his co-workers. I had gone from "submitter of the best high school poem" to "poetic genius" over the course of three phone calls. A few more and he'd be slandering dead poets in the same breath that he mentioned my name.

My mother made my favorite dish, Chicken Kiev. But it tasted of deceit and shame, which I am now on an authority to say tastes very gamey. I thought it would never end, and my pleas to return to my room went unheeded. My parents just kept wanting to fawn over me. And it was nice, their praise did alleviate my melancholy a bit. But not by much.

Even when it was over (finally getting away when I mentioned to them both that it was past my bedtime) I could feel their adoration press at me from all sides. To clear my head of all the negative thoughts, I began to ask myself why. There must have been hundreds of other heart-felt, meaningful, well written poems, so how had my fake snatched the prize? I've known for ages that life can't be fair, but this was a travesty that could not be so easily swept under the carpet. Other people, poets, as they could rightfully be called, deserved to win. I couldn't deny them that.

It was Friday, and I stood behind the curtains of the auditorium stage. The bright lights made me sweat from the heat even behind this partition, though nervousness probably contributed a little. My mind raced with the possibilities even as the principal began his speech that would begin the fair officially. Though he was muffled, I heard him go on and on about how the point of the fair was to promote creativity, and recognize students who were especially so. I admit it, I do wish I was one of those people he was talking about, but I didn't deserve to be.

"How should I do it?" I thought to myself. Should I say the poem and then speak of how terrible it is, and how it was formed? Perhaps I could symbolically rip it in half before the whole school. No, better to simply tell the truth from the beginning, then I wouldn't alienate the poor faculty who had actually enjoyed it. Or at least not as much.

The time of redemption drew near, the art teacher now speaking about how brilliant my poem was. She really loved to go on and on about how symbolic and true to life it was. Sure, everything she said about my poem was false, but it filled me with confidence. It felt good. I was vaguely reminded of the adulations I received from my parents last night, and was beginning to wonder if this was why they wanted me in the limelight. Because it did feel nice. No matter though.

I heard my name, and I walked out from the right of the stage. As I took my place at the podium, I saw hundreds of faces, all staring at me expectedly. I was going to tell them, and most certainly should have. But every last one of them had a look of expectant adoration. People who never before knew that I even existed watched me eagerly, ready to hear my every word. For once in my life, I think I finally understood the limelight

*"Near a tree by a river, there's a hole in the ground..."*

I learned something that day. It may have not been the right thing to learn, and maybe I should have never gotten that sweet taste of glory in the first place. But you know, the limelight isn't so bad after all.