

LAMENT FOR EMILY



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Account Rendered

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Your Humble Investigator (a TV series in collaboration with Lory Alder comprising: *Chase The Ace, Special Twist, Crooks' Tour*).

MUSICAL COMEDY

Two Hours of Happiness (in collaboration with Malcolm Knight)

LAMENT FOR EMILY

And other poems

by
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Published by **ASPEN-London**
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First published 2017

ISBN13: 978-1979878555
ISBN10:1979878552

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Cover picture: Emily emulates a statue with sad prescience

The ASPEN logo was designed by Tony Jenner

In loving memory of Emily Jane 1972-2017

**All proceeds from the sale of this book
are being donated to
Shine Cancer Support
the network for partners, friends
and family members
of young adults living with cancer.
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FOREWORD

Emily Jane left us on September 5, 2017. She was in a bed at Oxford's Churchill Hospital, heavily sedated and connected by a variety of tubes and leads to an organ support machine. She was surrounded by members of her family. For more than one week we had taken it in turns to sit by her bedside while she battled the increasing failure of her vital organs, her breathing an irregular raucous, ugly-sounding inhalation through a tube inserted in her mouth. The medical staff assured us that this caused her no distress. We had simply to assume that this was accurate.

Ultimately the time came when it was evident that sedation would have to be discontinued and life support withdrawn as her vital organs could not be maintained. The doctors discussed the situation with the family and it was agreed that we needed to release her from further suffering. Thus we stood around the bed. Husband, parents, siblings, ex-husband and friends. Jamie, 10 years old, with insatiable curiosity was adamant that he wished to be present at his mother's departure. Katie, not quite 7, was considered too young to be exposed to this situation.

We watched as one by one the tubes and connections were removed. The silence was intense. Then Steve, her husband, said "She has gone". It was her last day on earth. It coincided with the birthday of her sister and was just three days before the birthdays of her daughter and her father.

RIP darling daughter.



Part I
IN MEMORIAM

**When she was going through the
worst of her tribulations I wrote to
her:**

Whatever strength and sustenance
is mine to give
are yours to take and use;
to nourish you
throughout
the pain and trials
that lie ahead.

It was not enough

LAMENT FOR EMILY

The scriptures tell us that
to everything there is a season,
and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die.

Forgive me then if I suggest
that this was not the time
for Emily.
It bears no sense or reason.
It was a fearful crime.

She was one of the blessed ones
who offer so much sustenance to others
that they have little left over
for themselves.

It is not always a blessing
to survive.

Sometimes it is anguish
to be alive.

Now she has gone and we remain
to face a lifetime of pain.
But we should also strive
to keep alive the joyous memories
of all that she has brought into our lives.

Hers was a bright
unquenchable spirit.
The heartbreak of her vanished hair
produced a request for hats

that would enhance
and not detract.
Thus did she turn negatives
into positives.

The intensity of her smile
was such as to dispel
that monstrous regiment
of doubts and fears
that assailed us.

Thus did she bring us comfort.
Thus did she turn winter
into summer.

She always bore her sufferings
with fortitude beyond credence
and always thought of others
before herself.

Music was such a large part of her life,
for her the bells were always ringing.
She would be saddened beyond measure
if she believed our grief
prevented us from singing.

For life goes on
and we move on
and she would be the first to say
“It is right to grieve
it is right to display sadness,
it is right to shed tears
so long as you continue to believe
that I will sing with you through the years.”

Her song may now be heard
in the notes of every twittering bird.
Her smile will be seen
in every flaming sunset,
in every shimmering rainbow;
in the beauty of nature
as profound
as once she loved.

Her joy will continue to be felt
in the waves that crash
upon the shore,
the wind upon our skin,
the blades of grass
beneath our feet,
where once she walked.

In the fleeting clouds
of blissful skies,
the woods and trees
that mark the hallowed ground
that once she trod.

But most of all
in the sound of every twittering bird,
her song will continue to be heard.

ORISON

Along the Isis; down the Cam,
the brightest minds have not displayed
solutions that are worth a tinker's damn
deserving of an accolade.

How like the fates to cruelly take
the nectar of the sweetest flower;
to steal its fragrance and thereby to make
a nonsense of her latest hour.

The footpaths that she bravely trod
reflect the beauty of her life.
The countryside alas now sadly flawed,
by memories now sadly rife.

Late misted fields now sunset flushed
beneath the spread of every tree;
the golden corn now waiting to be crushed
from Shillingford to Maddingley.

A TIME TO GRIEVE AND A TIME TO MOURN

I find myself immersed in denial.
Is this not mere indulgence and self-pity?
Do I not owe to others
the love and respect and tolerance,
and the understanding that they, too,
have suffered an equally great loss?

I need to come to terms with the present,
acknowledge my loss,
and work through my grief.
Easier said than done
but not impossible.

To love again as once I loved;
to hold again as once I held;
to feel again as once I felt;
to see again as once I saw;
to be again as once I was;
to forgive myself
as once I forgave others.

Time to end the grief;
time to commence the mourning.

EUPHEMISMS

You may say that she has gone to meet her maker
now that she is with the undertaker.
Or possibly it's passed, passed on, or passed away
that you prefer to mark the day
on which finality did overtake her.

It's fine to think she rests in peace
now that she's pronounced surceased,
departed, gone, or finally succumbed
these metaphors have me benumbed
as a substitution for deceased.

She lost the battle, lost her life,
freed from further agonizing strife,
gone to heaven, breathed her last
and now has found eternal rest,
that mother, daughter, friend and wife.

She has gone to meet her Lord
from further pain she has been spared
I hate to break this sad news to you
sorry if it does confuse you,
but it simply must be said.

She is dead.

BELOVED EMILY

The suddenness of her departure
came as a vast shock.
She had clung to life as tenaciously
as a limpet to a rock.
But her acceptance of her final breath
as though she had been blessed
with relief long sought from suffering and pain
took her to a deserved and peaceful rest.



“The Intensity of Her Smile”

A WAKENING DREAM

She woke me up
this morning
when I overslept.

She brought a cup of tea.

When I opened my eyes
she wasn't there.

Nor was the tea.

A REUNION WITH EMILY

She came back.
Briefly.
Back from mind and heart.
Back into my
actuality.

The initial shock
of external appearance
immediately
transposed itself
into the feeling of
habitual love.

There was no alteration
beyond the
superficiality
of her changed deportment.
The strength of character,
the courage to face
unflinchingly
the extremities of
physical discomfort
and pain . . .
none of this in any way
differed
from the recalled
determination
that inspires
the admiration
and the adoration
in which she is held.

She is not a survivor.
She is a victor.

SO MUCH JOY

She had known much happiness
and not a little pain
that she had always sought.
until the last,
successfully to overcome.

Her children had given her so much joy . . .
The light that shone from her eyes
when she observed
her son or daughter
doing something precocious
or outrageous
or simply
brilliant,
was a joy to behold.

She had married three times
and each one,
for most of the time,
had brought her much joy.

And at the end of her days
she had known much happiness

And perhaps that is the most
anyone can hope for.

SHE COULD GIVE NO MORE

Some there are who move through life
without creating a ripple
on the surface of any other person's
existence.

Some there are who burn themselves out
with an excessive expenditure of energy.

But she . . .
she touched so many lives
she enriched so many others
she displayed so many talents.

My soul reached out to hers
caressed the chilled alabaster of her face
enfolded her in its embrace,
timelessly spreading its
tentacled grip,
at odds with the chilled alabaster of my heart.

And now she has moved on
and soon it will be time for me to follow.

MOVING ON

There are times when some buried and forgotten part
of oneself is awakened and it can be a pained rebirth.
The memories are fragile, soft hued,
like the discovery of a dry brown flower
that lies forgotten in an old book.

You may have to call upon
reserves of confidence and faith.
You may have to face the situation
with forced joviality.

My last therapy session
involved re-evaluation
of my state of mental health
and acceptance of altered circumstances.

I surprised myself with the ease with which
I could now speak of her

with joy and not with pain.
She hadn't gone.
She had not returned.
She had never ceased to be.

Death does not exist so long as she
remains within my heart
in memory.

She is here.
She is now.
She is forever.

NO TEARS

I thought she was my greatest love.

For more than half a century
I've nursed and cherished
a memory that haunted me.
My tinnitus and hearing loss
dating back to that bitter,
cruel and hateful
time,
has always been
attributed
to that recollected period
when I sat huddled and lonely
upon the vastness of
that couch in Antibes
and sobbed and sobbed,
and sobbed until I thought
I might expire.

And now . . .
having suffered a loss
that demonstrates how trivial
was that earlier experience . . .
and now . . .
having truly the need
to express my pain
in overtly demonstrable ways,
I find myself
unable to shed a single tear.
The pain is cutting me up
inside,

but no sign is visible
to others
and no physical relief
presents itself
to me.

Bite back pity.
Bite back pain.
Bite back remorse.
Disabuse myself
of trivia.
Embrace the exigent
and shed the
nugatory.
And then perhaps,
just perhaps,
I will learn the truth
about myself and others.
Perhaps I will learn
to accept my innocence
and place the guilt
where it truly belongs.
Perhaps after fifty years
I will finally see her
as the faithless creature
she truly was.

And then . . .
and then, perhaps,
I will be able to dispose
my grief where it truly
belongs.
And then, perhaps,
I will shed those tears.

THE LOSS OF A CHILD

She has gone
She is no more
A light has been extinguished
and the world is a poorer place.

No.
I correct myself.
She is not gone,
she is still with me
and I love her so much.

Part II
FOR EMILY'S CHILDREN

It was during a visit to my daughter in Witney, Oxfordshire, that I happened to spot these two birds in the garden and the first verse of a poem occurred to me. I shared this thought with Emily and she suggested it might provide the basis of a joyous poem for her children. So on return to my home I completed a few more stanzas and emailed it to her.

But by this time it had morphed into something more serious and she suggested that I might expand it still further and even introduce a metaphor for the human condition that the children might enjoy when they were older.

Here it is.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

I saw a thrush upon a bush,
a graceful bird was she,
and next to her I saw a rook
as black as black could be.

And as I looked, into my head
these words occurred to me:
Oh rook, oh rook, please tell me please,
why do we disagree?

For, after all, we both have beaks
and wings that we might fly,
and yet you know these things we share
just seem to pass us by.

Our main concern it seems to me
is how we might apply
abilities that each may have
that take us to the sky.

Beyond the rainbow we both soar
but what do we bring back?
For some of us it's peace and joy,
for others it's attack.

You may be black without concern
for my own speckled brown
but why should colour matter so
when, wings spread, we have flown

up to the heights and back again
albeit on our own
and you just treated with disdain
the friendship I have shown?

Although this thrush upon its bush
invited you to play,
you gave a quite incurious glance
then turned your head away.

I do not want to seem to push
or tell you what to do,
but should you want a friend, this thrush
will still be here for you.

Part III
EARLIER POETRY

ON FISTRAL BEACH

In the blue distance, gleaming, painted with glorious patterns
reflected in the refulgent sunset,
come the surfboards amidst
the swell
the froth
the crashing waves
that rise and fall.
Crashing, rushing, babbling in tune that
echoes and re-echoes in the evening softness
to dance in joyful harmony.

And this, this crystal world that I have seen
in patchwork majesty spread wide upon the shore.



Sunset on Fistral Beach

In 2006, while living in north Cornwall, I proposed making my two daughters the gift of a one-day fish cookery class at the Rick Stein school in Padstow. They accepted on the condition that I join them. The photo of Emily below was taken during the course of that lesson. The poem On Fistril Beach was written during an earlier visit with Emily to a restaurant on Newquay's Fistril Beach to view the magnificent sunset.



At Rick Stein's cookery school in Padstow

FOR EMILY

There is an invisible tie
that links my daughter and me.
Though not visible
It is as strong and as sharp
as tempered steel.

Though we have spent
so much time far apart,
the bond has never weakened,
and nothing can diminish
the way we feel.



DON'T ASK ME TO CRY

Tears come from the heart
and my heart is as cold as ice.
So don't ask me to cry,
for if I cry
it will not be for you as you are
but for you as you were;
when life was serene
and joy was unsullied,
and hearts were undemanding . . .
and tears will never bring that back.

ONE MORE TIME

I want to see her one more time;
One more time to say the things
I should have said before;
One more time to say I'm sorry
and how much I deplore
the ill-concealed behaviour
that she could not ignore.

I want to see her one more time;
One more time to gaze upon
that so beloved face;
One more time to visualise
that look of peace and grace
so unappreciated
while it was commonplace

If only I could see her one more time,
I'd be able to expiate my crime,
express contrition
for that disgraceful act
unintentionally hurtful
and more a lack of tact.
If I were granted only one more time.

WE SHOULD NOT OUTLIVE OUR CHILDREN

We should not survive our children,
it really is not fair.
The loss that I may suffer
is more than I can bear.

It is contrary to
every single grain of pride and hope
and nurturing love.

It flies in the face of
the biblical promise of
three score years and ten.

How horrifying then that we
the parents
may so far exceed that promise
and yet continue to face
the sickening prospect of
offspring loss.

Our children should not
predecease us!

It simply is not just.

STEM CELL TRANSPLANT

My lovely daughter Emily
is fighting for her life.
She may not be aware of it
beneath the surgeon's knife,
admitting of a doubt
for her is never rife.

I wish I might have half as much
courage in my own
meagre confrontations with
the symptoms that I've grown
accustomed to and which
are vastly overblown.

REPULSION

How she despised the scent of worthless lying,
Aroma of a thousand wretched, wasted days
of anguish at the prospect of love's dying
last embrace before the vast displays
of bitterness that's death-defying.

BEFORE I LAY MYSELF TO REST

Before I lay myself to rest
there are mountains I must climb.
Before I go, I must construct
the perfect paradigm.
There are bridges that I have to cross
and rivers I must ford;
and metaphorically at last
cut the umbilical cord.

Those things that I have left undone
from my long bucket list
must rapidly be tackled before
they can be dismissed.
And superficially at least
are tasks that need to be addressed,
and any sins remaining
that need to be confessed.

I will not go gentle.
I will shout and scream
and beat my breast,
withstand all mental
pressures that would seem
to put me to the test.
It will suffice just to resist
the forces that will persecute,
and, knowing I have done my best,
shall raise my fist
into a victory salute
and stay defiant to the last.

Part IV
AFTERWORD

AFTERWORD

Some months before her death, Emily Jane and her husband Steve made contact with the Oxford support group of the “Shine” cancer charity. They found this to be very helpful, not just to themselves, but for the benefit of other family members and friends. They suggested I join a local group in London. I did so and derived a deal of comfort from an exchange of thoughts and feelings via Facebook. I was going to attend my first meeting with other group members in London at precisely the time that Emily was taken to hospital for what was to prove her final admission to what she and her husband humorously referred to as the “health spa”.

In searching for a Charity to be the recipient of any proceeds of sale of this book, it occurred to me that Shine Cancer Support would be really fitting. Shine is the only UK charity that exists exclusively to support adults in their 20s, 30s and 40s who have experienced a cancer diagnosis. Although there is never a good time to have cancer, younger adults face different issues than their older or younger counterparts - and many of these are not dealt with by traditional cancer support charities and services.

Shine’s vision is to enable every adult in the UK living with cancer in their 20s, 30s or 40s to access the help and support that they need in a way that suits their lifestyle. They seek to provide tailored information and peer support for anyone in these age groups diagnosed with any cancer. They do this through a range of activities including lunches and drinks evenings, beach walks, multi-day getaways, workshops, online networking, and mentoring.

Emily Jane Page (née Sinclair) left us on September 5, 2017 after 4 years of intermittent suffering from non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and two stem cell transplants. It had been my intention to append a pictorial biography of Emily's life, but I found the choosing of suitable pictures too distressing, so I am adding simply the one illustration below, but a complete biography, fully illustrated, will be found online at:
<https://www.emilysdaisychain.co.uk/>

Emily R.I.P.



